RELIGION, NATION AND DEMOCRACY IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

Edited by Alexander Agadjanian, Ansgar Jödicke and Evert van der Zweerde

ROUTLEDGE

Religion, Nation and Democracy in the South Caucasus

This book explores in detail current developments in the three major societies of the South Caucasus – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia – focusing especially on religion, historical traditions, national consciousness and political culture, and on how these factors interact. It outlines how, despite close geographical interlacement, common historical memories including subjection to Russian and Soviet empires, and common inherited structures, the three countries manifest deep differences; and it discusses how development in all three nations has partly or even significantly diverged from post-Soviet elites' declared commitments to democratic norms and European values. The book demonstrates that these differences, and the failures of political ambitions, stem from the countries' different religious backgrounds, political traditions and emerging economic models, which have created very different dynamics over the last two decades. The book also considers how external factors and international relations continue to have a huge impact on the three countries.

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Editors' introduction

Alexander Agadjanian, Ansgar Jödicke and Evert van der Zweerde

The Caucasus is one of the world's most complex, politically precarious and culturally rich areas. Its fascinating, convoluted history attracts historians and art scholars; its improbable diversity draws ethnographers and linguists – but also tourists; its continuous power games, entanglements and conflicts provide a complex object of study for political scientists and politicians. Besides, for the past quarter of a century, the Caucasus has been a laboratory of post-Soviet transformations and a test case for current theories of modern development, democratization and social change. Looking at the region overall, we contemplate a precious, exquisite, fragile mosaic made up of trembling pieces, which nevertheless retains a sense of multicoloured harmony, as in Paradjanov's composition on the cover of this book.

This volume is the result of a three-year-long international project (2011–2014) which has brought together a group of senior and young academics from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, as well as scholars from other countries, who met at a series of workshops and coordinated their individual researches on the South Caucasus. The volume sets its sights on the recent, dynamic history of the three South Caucasian countries, which became independent nations after the breakdown of the Soviet Union (the North Caucasus, which is a part of the Russian Federation, is not within this volume's scope). The book addresses the nexus of the three major dimensions that the title makes explicit – religion, nation and democracy. We strongly believe that this nexus is crucial for understanding this region's recent dramatic developments. Religion-, nation- and democracy-generated discourses have been central in the post-Soviet period, and they have had an ongoing impact on politics, society and culture. The volume also addresses the external influences on the region, which continues to be the site of a conjunction of the geopolitical ambitions of several powers, such as Turkey, Iran, Russia, the European Union and the United States.

Most contributions are based on original empirical work. The variability of the topics discussed here requires a diversity of theoretical perspectives and methodologies. Although all of the authors were encouraged to explore a particular, empirically documented case, they do agree with some basic ideas drawn upon general scholarship and corroborated by their own academic and personal experiences. These basic, shared ideas include, first of all, a perception of the region

as a larger whole of interacting parts; indeed, there are many direct interactions and also some conflicts between the three titular nations, as well as other ethnic groups involved, and a number of millennial memories that tie all of them inextricably together. We all share, secondly, the belief that cultural paradigms define a society's modern dynamics to no lesser extent than do geopolitics and economic interests; of course, we would not agree to dismiss such "interests" in a sort of culturalist reductionism, but we do assert that the cultural matrix, or lineage, significantly affects the ways in which "interests" are produced, perceived and implemented. We all are sceptical, thirdly, about linear models of transition (specifically, from socialism to Western liberal democracy) and expect a complex combination of local and imported political, legal and cultural forms. And finally, we take seriously the quest for national identity, in spite of the impact of globalization or, rather, in spite of some new forms that correlate to such an impact.

Unavoidably, the dynamic and contestable political situation in the South Caucasus is strongly present in this volume. However, we do not adopt extra-academic positions with respect to any of the politically sensitive issues nor have we allowed such strong positions to be expressed in the contributions. One hot topic has been avoided altogether – the "frozen conflicts" concerning the disputed regions of Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These issues are certainly worth researching, and they are intimately related to the scope of our entire project. However, they require special, considered and in-depth examination and very careful efforts to come to a resolute bracketing of political opinions. In all other cases treated in the volume, our conviction was that an academic approach which remains as objective and neutral as possible is one of the things that the region urgently needs.

There is another facet of this volume's story: the *very fact* that scholars from the three Caucasian nations and several other countries – Germany, the Netherlands, Russia, Switzerland, and Turkey – have communicated and worked together intensely and fruitfully during these three years was a major asset of the project; one that has indirect political effects in its own way, without "doing politics." Personal encounters and contacts – between scholars from the three nations, between them and international scholars and between young and senior researchers – have been extremely valuable for all the participants and for the academic output as a whole. Beyond the volume itself, a scholarly network has emerged with a promising perspective given the median age of the participants.

The volume's structure is simple to grasp: we start with contributions by the three editors that tackle the three key concepts. They create a conceptual frame for the rest of the volume and refer, at least implicitly, and sometimes directly, to the case studies that follow. Then come four blocks of individual case studies covering intricate connections within the set frame: religion and politics, education and nationalism, culture and democracy, and external impacts. These case studies are interrelated; they sometimes overlap and sometimes complement each other, while in other cases they remain distinct because of different disciplinary perspectives belonging to sociology, political science, anthropology or semiotic

analysis. Each remains an original product, a fragment, contributing, as we hope, to a further understanding of this fascinating region.

The volume, as well as the project itself, would have been impossible without financial support from two major sources, both in Switzerland: the State Secretariat of Education and Research, Bern; and the Gebert Rüf Foundation, Basel, represented through the Academic Swiss Caucasus Net (ASCN) at the University of Fribourg. The venues for the interim workshops which ran throughout these three years, included Tbilisi (twice), Ankara and Nijmegen, and we as coordinators and editors are grateful for the efforts of all the people involved, representing Ilia State University, the Middle Eastern Technical University and Radboud University.

A few experienced experts in the region, though not members of the project itself, were nevertheless closely associated with it and participated in the discussions of the chapters; some of them were finally invited to contribute their own pieces. We are, therefore, thankful to Bayram Balci, visiting fellow at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington; Ayca Ergun, Middle East Technical University, Ankara; Katharina Hoffmann, St. Gallen University; David Hovhannisyan, Yerevan State University; Andrey Mararychev, Tartu University; Ulrich Schmid, St. Gallen University; and Nona Shakhnazaryan, Krasnodar University. We also want to thank Sarah Bannock for her patience and accuracy in the language editing.

Here is a final note on editing: as the linguistic richness is one of the region's advantages and challenges, we had to decide on how to render terms and proper names. We proceeded as follows: in the body of the chapters, we largely draw upon the Library of Congress transliteration system, with the exception of some words/names that acquired a conventional usage in academic English; in the references we preferred the original scripts, followed by translation.

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Part I

Conceptual frames

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1 General trends in the interaction of religion and politics as applied to the South Caucasus

Ansgar Jödicke

All three South Caucasian countries have gone through a period of intense political change: its key terms – nationhood and democracy – are indicated in the title of this volume. The diagnosis of change is more difficult when it comes to religion. Has religion played any kind of role in the process of social change? Has religion itself changed? It very much depends upon the choice of theoretical approach as to whether "religion" is regarded as being as important an area of change as is the political regime or the politics of nation-building. The aim of this chapter is to appraise the role of religion in the contemporary societies of the South Caucasus. This chapter provides a theoretical framework for approaching religion by analysing the interactions between political and religious institutions. In doing this, religion will be understood as just one societal power among others. From this perspective, the role of religion in the process of societal change is neither crucial nor negligible and religion's power depends on the particular societal constellations rather than a certain degree of modernization. Moving beyond the macro-theoretical assumptions of an incompatibility between modernization and religion, this theoretically informed, middle-range analysis reveals complex historical constellations of politics and religion in the South Caucasus.

In what follows, I will deal with both theoretical issues and their application to the situation in the South Caucasus. First, I will discuss some selected problems that are pertinent when applying modernization theory to the field of religious change in the South Caucasus. I propose a shift of interest from a macro-theoretical to a more meso- and micro-theoretical approach by emphasizing the interactions between the religious and political spheres. This is followed by a comparative analysis stressing the institutional and symbolic capacities of the majority religions, the influence of religious actors on politics and the influence of politics on religion. By doing so, I am connecting the other contributions of this volume with a wider mapping of constellations between religion and politics in the South Caucasus.

Political change and religious change: problems with modernization theory

The experience of accelerated socio-political change in the South Caucasus raises questions about the ways in which this change may be thought to be related to religious change. The two types of change seem to be linked. In most of the

macro-theories of the social sciences, they are linked through the assumption of a general process of modernization. However, when we use the term "modernization," we get involved in difficult problems of terminology and normativity which call into question the merits of the theory in the face of the complex situation it attempts to explain.

Modernization theory assumes that a number of processes are coinciding in society. From a classical sociological point of view (Durkheim, Weber, Parsons), these processes are understood to be part of a bundle of change, rather than a loosely connected variety of changes. They include, for example, social differentiation, nation-state building, industrialization, changes in societal values, globalization, and so on. One of them – secularization – is itself the subject of a variety of theories and counter-theories.

It is not necessary here to reconstruct secularization theories as, indeed, some of the other contributions to this volume already do this. However, I would like to stress one aspect of the widely discussed struggle between the various secularization theories, their modifications (Martin, 2005) and their rivals, such as "privatization/new forms of religion" (Luckmann, 1967), "desecularization theory" (Berger, 1999) and the "revival of religion" (Tomka, 2011). What secularization theories and competitive theories have in common is the view that the social situation in respect of religion has changed dramatically in modern times. All of these theories are theories about religion in modernity. Either they assume that modernity is, at least in principle, a tough environment for religions to survive in or they are more optimistic about religions in modern times under the proviso that they are being transformed by these societies. The first assumes there is a dichotomy involving "*either* modernization *or* religion"; the latter postulates a characteristic "modernization *of* religion."

In the first type of argument – an example being that economic industrialization leads to secularization – religion is a definitive feature of the pre-modern society, so that modernization threatens its very existence. Thus, cities are normally more industrialized than rural areas and as a consequence, urban areas are supposed to be more secular than rural ones. A lot of data support this view, but contradictory observations also have been made. In Georgia for example, populations in towns have a higher proportion of participation in religious rituals than populations in rural areas.[1]

Besides this contradictory evidence, there is one crucial problem with putting forward this sort of argument; specifically, that it assumes religion to be outside of the modernization process. The changing societal environment may be hostile to, or at least problematic for, religious groups, but religion itself is understood to be a static enclosure, unable to change itself and adapt to a changing environment. This fits with the commonly recognized and self-acknowledged innate conservatism of religious traditions in that they are perceived to offer guaranteed, unchangeable values. By contrast, however, the history of religions actually reveals that religions have frequently changed and should be understood as being an active element in society, responsively adapting their contents, organizational features and impacts on everyday life.

The second type of argument – the modernization *of* religion – overcomes this problem. If modernity provides a completely different environment, religions will survive when they are adapted to this environment, or to put it in other words, when they change their forms.[2] In my opinion, the most innovative aspect of the counter-theories of secularization is not their assertion that religion is not declining in modern society, but rather that religion is understood as being part of modernization. It is worth noting for our topic that we have at our disposal completely contradictory theories which use this sort of argument. Some, as in the case of privatization and individualization theories, emphasise the fact that religion in modernity has to find its place outside public debates or political engagement. Others, such as civil religion (Bellah, 1967) or nationalism theory (critical: Brubaker, 2012), identify new forms of religion emerging, especially in the realm of politics.

This type of argument raises several problems. First, religious change is still understood merely to be a function of social change. To assume that religion only survives when it changes its form presupposes nonetheless a linear understanding of modernization. The search for religious phenomena that fit into a modern social structure underestimates the capacity of religion to contribute to the building of social structures. Second, this approach has been applied to highly individualized world views far from the sites of the "traditional" religions, such as those of the Caucasus. There is some plausibility in this approach in some Western countries; however, such findings are not appropriate for getting a grasp on developments in the Caucasus, where traditional religious institutions are the significant occupants of the field of religion.

Both the "*either* modernization *or* religion" and the "modernization *of* religion" approaches are limited to a perspective that perceives religion as being passive in the face of social processes. Both approaches fail to understand that religion is actively shaping society. In addition, both arguments are backed by some empirical evidence but cannot be generalized. Therefore, the academic struggle for and against secularization theory may not have come to an end, but it is decidedly fizzling out when it comes to the case of simply ascertaining the existence or non-existence of "secularization." It seems obvious that as Casanova suggests, there are a number of dimensions behind this term (1994, pp. 19–39) and that different constellations are possible as a response.

Consequently, we need to limit the degree of generalization, and we must restrict our analysis to concrete interactions between political and religious bodies. We have to ask for reverse dependencies as well as independencies. Interactions in the fields of politics and religion cannot be understood as being a throwback from pre-modern times before they were separated; rather, they are the basis on which we can analyse the modernization process itself. It is better to analyse religion as an active element within modernization processes, even if, like the so-called fundamentalist movements, it condemns modernization. Religious traditions try to adapt to, but also influence, the process of societal change. They are best characterized neither as mere bystanders nor as agents so powerful as to be able to stop social change. Religious ideas, religious leaders or religious communities can stimulate the preservation of, as well as innovation in, social values.

Political and religious groups – in some cases this distinction might be difficult to make – observe each other and respond. The politics of religion are sometimes worked out in negotiation with religious communities and sometimes without any negotiation. Religious communities sometimes negotiate their decisions with state authorities but otherwise make them independently. My analysis of the dynamic interactions between political and religious bodies in the South Caucasus will be guided by four considerations, outlined below, concerning religious change and modernization.

First, the process of modernization has to be regarded as just that – a process. It is not helpful to understand modernity as something that already has arrived and then look to see where islands of pre-modernity persist. That would not be an analysis of societal or political change; rather, it would amount to an ideology of modernization. The problem of neglecting the historical process of modernization has been strongly criticised by new theories of modernization which take into account the fact that processes of modernization are much more complicated and less linear than has been assumed (Beck et al., 1994). Not only secularization theories but also modernization theories have become more complicated. The variety of configurations of modern societies is much greater than earlier theorists were aware of, leading to the concept of "multiple modernities" (Eisenstadt, 2000). There is no *telos* to modernity; modernization itself might be a political programme but academic, historical and sociological approaches can illuminate the variety of configurations, as well as the specific interconnections, of modern and pre-modern aspects in a social context because 'the social in the modern world is fragile and fragmented' (Turner, 2010, p. 663).

Second, the term "religious" is not a qualifier that characterizes a society as a whole; thus, there is no point in asking whether or not a society is religious. We cannot even measure personal religiosity in one dimension; we know much less about the interconnectedness of the social dimensions of religion, such as personal interactions, religious communities, religious organizations and overarching (identity) discourses on religion. The distinction between pre-modern (traditional) and modern is too simplistic to be applied to society as a whole, but the specific configurations of pre-modern and modern activities are worth scrutinizing.

Third, it is obvious that religious institutions are related to power, community and society. Religious traditions are based on sign systems[3] upon which communities – and, as we will see later, also societies – are built.[4] In this sense, 'religion and the state are intrinsically related' (Hammond and Machacek, 2009, p. 391). Even if specifically modern systems may be more efficient, religious sign systems are characterized by concrete ideas about the family, education, juridical decision-making or power distribution. Thus, the very idea of a society lives within the sign systems, even when religious communities are "only" a part of the society (Luhmann, 1989). This is why political leaders regard religious communities as highly politically relevant, either positively or negatively. It is worth noting that religions may provide alternative concepts of society even if they are not able to realize them. Interactions between political and religious institutions are not automatically a sign of a pre-modern rationale, either of religion

or of politics. A more pragmatic view characterizes them simply as negotiations between actors on issues of society, power and legitimacy.

Fourth, the study of religion and politics inevitably evokes normative assumptions: 'Among Western scholars, and probably among much of the Western public, the suspicion surrounding the admixture of religion and politics reveals instead deeply rooted assumptions about the modern secular state' (Hammond and Machacek, 2009, p. 399). The task of this introductory chapter is exactly to map this admixture. The paradigm of a separation of the two is neither an empirical category nor a self-evident fact. It has been part of political emancipation programmes since the eighteenth century and the subject of communicative negotiations with regard to any given society.

The following comparative sketch of interactions between the political and religious spheres in the South Caucasus is organized around three issues. First, the identification of the main religious actors and issues of power associated with them. From there, I will proceed to the influence of religious actors on politics and, thirdly, the state's politics of religion.

Majority religions: symbolic and institutional capabilities

The recent history of religions in the South Caucasus primarily has been shaped by *three majority religions:* the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) in Georgia, the Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC) in Armenia and, in Azerbaijan, Shi'a Islam (about 65 per cent) and Sunni Islam (about 30 per cent). Given that the differences between Shi'a and Sunni Islam are, in the view of the political elite, not very important in Azerbaijan, it is possible to speak of the three countries as countries with majority religions. After massive waves of migration in the wake of the Karabakh war, the distribution of the three religions has been more or less coincidental with the national borders, setting aside the Karabakh region where the national borders are disputed. Georgia has an Armenian and an even smaller Azeri minority, each predominantly adhering to their respective religious traditions. Numerous other religious minorities are politically not very active; nevertheless, their political significance will be discussed below.

The dominance of the majority religions entails specific characteristics of the political significance of religion rather than a mere quantitative assessment. After independence, the leading political issues have been formulated within the framework of nation-building. The overarching, unifying factor was the idea of the "nation" and, therefore, it was obvious that the religions would enter into in that area (see also the contribution of Alexander Agadjanian in this volume). Especially in a period of instability when questions of unity, legitimacy and power distribution are fiercely negotiated, the qualities of the majority religions are politically highly relevant. These imagined religious communities bring along symbolic and institutional resources which will be discussed in the following.

In all three countries, political and religious representatives take the opportunity to meet on various occasions. These public meetings can be seen as examples of a demonstration and enactment of power. The specifics of the political

circumstances are completely different in the three countries, but the symbolic meaning of these meetings is similar: the majority religion represents one of the potent social forces, one that is close to power and the legitimation of power. Sona Hovhannisyan's chapter in this volume analyses inauguration ceremonies in Armenia, where the presence of the Catholicos during these events ensures the political legitimacy of the incoming government and vice versa. The AAC's ostentatious appearance serves to indicate that it is one of the established institutions of power in the country. Similar events also take place in Georgia, as when Patriarch Ilia II visited the newly established parliament, or, in Azerbaijan, when its president visited the leading Islamic representative Allahşükür Paşazadə.

Besides these symbolic demonstrations, the two Christian churches have structural connections with, for example, the education system, thus influencing the formation of the cultural memory of their respective nations. As is often noticed in countries with majority religions, the question of what is the essential national identity is answered by referring to – amongst other things – a religious tradition. In this volume, Satenik Mkrtchyan shows how the AAC makes sure that its historical role is strongly emphasised in Armenian schoolbooks; meanwhile, Tatia Kekelia analyses the ways in which the GOC inhabits the discourse of national identity.

The basis of public symbolic representation is a single religious organization in each country, but they are, however, completely different in character. The two Christian churches are robust, unitary organizations in contrast to the Islamic communities, which traditionally are not joined into a single hierarchical structure which could be identified by sociologists as an overarching organization. It is telling that the emerging modern nation-state needed to create a religious affairs institution to oversee all interactions with religious bodies. In 1872, the Russian administration formed two institutions to represent Shi'a and Sunni Muslims, respectively. However, in 1918, when Azerbaijan became independent for almost two years, the two institutions were fused together into one single Muslim organization *Məşihat-i İslamiyə* (The Islamic Spiritual Administration). This "ecumenical" policy was carried by the liberal political forces in a secularized environment where "confessional" differences were perceived to be no longer important. In 1920, the Soviet regime abolished this institution. When, after 1944, conditions for religion improved, the Spiritual Administration of the Caucasus Muslims was re-established in order to support Russia against Nazi Germany. Nevertheless, it was still an instrument of state-religious organizational policy, with grandiose claims as to its representativeness, which was, in fact, rather limited. The state had created its own counterpart. The actual power of this organization always has been ambiguous because of its links with political institutions.

The GOC used opportunities which arose during the *perestrojka* era to rebuild its structures. When Georgia became independent in 1991, the GOC was the only (and, for a long time, the preeminent) functional institution in the country. Thus, it entered the period of political unrest and change which followed independence with enormous advantages. The charismatic and popular Patriarch Ilia II has been in office since 1977 and to this day he incorporates stability and an organization that has a high level of trust amongst the people.

When the whole of the Caucasus came under Russian rule in the early nineteenth century, the GOC lost its autonomy, being incorporated into the Russian Orthodox Church till 1917, while the AAC was able to keep its identity. However, in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, the Armenian genocide weakened its religious, political and intellectual resources. Notwithstanding, the AAC represented the ethnic Armenians and maintains high levels of trust in opinion polls. However, its political power was stronger in the late 1980s and during the 1992–1994 war in Karabakh than it is now. The AAC suffers under an unpopular religious leader who is seen to be a beneficiary of the state but not a leader of an independent institution.

All three countries have – with their various backgrounds – religious organizations that represent their majority religious traditions, collaborate with national political institutions and grapple with discourses of national identity. Nevertheless, the focus on national identity should not obscure the fact that these religious organizations are political actors whose sphere of operation also has an important transnational dimension.

In Armenia, the national character of the church often has been emphasised. However, the AAC is more complex than that. There are other patriarchs outside the national territory of Armenia and the superiority of the Holy See in Etchmiadzin only has been agreed on symbolically. Furthermore, the Armenian diaspora, which also intervenes in political affairs, is extremely important for Armenia. The tension between the Armenian state, mainly dependent on Russia, and the Armenian diaspora, which extends to the US and all over the world, is an important additional factor.

The GOC seems to be more naturally a national church because it follows the territorial principle that is typical to the Orthodox tradition more generally. However, its historical continuity is fragmented; for example, the GOC was deprived of autonomy between 1811 and 1917. In its self-understanding, the GOC is part of the Orthodox tradition where the relationship between national churches and ecumenical unity still poses theological and political problems.

Last but not least, the relationship between national identity and a single religious organization is weak in Azerbaijan, where the *Qafqaz Müsəlmanları İdarəsi* (Administration of the Caucasus Muslims or often the Caucasus Muslims Board) is (or should be) the representative of all Muslims in the Caucasus. However, this institution is not even functional in terms of representing the existing Islamic groups in Azerbaijan, since numerous Islamic traditions have connections abroad, mostly to Iran and Turkey, or do not recognize the authority of the Caucasus Muslim Board because of religious reasons. Nevertheless, the national character of the Azerbaijani state Islam can be understood as the expression of an overarching, cultural reference to "Islam" which is often referred to in the national self-understanding.

Having so far discussed the symbolic and organizational aspects of the majority religions, a satisfactory description of the religious field cannot be achieved merely by focussing on religious organizations. Especially in this field, it is a mistake to assume that religious organizations comply with the classic economic

or social models (which are characterized by hierarchical distributions of responsibility and a clear identification of members). Clerics do not necessarily speak for the people and the high levels of trust in the religious institutions – which have been measured in all three countries – do not automatically mean that people follow the political opinions or ethical instructions of their religious representatives.

Outcomes from various opinion polls have given rise to claims of a "revival of religion" taking place in a fashion similar to a phenomenon which was observed during the late Soviet era (Tomka, 2011). In all three countries of the South Caucasus, this so called religious revival began in the 1980s, but the dramatic political changes of the early 1990s are commonly understood as being part of a separate development. The increase in believers in Georgia is documented in more detail in Barbare Janelidze's contribution to this volume. We can distinguish between: a) a small percentage of the population that participates regularly in public and official rituals (10–20 per cent); b) a higher percentage that scores on more individualist items of religious observance, such as prayer or decision-making in daily life (20–75 per cent); and c), an overwhelming trust in the dominant religious organization in all three countries (65–85 per cent) (CRRC, 2013).

Obviously, the values of individualization have gained ground in the South Caucasus, even though, as Tigran Matosyan points out in this volume, they are less well established when compared with the Netherlands, which is a highly individualized society. Compared with the low rates of participation in public ritual, the relatively high level of personal religiosity fits with an individualization process. This does not contradict the detection of high levels of trust in religious institutions because of the above-described role of these institutions, at least in Georgia and Armenia.

In this short overview, it has to remain an open question as to how these collections of data about "religiosity" – especially the items concerning subjective religiosity – can be interpreted and how data about social structure can be related to, for example, the role of a religious organization in a given society. The political interactions are, nevertheless, carried out by representatives of these religious organizations which are powerful and accepted players in the political sphere. Therefore, I will limit myself in what follows to political and religious institutions, aware that this is – and the same applies in the field of politics – something of a shortcut.

Overall, the character of the interactions between religion and politics in the new independent states is mainly influenced by the fact that the countries are shaped by majority religions. This provides specific characteristics rather than a mere quantitative assessment. Most of all, there are strong symbolic and institutional forces that construct one single religion, where a closer historical look would reveal diversity. It is easy to fall into the trap of assuming that where there is a simple majority there is unity. In such cases, and depending on their historical backgrounds, the religious organizations in the South Caucasus have gained strong political positions within the symbolic representational functions of political life. Political stability was established earlier in Azerbaijan than in Georgia and Armenia, but in all three countries, such stability only was established after

years of disorder and civil war-like conditions. The advances of the church organizations in Georgia and Armenia were used during the time of political instability to accrue social power and establish institutions which were on a par with political institutions. By contrast, the presence of Islam in everyday politics in Azerbaijan was very weak from the beginning. The overarching religious organization is constituted in, and represents, something of the commonly held sense of a national Islamic heritage, rather than in a majority comprised of Islamic communities.

Political influence: state religions and political opposition

Even when the patriarch in Georgia, Ilia II, announced that the church did not interfere in political elections (as did the AAC), the political significance of statements and sermons made under its auspices was obvious. Engagements with the political sphere included informal meetings with politicians (Grdzelidze, 2010, p. 175), explicit statements on political issues (the church, for example, commented on the armed conflicts) and the drawing up of the 'Constitutional Agreement between the Georgian state and the Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia' ('concordat'), which was signed in 2002. In this volume, Barbare Janelidze analyses the influence of the GOC on the major political party in Georgia. Similar constellations of influence exist in Armenia, at least at the level of the local clergy.

The political influence of religions can, furthermore, better be analysed when taking into account the role of political opposition. In whatever ways we may want to define democracy (see the contribution of Evert van der Zweerde to this volume), an efficient opposition is crucial for the emerging political systems in the South Caucasus. The democratic political field is shaped by a fundamental distinction between the ruling forces and the opposition. In some cases, religious institutions and the government have acted as political partners but in others they were opponents. With respect to the role of opposition, we can note a difference in character of the political influence exerted by the churches in Georgia and Armenia. Especially in Georgia, the nature of the close relationship between state and church authorities is ambiguous. On the one hand, the GOC has been a partner of the government. On the other hand, it also has behaved as an oppositional force. When political opposition was extremely weak, the GOC fulfilled both roles at the same time.

In international politics, the GOC also played the national card but did not only support the government. When the autocephaly of the GOC was accepted by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1943, the GOC's sphere of responsibility and jurisdiction clearly coincided with the border of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. Accordingly, the current quarrel about the national border in Abkhazia is mirrored in a quarrel between the Russian and the Georgian Orthodox Church about responsibility over this region. The contribution of Alexander Kornilov and Andrey Makarychev to this volume analyses the influence of the Russian state in this transnational interplay, where religion is sometimes used as soft power. The Georgian policy of hostility towards Russia between 2003 and

2013 only partially succeeded in using the church as a national bulwark against its northern neighbour.

By contrast, the AAC lost its capacity to take on the role of representing or even backing political opposition but benefitted from financial support. During the Soviet period, the church operated under difficult conditions, but in the last years of the Soviet era, during the spin-off period, it gained influence in being a platform for political opposition. With the arrival of political independence in the region, the AAC finally was able to instigate its own reorganization. By contrast with Georgia, two new Catholicoses needed to be elected during the years of independence (the follower of Vazgen I in 1995 was Garegin I). The present patriarch, Garegin II (in office since 1999), is deemed to be submissive to secular authorities and is less popular.

The comparison with Azerbaijan is instructive in this respect. In his contribution to this volume, Rashad Shirinov describes the failure of the political opposition in Azerbaijan, and his explanation can be linked to a consideration of the potential interactions between the political and religious spheres. The politically invisible religious bodies did not play any role during the initial period of independence, so that while the Christian churches succeeded in establishing powerful yet non-political institutions, the religious communities in Azerbaijan did not create any form of institution which could engage with the polity. The Caucasus Muslim Board was too thoroughly integrated into state structures to play any independent political role besides being a representation of state Islam and national identity.

This situation changed rapidly after the Azerbaijani government identified Islamic groups as fertile ground for political opposition: Shi'a groups as political rivals and some Sunni groups as terrorists. Religion in Azerbaijan aimed at exerting influence (or achieving potential significance) when the political system already had been established and was set in a semi-authoritarian form. Initially, in the late twentieth century, the idea of a religious state was inspired by the Iranian model. However, the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan, which promoted an Iranian-style political system, was banned in 1995. Opposition, which took the form of championing an Islamic state, provoked the resistance of the ruling party and, thus, failed. Subsequently, after the 9/11 attacks in 2001, and partly under pressure from the US, some Islamic organizations with connections to terrorist organizations were banned as well. The Azerbaijani government has since then used certain recent historical circumstances to justify a more restrictive politics of religion and has deployed the Caucasus Muslim Board to implement them (Sattarov, 2009, pp. 155–190). As Elnur Ismayilov points out in this volume, the harsh political responses to both real and suspected dangers of radical Islam have led to a polarization from the top-down and a stimulation of Islamic activity. Another example from Azerbaijan is dealt with in the study of women's education by Nigar Gozalova. Intersections of secularly inspired education programmes and religious ideas are possible, but in some cases religion represents the conservative position as it rejects the principle of women's education altogether. The main governmental interest with respect to religious matters is to prevent any identification or association between Islamic movements and political oppositional groups (Bedford, 2009).

Political opposition, whether it is religious or not, needs financing. The financial situation of the church in Armenia is not open to public scrutiny; this feeds speculation regarding an informal entanglement between the state and the AAC. In Armenia and Georgia, privately based financial agents have played significant roles by contributing to and mobilizing church funding. Yulia Antonyan analyses an example of an oligarch-financed church-building project. In this case, the project has close associations with the personal spirituality of the sponsor but also is linked with a political party. In other cases, financial donations are made as part of a bolstering of the church's political muscle, as in the case of Bidzina Ivanishvili, who was the prime minister of Georgia from 2012 to 2013, when he resigned voluntarily. He sponsored the new Sameba Cathedral, which was opened in 2004 at a time when he was not involved in the ruling political party and the church was the only platform for political opposition. So, on his way to power, Ivanishvili financed the majority religion in Georgia.

To summarize, the religious influence on politics in this region is both an influence on the respective ruling political parties and an influence as opposition. Depending on the given possibilities (especially in countries with majority religions), the religious organizations may intervene in politics either as an oppositional party or as the state religion. And they may change between these roles very quickly. The political power of religion in Azerbaijan – which was very limited after independence – co-evolved with a political regime which tried to suppress political opposition. In Georgia, by contrast, the period of instability was much more protracted, and the organizational presuppositions of the church were much better adapted. The GOC was the last to succeed in gaining political influence, but not least, as it successfully manoeuvred itself into a position between political opposition and state religion. Compared with the GOC, the AAC anchored itself at the heart of power during the decade of instability. However, the fact that it fails to play an oppositional role continues to limit its credibility as an independent institution.

Religion in the focus of the state: promotion and restriction

Religious actors, mainly of the most powerful majority religions, may influence politics and act upon the political sphere, but political institutions also regulate, influence and manipulate religious communities. Let us now look closely at this reverse impact – by the states upon religions. Primarily, the direct support of a religious community, habitually the majority religion, is a common strategy in the politics of religion. In Azerbaijan, state-controlled Islam receives a lot of money in order to fulfil its representational function. In addition, the restoration of mosques (for example the Bibi Heybat Mosque near Baku) has brought forth magnificent and representative buildings. The Təzə Pir Mosque and its Islamic University in Baku are completely newly renovated buildings. A commemorative stone near the university proudly states that 'the renovation and enlargement of the Təzə Pir Mosque was realized on the initiative of President Ilham Aliyev.' These costly religious manifestations of obvious and publicly displayed wealth

exist in all three countries, and they demonstrate that the state appreciates the role of the majority religion as a kind of religion of the establishment. Similar financial transactions have taken place in Georgia and most probably in Armenia. However, the financial situation of the AAC is not transparent to the public.

In all three countries, religion-friendly politics is a means of influencing and partially controlling the religious sphere. The *politics of religion,* then, is an aspect of governance. As a consequence, each of the states interact both with their majority religion and minority religions by means of legislation and administration. Thus, the minority religions are politically significant even if they do not assemble great numbers of adherents. The most important instrument in connection with religious pluralism is the politics of registration, which is relevant in all three countries.

Registration politics started to be a liberal instrument of religious freedom in the early years of independence. The fact of minority religions existing alongside the majority religion is a feature of the political negotiation which is characteristic of a democratic country (Sarkissian, 2008, p. 167f). Thus, registration politics is defining a religious field with a variety of actors. Even if the minority religions do not have the same rights as majority religions, they are included in the field. This is why the GOC intervened against registration politics in 2011, without, however, stopping the legislation. The more liberal registration politics counterbalanced the GOC-friendly politics.

Nevertheless, registration politics allows for the possibility of restraining specific religious communities. The dominant scheme of interpretation in Armenia and Azerbaijan is "traditional"[5] versus "new" religions. Religions which have a long tradition in the countries are accepted; by contrast, religions which arrived during the last 20 years are new and thus "dangerous." In Armenia, the politics of registration is mainly aligned in such a way as to hinder missionary groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses or Pentecostal churches. This can be interpreted as the long arm of the AAC, which tries to stabilize the status quo in the religious field. In Azerbaijan, all religious activity is forbidden if it is not carried out within the framework of a registered community. As noted before, religions deemed "dangerous" are especially specific Islamic groups, as far as they are under suspicion of being terrorist groups or more generally because of their potential for political opposition. The Caucasus Muslim Board is authorized to supervise the registration of Islamic communities and human rights reports register a lot of condescension and obstruction. Thus, the Azerbaijani politics of religion combine the "new" and "from abroad" in order to identify the suspicious religious communities.

Indeed, there is influence from abroad. The international interconnections with Islam in Azerbaijan are fragmented and complex. Tatevik Mkrtchyan scrutinizes Iranian political influences in the region, especially the influence on religious groups in the south of Azerbaijan. The influence of Turkey on the wider region is analysed by Bayram Balci. The Azerbaijani politics of religion, therefore, has to cope with three issues: Islamist ideology and the connection between political opposition and Islam, as well as the use of Islam by external governments.

To summarize, the three countries each have developed a specific politics of religion which hardly can be classified either as liberal, cooperative or restrictive. In the years immediately following independence, the liberal message of freedom of religion dominated. The states' response to the surprisingly strong religious organizations was unsteady, rather than unerring, in this field (Guliyev, 2012). Especially in Georgia and Armenia, the state legally has conceded considerable privileges to the churches. The politics of registration has had two – sometimes paradoxical – effects which have occurred in all three countries but most prominently in Azerbaijan. First, it is a means of controlling religious pluralism, especially those who are deemed to be "dangerous" or "bad." Second and paradoxically, it promotes religious pluralism by defining the religious field which is not identical with the majority religion. Drawing a political distinction between "good" (in some cases supported) and "bad" (in some cases persecuted) religions is still different from making a theological distinction between the one "true" (majority) religion and all other religions.

Conclusion: political change and religious change in the South Caucasus

To conclude this brief sketch of the interactions between politics and religion in the South Caucasus, we can see that during a period of massive political change and modernization the religions also have altered and been altered. The increase in participation in public religious rituals (a so-called revival) is merely a minor aspect of the changes which have occurred in the field.

The importance of the nation-building process after independence brought about a public discourse on religion organized in the terms of "majority religions" rather than "religious pluralism." The churches in Georgia and Armenia have been consolidated; they have succeeded in monopolizing the religious field and building specific religious institutions which also have learned to operate in the political sphere. By contrast, in Azerbaijan, the institutionalized majority religion was more a construction of state requirements than a representational organization. The discourse on the national and symbolic significance of the majority religion was less important and focused on the cultural meaning of religion.

The establishment of strong religious institutions and the political significance of religious opposition contradicts some secularization theories. However, proposing a counter-approach, such as desecularization or revival, would not be a satisfactory solution. The analysis of interactions reveals that strong religious organizations are possible when the political institutions (including the opposition) are weak or dysfunctional and when the representation of the whole society is not guaranteed.

The enhancement of the political power of religions was possible when either the political structures were too weak and could not guarantee societal stability, as in Georgia and Armenia, or when they were too strong and could not guarantee social flexibility, as in Azerbaijan. During the build up of political structures, the AAC turned into a beneficiary, while the GOC also fulfilled the function of a political

opposition. This was impossible in Azerbaijan, where single religious communities are now seen as potentially the germinal centre of political opposition. By contrast, the AAC currently has no potential for opposition because of the parallel establishment of political and religious structures at the end of the twentieth century.

It is worth noting that theories and counter-theories of secularization have not been developed in the context of Orthodox Christianity or countries with Islamic traditions. The application of modernization theory to these traditions (e.g. Makrides, 2012) reveals an inconclusive picture of anti-modernist and anti-religious polemic, arrangements between political and religious institutions, separation rhetoric and informal interactions. Therefore, I did not apply a summarizing assessment of "modernity" in my foregoing comparative description of the religions in the South Caucasus, claiming that the analysis of actors and their societal deployment reveals something more. The process of economic and political modernization in the region of the South Caucasus is experiencing a second wave, following the enforced one of the Soviet era of modernization. It is quite apt to assume, in this part of the world, a specific modernity in which politics includes religious actors. Their activities are answered in the establishment of the states' politics of religion. Thus, the field of politics and religion comprises campaigns against religious traditions, opinions and values as well as opposition to specific political parties, powers and systems. These struggles are an expression of, rather than a falling behind, modernity. Religious and political bodies behave like brothers; but they are mistrustful and sometimes hostile.

Notes

1 This finding can be explained by history. During Soviet times, religion was strongly persecuted. Thus, religious convictions and practice diminished over time. After independence, being religious was one new possibility of personal orientation. This new opportunity was realized more quickly in cities than in the country because the country remained more traditional than the cities.
2 The classical theory is Luckmann's "invisible religion"; however, I would also subsume the rational choice approach to this kind of theory.
3 This term has been made popular by Geertz (1983) and is widely used.
4 Indeed, I refer just to the fact that religions are in principle able to build societies. It is not appropriate to understand religions as quasi-nation-states. However, religious organizations may step into power where the state is instable, incompetent etc.
5 Curanović (2013) states that "traditional religion" is a core category of the post-Soviet religious model. Even if it is not in the constitution of Azerbaijan, it 'can be concluded from the actual policy of the authorities' (333). Curanović has excluded Georgia and Armenia from his analysis; however, both models of politics of religion fit his framework.

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2 Ethnicity, nation and religion

Current debates and the South Caucasian reality

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The aim of this chapter is to reveal a few trends in the interaction between religious, national, and ethnic identities as these trends can be applied to an understanding of current developments in the South Caucasus. While this volume deals specifically with this particular region, we can find many parallels with other areas where identities have been in flux since the major global transformations which occurred around the turn of the twenty-first century; therefore, my reflections are inspired by trends that are broader than regional, though many local examples will be referred to.

To schematise my task, I shall distinguish between three co-related foci: a) societal transformations; b) identity-formation as a response to these transformations; and c) academic/scholarly perceptions of both of the previous areas. It goes without saying that these three foci are interrelated and overlap so extensively that it may be hard to distinguish between them. We can easily show how the scholarly and popular perceptions (of ethnic or religious identities) depend upon each other and how both may define the real social changes and, simultaneously, be dependent upon these changes. We can assume, however, that these three foci are not the same, and that boundaries between them, however permeable, do exist.

Considering these three foci listed above, I will proceed in reverse order. I will start with the scholarship – more specifically, the scholarship on identities – that has undergone, in reaction to a profound restructuring of both Western societies and Western epistemologies, a deep shift towards, basically, a postmodern washing-out of old-style solid concepts such as ethnicity, nationality, and religion. I will then turn to certain objective and subjective developments in the emerging new societies, like those of the South Caucasus, which seem to contradict the currently fashionable academic *epistèmes* by restoring what have looked like robust and effectual concepts of ethnicity, nationality and religion. Finally, I will try to show how the societal and global changes, in the final analysis, refute these restorative claims and prove the new *epistèmes* to be at least partly true.

Towards de-essentializing old collectivities: a global trend and an academic vogue

If one tries to formulate one major trend in the academic understanding of all three terms in question here – nation, ethnicity, and religion – it would be that of de-essentialization. This trend started a few decades ago with postmodern and

poststructuralist questionings of longstanding academic conventions. This line of questioning was the result of a number of political and cultural processes, as well as some academic shifts, which I am not going to deal with here. Previous notions of ethnicity, nation (the nation-state) and religion as they were defined within the Western discourse of modernity had lost their clear content.

This de-essentialization has affected all three concepts. Ethnicity (*ethnos*) lost its primordial connotations to blood and kinship relationships; rather, it came to be seen in "constructivist" terms, having fluid or partial/multiple identities as its main characteristic. Some major works in this area have been followed by many others (Barth, 1969; Hobsbawm, 1992; and see Appadurai, 1990 for the concept of "ethnoscapes"). The concept of the nation (nation-state) as a political "container" was reinterpreted as a largely constructed, invented and even historically contingent reality in accordance with, and under pressure from, a new "global condition" with its softer notions of citizenship, weakening patriotism, massive migrations, transnational economic, political and cultural flows and integrative political trends (Anderson, 1983; Brubaker, 2004; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1992).[1] Finally, religion – the third concept that concerns us here – was deconstructed as a phenomenon with a modernist genealogy, rather than a perennial tradition, and thus was reinterpreted as an applied, flexible source of identity, tending to be individualized, uprooted, disembedded from a certain cultural background and de-confessionalized – detached from a particular institutional and ethno-nationally informed context (Asad, 1993; Bastian et al., 2001; Beyer, 1994; Masuzava, 2005; Smith, 1998).

We can rightly assume that the trend just described has been the most visible and dynamic (and, perhaps, quantitatively dominant) and has affected some normative – both academic and extra-academic – assessments of related terms and phenomena. Ethnocentrism and nationalism have acquired mainly negative connotations, being widely considered as "bad things," as dangerous tools of possible manipulation or, at the least, as amounting to a deceptive, essentialist obsession, generating conflicts. In some sense, this new negative vision of large (pseudo-)organic collective solidarities glossed over the classic opposition of ethnic and civic nationalism, because now, with the alleged decline of the nation as such, any type of nationalism – be it civic or ethnic – or even patriotism, would be considered as less relevant (in objective terms) and less beneficial (in normative terms); they contradict the supposedly major trends toward transnationalism and cosmopolitanism.

"Ethnicity" or "ethno-nationalism" may have acquired more positive content within the liberal (multi)culturalist perspective when referring to softly encouraged, open minority communities (Kymlicka, 2001; Tamir, 1993); but in this case "ethnicity" or "nationality" have been clearly dissociated from ethnocentric, primordial claims and not linked to classical nationalism aspiring to the establishment of a nation-state. There still have been many arguments to support the nation-states as such, for example quite famously in Rawls (1999), for whom nation-states were 'natural, stable and suitable units of international order.' But for Rawls, too, the nation-state was also an ideal liberal community based on individual human rights and civic ties. However, Rawls was strongly criticized by

"cosmopolitan critics" for assuming the nations to be homogenous "peoples" (see discussion in Miscevic, 2010).

As far as our third term here – religion – is concerned, the academic discourse of recent decades has been more complex, Religion was definitely refuted as a meaningful concept when linked with ethnicity, or nation, or particular roots of any kind. Rather, it began to be associated with vibrant trans-ethnic and transnational agencies; for example, the highly visible and dynamic religious movements of Charismatic Pentecostalism and Islamism.[2] At the same time, what developed simultaneously was a new post-secular sensitivity, reflected in scholarship, according to which a de-essentialized and de-confessionalized religion – a sort of diffused, cosmopolitan "spirituality" – became a legitimate complement to individualized and communal self-expression within a general framework which should be invariably pluralistic, egalitarian and based on complete freedom of religion (or no religion).[3]

Scholarship challenged: a new explosion of real essentialism

All these academic trends and normative preferences (semi-covertly affecting academic research), have been strongly challenged when applied to some non-Western contexts and beyond some of the abovementioned transnational examples. In those contexts, ethnicity, nation and religion, being deeply interwoven with each other, have created a pivot of political and cultural revival, We can refer to new outbursts of ethnic conflict in Rwanda, Sudan, India, Sri Lanka; the growing religious nationalisms such as Iranian Shi'a, Turkish Sunni and Indian Hindu nationalisms, or religious Zionism; and many other ongoing tensions, even within democratic contexts, such as Flemish, Catalonian and similar claims. The above-described priorities were particularly shattered by the breakdown of the Communist Bloc, especially the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. For the newly independent territories appearing on the ruins of these empires, nation-building became by far the preeminent project that involved political elites and mobilized the entire population. The nation they fervently started to build was conceived, initially and ideally, in "classic" modernist terms, as a pivotal socio-cultural order based on strictly defined territories, a unitary citizenship, one language, one set of symbols and one sovereign government.

This modernist ideal of nationhood was borrowed from classic mainstream Western rhetoric and appropriated as applied to a certain period of "transition." This ideal indeed may have looked like a classic civic or political nation, which was declaratively (and sometimes sincerely) referred to by the new elites. Yet there was at least one feature of this new breed of nations that made it radically different from the ideal – this was its clearly ethnocentric basis. National identities here have been clearly defined by means of a distancing from "others," and these "others" were alien ethnicities. The Croatian, Serbian, Hungarian, Russian, Ukrainian or Kazakh nationalisms of the 1990s–2000s were clearly ethnically marked – although even a quick glance over the listed cases suggests how different were the particular manifestations of this feature. In sum, both nation

(in the modern sense) and ethnicity (with primordial connotations) were bound together and embraced by the new governments, becoming key defining narratives in these lands – quite in opposition to the alleged global trend of a "dilution" of conventional, modern, communal entities, tending toward transnational mixtures and cosmopolitanism. In a way, we can say that this ethno-nationalist explosion in the liberalized post-communist context clearly confirmed something that was always the case: ethnic, national and religious feelings, coupled with the strong "us against them" discourse of identity-based borders, were never going to disappear. They stood strong in spite of an exaggerated political rhetoric of globalization, to some extent endorsed by new academic theories (on the concept of ethno-nationalism in connection with the Soviet breakdown, see Connor, 1994). The most blatant conflicts – such as the post-Yugolavian wars and the conflict between Ukraine and Russia in 2014 – were perfect examples of mutual, ethno-national repulsion and demarcation.

This counter-global, re-emergent emphasis on a strong ethno-national solidarity can be found in all three South Caucasian nations. First, in all three, nation-building – the establishment of a classic modern "nation container" – formed a central discourse that framed both the fight for power between the elites within each country and the relationships between the three nations. Second, ethnicity was essential and indeed (re-)essentialized. Armenian-ness was taken as the key element of a primordial identity, with emphatically ancient roots and a declaratively autochthonous presence on national territory (see Levon Abrahamian's discussion of a "root-oriented," also "pseudo-historical," model of national identity, typical of the Armenians; Abrahamian, 2007, pp. 10–12; see also Siekierski, 2009, 2010). Azerbaijan's Turkic origins and belonging, which absorbed, according to a new historical narrative, the pre-Turkic autochthonous local substratum, prevailed as the central element of Azerbaijani identity (Yunusov, 2007). The Karabakh conflict between the two nations in the early 1990s showed that ethnic identity was predominant; it defined the fight for national territory, and was followed by respective ethnic cleansing, forcing out, *en masse,* Armenians from Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis from Armenia and Karabakh.[4] In Azerbaijan, ethnocentrism rendered also the conditions of other minorities precarious (although not to the point of open conflict, as in the case of the Azeri Armenians). We have seen similar processes in the wake of conflicts in post-Soviet Georgia, where Abkhazian and Ossetian ethnic resurgences have been paralleled by the deeply ethnocentric, Kartvelian character of the Georgian nation-building project.

The distinction between the civic and ethnic modes of a nation was not always obliterated; the two modes developed simultaneously but they also often merged. All three nations place a strong emphasis on their "first republics" which existed in 1918–1920/21, between the dissolution of the Russian Empire and Sovietization. In all three cases, this legacy was partly construed in terms of *civitas* and democracy, as opposed to the Russian and Soviet imperial regimes. Such was the initial anti-Soviet and anti-Russian rhetoric of the first independent governments in the 1990s in all three countries, with their declared aspirations towards the European model of a civic nation, endorsing diversity and universal citizenship.

Yet ethnically-coloured memories were inevitably interwoven into the story of independence; ethnically-based attitudes massively exploded and very quickly drowned out the rhetoric of the civic nation. The idea of each new nation's ethnic foundation became dominant, as did the idea of ethnic purity and, consequently, the practice of ethnic cleansing. Ethnic victimhood and related hostilities towards other groups (including the Armenian genocide, which took place during the period of the Ottoman Empire; Georgian suffering at the hands of both the Ottoman and Russian empires; the consequences of recent war atrocities in Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the resulting suffering of refugees from all sides) was another central element in the nation-building process. The idea of a civic nation did not disappear, though. Throughout the quarter of a century that followed, this idea was periodically referred to by the unsuccessful liberal opposition parties in Azerbaijan; it was cautiously referred to by competing political camps in Armenia; it was deployed as an effective means of legitimation during the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia. However, it could not compete with the ever-dominant ethnocentric discourses, and the interests of the "nations" were consistently construed in ethnic categories, both among political elites and the population at large.

Another strong pillar of nation-building, in terms of classical nationalism, was statehood. In searching for the experience of statehood in the past, the aspirant nations hoped to evince the ability of an old *ethnos* to empower itself in a new situation of independence. The experience of statehood in Soviet times had of course had a major impact on the new countries (see the next section of this chapter). However, the Soviet legacy was mainly conceived in postcolonial terms and, therefore, seen as ideologically inefficient; ethno-national memories were being searched for stronger examples of power and glory. Hence the interest in history, with an emphasis upon military exploits and access to power. The reference points for Armenians were relatively short periods of glory, such as the state under Tigran II in the first century BC; the Bagratid kingdom of the tenth and eleventh centuries CE, or the Kingdom of Cilicia (twelfth to fourteenth centuries CE). In Georgia, such references were the semi-mythical ancient kingdom of Colchis and the "golden age" of the Bagrationi dynasty (eleventh to thirteenth centuries CE). In Azerbaijan, the ethno-national consolidation was more recent; yet today the trend is to claim the ancient kingdoms of Atropatene and Albania as antecedents and to make references to the Azeri origins of the Safavid and Qujar dynasties in Persia.[5]

Let us now turn to religion, another strong and recently re-emerged symbolic resource in the area we are dealing with. But before we come back to the Caucasus, a brief overview of some global trends is necessary.

On the one hand, a certain crisis of secularism, or at least some developments that have rendered secularism vulnerable, represents a global trend; thus, religion has become a privileged resource of social and cultural construction – a situation that seemed less plausible during the heyday of classic secular modernity. But contrary to the dominant vision of a new vibrancy among transnational and trans-ethnic religions, in the post-communist area the resurgence of religion has clearly assumed ethnic forms and become an additional and effective

"brace" for reinforcing ethno-national myths and legitimating the "revived" nation-state. Hervieu-Léger noted that both religion and ethno-nationalism concur in referring to a perennial genealogy and naturalness (2000, pp. 157–162). Also, religion possesses a powerful energy, acquired throughout the larger portion of the twentieth century, during which time it has been under pressure, and precisely because it was repressed in the communist countries. Religion was thus construed, again in essentialist terms, as quasi-eternal and the most profound component of identity.

In some cases, religion has functioned as the key variable in the invention of new nations, such as in case of Serbian, Croatian and Bosniak (Muslim) nationalisms, where purely ethnic distinctions were ineffectual in providing strong, border-constructing resources. In most other cases, religion was secondary to either ethnic or national identity. In cases like Poland, Lithuania, Russia or Romania, an incontestably dominant Christian confession, be it Catholicism or Orthodoxy, has worked as a central *de facto* legitimizing pillar in the new nation-states, although this role was not established *de jure.* Greek Catholicism became a powerful marker of the western Ukrainian identity within Ukraine. Within Russia, the Tatar, Bashkir, Chechen, Avar and other ethno-mythologies and ethno-polities used Islam as a major reference. Beyond Russia, Islam was a common reference, though to varying degrees and in various forms, in the newly independent post-Soviet states and territories, where it was the prevailing religion of the dominant ethnic groups.

Moving back to the South Caucasus, we have seen a similar, restored religious ethno-nationalism strongly manifest itself in the formation of a widely held and almost consensual grand narrative of an endemic, inherited religiosity – Georgian Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic or Azerbaijani Muslim, respectively. The grand narratives of perennial religious identity have been included in official political discourses, heavily promoted by engaged local academia and have become mainstream in popular culture.

In Armenia and Georgia, the essentialist vision of the respective Christian churches has been enshrined in the constitutions and special legislation. The Armenian 2005 Constitution, while stating the principles of religious freedom, pluralism and separation, refers to the "national Church" (Article 8.1) and other legal documents confirm this status (Tchilingirian, 2007; Sarkissian, 2008). In Georgia, the 1995 Constitution also combines pluralist norms with a recognition of traditional Orthodox hegemony, which was further confirmed in the 2002 Concordat between the church and the state (Article 9.1.).

Both churches have been stereotypically presented as the most ancient established Christian churches (having become state churches in the early fourth century CE) and hence serving, without interruption, as holders of an essentialized ethnic identity, including periods of statelessness when this identity was under threat. Both churches have strongly emphasized their indigenous singularity. This is true in the case of the Armenian (non-Chalcedonic) tradition, with its own literary and liturgical style. The Georgian church, while belonging to the Eastern Orthodox commonwealth, has also developed a strong institutional autonomy, a specific style and an indigenous identity; under strong internal

traditionalist pressures, it left the ecumenical movement in 1997. The peak of the religious resurgence in Armenia occurred around the official celebrations of the 1,700th anniversary of Christianization in 2001. In Georgia, this resurgence has achieved a greater intensity and assumed a massive, grassroots formation as distinct from the more top-down, guided model in Armenia (see Serrano, 2010a; 2010b).

In Azerbaijan, the idea that Islam defines endemic cultural codes closely linked to ethnic Turkic and national Azerbaijani identities could hardly be contested following the fall of the Soviet Union. However, if compared to the Christian traditions of Armenia and Georgia, Azerbaijani Islam has not displayed a hyperbolic, ethno-national consolidation. There are a few reasons for this. One reason, as mentioned above, is that Azerbaijan has a shorter memory of national integration or of a specific ethnic "cell" within a diffused Turkic population dating back to the late nineteenth century; therefore, there was no ground for a specific, local Islam to fully emerge. Another reason might be a rift between ethnic (Turkic) and religious (Shi'a) identities, which made the possibility of religious belonging less articulate. Also, the difference in the institutional cultures of Islam and Christianity made the degree of confessionalization in Islam, with the absence of a "national institution," much less pronounced. A new factor preventing the nationalization of Islam was the rise of radical Islamism as a transnational force that operated across and against national frames, making Islam less applicable to projects such as nation-building. Significantly, Islam has never been mentioned in Azerbaijani constitutional or legislative documents as a "national religion." Still, as said before, the idea of the "Muslim essentials" of Azerbaijani identity is a mainstream idea and is deployed in various ways by political and cultural agents (Swietochowski, 2004; Yunusov, 2007).

The rise of religious ethno-nationalism in the era of global mixtures and relativity came as a surprise and, again, it was something that went against the dominant academic preconceptions which were in vogue at the time. However, the very fact of such an explosion of primordial feeling fitted the logic of globalization: it revealed the reverse side of the trend towards transnational mixtures. As R. Friedland compellingly puts it: in times when cultures and capitals become *sans frontières,* 'religious nationalism represents the return to text, to the fixity of signs, the renarrativization of the nation in the cosmic context' (1999, p. 314). Religion helps non-Western states 'to fabricate a discursive space in which they can breathe easily' (Friedland, 1999, p. 317). Within this reverse logic – or let us call it anti-global, root-restorative logic – religion provided ethno-nationalism with a power of grandeur and a superior legitimacy in consolidating economic resources (first of all, territory) and promoting a sense of cultural vitality. Religion provided ethnicities and nations with a neo-essentialist script, a language, indeed a "cosmic reference" and became a major element of individual and collective subjectivities. This revived form of an essential subjectivity was strongly opposed to the global, cosmopolitan, eclectic and relativistic subjectivity so much in vogue in academic writings, with its triumphalist political implications.

An explicatory interlude: the centrality and ambiguity of the Soviet legacy

The one single and most crucial factor that was cardinal to the explosion of religious and ethno-national identities in the South Caucasus was the ambiguous legacy of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was, on the one hand, a unifying project, promoting a unitary Soviet citizenship, an authoritarian, supra-national sovereignty, and an official socialist culture. Ethnic particularism and nationalism were seen as contradictory to the communist ideology. On the other hand, as some scholars have pointed out, the Soviet regime was not consistent and ultimately failed in providing what it sought to achieve in this field (Brubaker, 1994, p. 50; Suny, 2001). Instead, in glaring contradiction to the ideology of communist internationalism and potential/claimed revolutionary globalism, the Soviet regime put a unique emphasis on multinational and multicultural diversity. In fact, as scholarship suggests, the Soviet regime produced a re-configuration of the Russia-dominated space along stressed ethnic lines and articulated ethnic borders. The Soviet Union turned out to be an "affirmative action empire" (T. Martin, 2001) – the empire that actually promoted, although selectively, ethnic particularities, created national elites, and essentialized the very notion of "nationality" as being firmly linked to language, territory and blood.

The Soviet Union was a two-storeyed empire: officially, the "ground storey" of ethnic particularities was subordinate to the "upper storey" of the union. The ground storey has gradually developed its own, partially hidden, but in fact, as Rogers Brubaker has brilliantly shown (1994), thoroughly institutionalized alternative identities, with burgeoning nationalisms and latent animosities (directed both against the central government and against other peripheral nationalities) which finally exploded around the time the union collapsed – and, which were, in fact, a major cause of this collapse. While the early 1990s were a time of euphoric, post-Cold War hopes for global integration (reflected in academic writings), the post-Soviet independent states, ironically, brought with them what was now an unfettered, liberated sense of revived, ethnocentric, sometimes aggressive collectivist subjectivities.

Like other new countries in the region, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia found their separate identities already ripened and ready-made by their Soviet experience, and these identities were further stirred up in the competition between the national elites for resources – not only economic and territorial, but also symbolic, Hence, the arising of what we can call "the memory wars" between all three nations; in the cases of the conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh, these "memory wars" and the actual wars became closely linked to each other.[6]

The rise of the religious modus of nationalism in this region, part of a wider global trend, was also mediated by the Soviet experience. The pre-revolutionary Russian Empire was largely constructed along confessional lines. The Soviet empire, by contrast, was redefined, as we have just seen, in ethnic and national terms, as religion had been definitively repressed as the symbolic rival of the

communist ideology. However, religion became a "hidden script," latently connected to a much more "open script" of nationality. Thus, religion was subordinated to national identity. In the latter years of Soviet Union, from the 1960s onwards, religion was a politically controlled ghetto but also a culturally recognized "ethnographic museum," an ethnic "old curiosity shop." Yet, religion gradually recaptured some symbolic crypto-power, precisely because its "spiritual" content was downplayed and curtailed. In the South Caucasus, this was especially obvious in Georgia, where, for specific reasons, the revived national heritage was captured in religious terms, rendering the erstwhile secular nationalism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries "sacralized" and "appropriated," in Georgian Orthodox terms, even as early as in the 1980s – during the last years of the Soviet era (Zedania, 2011). M. Pelkmans showed, using the case of Adjara, how the cultural boundaries "produced" in the Soviet Union (between Muslim Adjarians and the Orthodox Georgians) were "fortified and essentialized" after its fall and how later the pressure of the strong pan-Georgian narrative of an "Orthodox nation" made of the Adjarians "incomplete selves" within the new Georgian nation and pushed many of them towards converting to Christianity (2006, pp. 120, 163, 224). In Armenia, the national church has been considered, in a similar way, to be the bearer of the national historical heritage, and the Catholicos Vazgen I (in office from 1955 to 1994) was the most prominent national figure, as is the Georgian Patriarch Ilia II (in office since 1977). Layers of mass Muslim consciousness and hidden networks have played a similar role in Soviet Azerbaijan, albeit without such a concentration of authority as in the case of the organized national churches in the two other countries.

Nevertheless, the Soviet legacy has proved to be complex and ambiguous. It has significantly shaped the public religious symbolism and language that emerged following the breakup of the union, but it has also left deep clefts and gaps in religious knowledge and practices, leading to a thin, weak religiosity, making "religion" an easy object for interpretation, improvisation and reconstruction. The Soviet legacy also left behind a strong tradition of everyday secularism that has survived well into independence. Religious ethno-nationalism, therefore, was limited to an extent largely defined by the same Soviet experience that called it into being.

Indeed, the substance, or "thickness" of everyday religiosity, as reflected through frequency of attendance, depth of religious knowledge and other indicators, may have been different in each of the three South Caucasian cases, much variegated regionally and overall relatively fragmented and unstable. As in other post-Soviet countries, the grand narrative of an endemic religion has been contested by the secular and reformist elites formed in Soviet times. Another limitation on religious nationalism has been the pattern of secularity and a separation of religion and state based upon the tradition inherited from the Soviet period. Pragmatically, state secularity may serve to preserve a balance in a relatively plural confessional context, which applies mostly to diverse Georgia. Moreover, the pragmatic stance of post-Soviet ruling elites required striking a balance between instrumentalizing religion as part of national symbolism and neutralizing religion as a suitable form

of political opposition. This was especially true for Islam with its potential politicization and here the case of Azerbaijan stands out, illustrating how the ruling regime, largely derived from the Soviet political tradition, followed the Soviet type of state secularism, while Islam, emboldened by the impact from the strong external centres of Islamism, turned into a channel of opposition (Cornell, 2006).

The Soviet legacy of state secularism, thinness of massive religious engagement, and even distrust of religious involvement, were not the only causes limiting religious ethno-nationalism. Another factor was the Western model of secularity, solidly built into the international legislation to which the new independent states have been more or less bound to conform. Secularity corresponds to the modernist ideal of the nation-state and it conflicts with the temptation to make recourse to religion a distinctive marker and a legitimizing resource. Georgia, which has been the location of the strongest religious resurgence, also represents, paradoxically, a particularly strong example of where strict secularism has become a quasi-official position, as was the case under the government of Saakashvili from 2003–2013, and for a rationale of this we can hardly refer to the Soviet legacy. This breakthrough, which was of a totally new nature for the region, was not, however, of sufficient strength to erode the widespread notion of a national and nationalized religion.

Overall, we should keep in mind the centrality and also the ambiguity of the Soviet experience in configuring the new understanding of ethnicity, nation and religion in the region. The Soviet canonical ideology, partially infused into the *habitus* of elites and other social groups, conveyed the Russian imperial multiethnic tradition and simultaneously the new modernist ideas of supra-nationalism and secularity. Yet, paradoxically, this same Soviet experience created the conditions that led to the explosion of ethnic, national and religious particularities. Of these two opposing impulses, which both affected the post-Soviet societies, the impulse of particularism seemed to have dominated in the aftermath and under the impression of the collapse of a supranational project that the Soviet Union allegedly was. Yet, as an another example of ambiguity, the Soviet Union as a whole was also a bulwark of self-contained particularism, and its breakdown was the catalyst of another, even stronger, and increasingly powerful supranational ideology, a globalizing euphoria emerging from behind the crumbling Berlin Wall and the post-Washington-consensus West.

Discussion: combining primordialist explosion with the effects of globalization

In his classic work *Nations and Nationalism since 1870*, Eric Hobsbawm writes about the decline of nationalism in the late twentieth century due to the drive toward global interconnectedness. But then, in Chapter 6 of his second edition, he acknowledges that:

> it would indeed be absurd to deny that the collapse of the Soviet Union . . . marks a profound, and probably permanent historical change, whose implications are, in the time of writing, entirely obscure," and adds that it may seem "willful

> blindness to conclude this book with some reflection on the decline of nationalism as a vector of historical change . . ."
>
> (Hobsbawm, 1992, p. 163)

Hobsbawm's musings reveal his embarrassment. The post-Soviet reality seemed to overthrow trendy, constructivist approaches to ethnicity, nationhood and religion. This reality somewhat reshaped the academic debates, apparently revitalizing those findings that emphasized, by contrast, the old, ethnic origins of nations (Armstrong, 1982; Beaune, 1985; Smith, 1988, 2004).[7] These findings echoed, although they were never identical to, the erstwhile dominant German philosophical tradition, going back to Herder and Hegel, of conceptualizing the *Volksnation* endowed with *Volksgeist,* and a French intellectual tradition of the *mentalité collective* or *charactère nationale.* The emphasis on the religious element in forging the old, "pre-modern nations" seemed to be similarly legitimate.[8]

This emphasis on the antiquity of collective solidarities and their sacral origins apparently went against the constructivist view of the modern nation and the equally constructivist thesis about the withering and weakening of nations as such – both ethnic and civic – in the postmodern global mix. However, I would argue that conclusions built upon the experience of the post-Soviet states reflect confusions of the existing academic stereotypes. As a matter of fact, quite beyond the opposition of primordialism vs. constructivism, nationalism vs. transnationalism/globalism as obvious speculative extremes, we can discern a complex situation as outlined below.

First, indeed, the post-Soviet experiences did revive the idea of an ethno-religious continuity of the pre-modern nations, and our Caucasian cases, perhaps, should be taken seriously as examples of a protracted cultural memory and, therefore, of a collective subjectivity with a long history. At the same time, there is plenty of evidence that the narratives of the old, pre-modern ethno-nations have *always* been as heavily dependent on constructivist interpretations by ruling and intellectual elites as they are now. "Cultural memory" does not distinguish between history and myth; it projects current needs and present-day references onto the past and works as a "hot memory," invoking potent symbols of earlier times in the construction of contemporary identities (Assman, 2011). This early twenty-first century process of construction by means of memory is no different from similar processes which occurred earlier in history, when the historiographers and politicians of the medieval, "pre-modern nations" were inventing the old collective identities in primordial terms. In the Caucasus, the "hot memory" constructivism of Armenian or Georgian medieval authors is an obvious example.[9] Therefore, cultural memory construction has been a constant, ongoing process, but the very (re)production of this chain of memory proves, by itself, the existence of *longue-durée* collective subjects so that we can go beyond the rigid primordialism/constructivism opposition.

Second, the post-Soviet experience has reenergized the idea of the nation as a modern phenomenon, as a project linked to modernization. The newly independent nations were conceived not only in terms of tradition but also in terms of

novelty and progress. The Russian Empire and the Soviet Union had provided the South Caucasian states with initial modernizing experiences. The subsequent surge of postcolonial self-determination in the 1990s was, however, mostly anti-Soviet and anti-Russian and made for them essential and pertinent the transfer of economic, political and cultural technologies from the West. The idea of a "transition" to Western legal, economic and political frameworks led to a partial adoption of classical modernist assumptions about the "nation." This nation-building process was constituted of a complex fabric of emerging new norms and institutions. However, it was also a matter of interpretation and construction in two senses. First, the construction of an ideal national modernity (a selective set of cues that were interpreted as "modern"). Second, this idealized modernity was deeply interwoven with essentialist ethnocentric and ethno-religious assumptions. We cannot deny the real process of nation-building as *modernity* building. However, once again, its orchestration was deeply infused with a mixture of civic and ethnic, secular and religious interpretations.

Thirdly, the post-Soviet emphasis upon the essentialized nation, although apparently contradicting integrative and globalizing trends, did not preclude the process of blurring and mixing national identities. Above all, we should not forget the common imperial (Russian and Soviet) legacy. We have seen how ambivalent this legacy was. However discredited and rejected it may have been in the context of postcolonial criticism, the imperial experience continued to project a common semantic space. After a few centuries of living within this space, the reality in all three South Caucasian countries represents "a palimpsest of social identities" of earlier times, and this imperial experience was already the first exposure to strong supra-local integrative impulses.[10] Marco van Hagen's new "Eurasian" paradigm emphasized the need for a comparative and interactive history of the entire area, challenging the normative frame of a European nation-state with fixed borders and, rather, focusing on borderlands and diasporas as acute examples of globalizing trends (van Hagen, 2004).

In post-imperial times, since the 1990s, the old imperial "palimpsest" has been further inscribed with new layers created by global forces; new borderlands have replaced old ones and new diasporas have been added to old ones. Indeed, all three of the independent South Caucasian countries have been exposed to powerful integrative forces, defined by economic neo-liberalism, the interdependence of markets, growing migratory trends, a global flow of legal and cultural products and patterns, and various projects of political integration. Under these circumstances, in spite of the trends of ethnic consolidation and cleansing that I have described, any nationalist solipsism and narcissism could barely be sustainable. This does not mean that strong emphasis on the perennial ethno-national entity is impossible – we have seen it flourish – but it is interwoven and mixed up with integrative, globalizing trends. The concept of a postmodern nation, in contrast to a pre-modern or modern one, implies this combination of a constructed "uniqueness" with a freedom of movement beyond territorial and semantic borders. For example, in today's Armenian, Azerbaijani or Georgian diasporas, we can find both transnationalism and ethnocentrism; they may develop either religious indifference or stronger ethnocentric religious solidarities or even a trans-ethnic

religiosity of individual (or group) choice, etc. On the other hand, internal nationalist discourses are dependent on transnational trends, such as, for example, the impact of Iranian or Arabic Islamism or Turkish de-secularization in shaping the evolving national identity in Azerbaijan.

Thus, the idea and practice of the strong ethno-nation and ethno-religion actually represents, even though it is promoted as the only powerful strategy of identity, just one of a range of options in a postmodern context. Ethnocentric exclusivism and border-construction are strong protective reactions to global mixtures, but they do not cancel these mixtures. The new robust nationalism, with ethnic and/or religious underpinnings, reacts against individualism and cosmopolitanism, but it cannot halt their spread. In this sense, the scholarly trend of de-essentialization that I started out with in this chapter retains its accuracy and value in spite of the apparent wave of re-essentialization worldwide, and in the South Caucasus in particular.

We have completed the circle: the scholarship of global mixtures is still valid even if the politics seem to contradict this scholarship by obsessively searching for fixed borders of ethnicity, nation or religion. This obsession with constructing fixed borders is both a reaction to, and actually a part of, the growing global interaction.

Notes

1 Ulrich Beck has famously proclaimed the nation state a "container" imagined in social sciences but having shrinking validity with the rise of globalization (Beck, 1997). The same U. Beck (with Daniel Levy) attempts 'to overcome the territorial fixation of the social sciences by shifting our attention to temporal dimensions' and to situate their focus 'between the essentialized notion of nationalism and the universal version of cosmopolitanism' (Beck and Levy, 2013). For a review of a postmodern vision of nations as pure "constructions" see Walker 2001.

2 From the vast body of literature on the rise of transnational, culturally disembedded Pentecostal/Charismatic movements, see for example Coleman who writes about '[the] global Charismatic "metaculture" that transcends locality and denominational loyalty and displays striking similarities in different parts of the world' (Coleman, 2000, pp. 66–69); see also D. Martin (2001). With regards to Islamism, see Olivier Roy's book with an evocative title: *Holy Ignorance. When Religion and Culture Part Ways* (2009).

3 On the concept of the "postsecular" see: Gorski et al. (2012). The connection of essentialism and confessionalism in the history of religions is complex and goes beyond the scope of this paper. There have been many contrasting examples, when a strongly essentialized view of religion – a kind of universal "religion as such" – has been accompanied by a deliberate rejection of confessional borders. Such examples, however, have usually been individual intellectual endeavours, such as Rudolf Otto's phenomenology of allegedly universal religious experiences. At the level of mass social phenomena, religious "essentials" are perceived in confessional categories, and the rejection of these "essentials" results in an indifference to confessional (and cultural) borders.

4 Nona Shahnazaryan showed how the war revived archaic social patterns and repressed any individual non-conformism towards ethnic solidarities (2010).

5 For similar use of historical memories in the North Caucasus, see Gadjiev et al. (2007).

6 I borrow the term "memory wars" from Victor Shnirelman (2003). His book deals with various "presentist" interpretations of history by South Caucasian academics. Many local academic and popular works and internet debates between all the three main

nations of the region, as well as its minorities could qualify as "memory wars" (See also an earlier book of the same author in English: Shnirelman, 2001).

7 Anthony Smith devoted an entire volume to systematizing debating paradigms (1998)

8 A. Hastings believes Christianity (but not other religions) to have been the main source of nationalism (1997).

9 See an interesting discussion by Mikhail Dmitriev (2008, pp. 24–28) about the discourses of ethnic differentiation in medieval Europe in connection with polity-building, social consolidation and power legitimation, which he refers to as *Sinnproduktion* – the creating (assigning) of meanings.

10 On the re-evaluation of the Russian and Soviet imperial past, see the editors' introduction "In search of a new imperial history" in: Gerasimov et al. (2004, pp. 7–29);. I borrow the term "palimpsest of social identities" from this text.

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3 Democratic repertoires

The South Caucasus case(s)

Evert van der Zweerde

> 'If this is the choice of my people, then I am against my people.'
>
> Merab Mamardashvili, 1990[1]

The South Caucasus is traditionally associated with transport, transit and transfer. As Thomas de Waal (2010, p. 1) puts it: 'The countries of the South Caucasus have always been the "lands in between." In between the Black and Caspian Seas, Europa and Asia, Russia and the Middle East, Christianity and Islam, and, more recently, democracy and dictatorship.' As a reflection not only of the traditional function of an artery transporting important goods, from silk and spices in the sixteenth century to oil and gas in the 21st, but also the character of this relatively small region being "on the other side," the Russians call it Transcaucasia (Закавказье). The EU has addressed the corridor character of the South Caucasus in its TRACECA and INOGATE programmes (Jafalian, 2005, p. 3). Since independence, this region has been a "testing field" for projects of democracy and democratization, some of which have fared better than others, but all of which have been transferred from other parts of the world or from the region's own political past. In 2003, Karen Fogg could write:

> . . . the countries of the former Soviet Union have embraced democracy after a period of authoritarian rule only to find that the rapid introduction of democratic processes does not necessarily mean that social problems are resolved, that public attitudes towards politics will suddenly be favourable, or that the beneficial effects of democracy will be instantly and uniformly felt by all its citizens. This is particularly true for Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, which remain challenged by continued social conflicts, difficult transitions to market-based economies, contested elections and enduring legacies of authoritarian rule, after a decade of halting strides toward democracy.
>
> (2003, p. 8)

A decade of halting strides later, a differentiation seems to have taken place. Azerbaijan is a consolidated dictatorship, closer to the Central Asian (Kyrgyzstan excepted) than to any "Western" model; Georgia's parliamentary and presidential

elections have set it on a "European" road;[2] while Armenia can still go either way. Obviously, the region has been a "testing field" not only for democracy but also for dictatorship, authoritarianism and corruption. In contrast with Soviet times, however, when the future was more predictable than the past, the future is far from clear: the crisis, economic and political, of the EU, a volatile fossil energy market, and the alternative authoritarian or (liberal-) democratic directions of Turkey, Iran and Russia will affect the political future of all three of these small and vulnerable republics.

If we live 'in a world that is increasingly democratic' (Zakaria, 2004, p. 18), up to the point where 'democratic legitimacy is the only one available today' (Habermas, 2011, p. 24) or that 'in today's world the only serious source of legitimacy is democracy' (Fukuyama, 2004, p. 26), political power *has to be* democratic, whether really or only seemingly, and "democracy" inevitably turns into a major ideologeme of the political constellation of nearly all societies (recent developments in Myanmar have reduced the number of polities *not* claiming to be democratic to nine: Saudi Arabia, Oman, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Brunei, Swaziland and Cittá del Vaticano; seven of them oil-rich states). In a world in which democracy is the main legitimization of political power, the fact that something calls itself "democratic" cannot be taken as an index of its actual democratic nature. As David Held stated: 'Political regimes of all kinds describe themselves as democracies.'[3] It is not surprising that Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia have regularly held local and national (both parliamentary and presidential) elections with the participation of several parties and candidates. This, in itself, is neither sufficient ground to call these polities "democratic" nor to deny them that title. In what Mikayel Zolyan (2012, p. 4) labels "imitated democracy," elections, whether fraudulent or "technically fair," 'do not perform the function that they normally have in a truly democratic system – the recruitment and rotation of ruling elites.' If 'we are all democrats now' (Brown, 2011, p. 44), there is a risk of the very concept becoming meaningless (Nancy, 2009, p. 77) unless we differentiate its meaning *and* acknowledge its ideological dimension.

If 'from a distance, many of the world's leading authoritarians look almost democratic' (Dobson ,2013, p. 6), one must look more closely. In order to do so, this chapter tries to assess the state and fate of democracy in the three South Caucasian republics through the prism of a broader idea of democratic repertoires and their transfer.[4] It offers, first, a theoretical framework; next sketches the context of democracy in the South Caucasus; then discusses the "colour revolution" as an important democratic repertoire; and continues, before arriving at a conclusion, with a discussion of the concept of counter-democracy, borrowed from Pierre Rosanvallon (2006).

Theory

There is a strong tradition in political theory of equating democracy with elections, or to assume, as with Samuel Huntington, that 'elections, open, free and fair, are the essence of democracy, the inescapable *sine qua non.*'[5] Elections are an important, arguably indispensable aspect of the democratic repertoire, but

although the degree to which elections properly perform their function is relevant for the assessment of the democratic or un-democratic character of a polity, they should not be considered the only one, either actually or ideally.[6] Any reduction of democracy to the "democratic six-pack" – comprising free, fair, frequent, universal, competitive[7] and secret elections (FFFUCS) – is both theoretically poor and politically hazardous. Theoretically, the very idea that democracy has an "essence" has, since the seminal work of Claude Lefort, been demonstrated to be problematic; if democracy has an essence, it is a negative one, with an empty space at its centre and lacking any stable foundation (Lefort, 1986; Marchart, 2007). Politically, an exclusive focus on FFFUCS reduces democracy to a single repertoire that tends to substitute an electoral show for political struggle and leads to an increasingly consumerist, passive and apathetic citizenry.

The above is not an argument against the relevance of the FFFUCS repertoire but against its primacy. It is better to have elections than not to have them; it is better to have free, fair and frequent elections than unfree, rigged or "one man, one vote, one time" ones; universal suffrage is better than a franchise limited in terms of gender, income or ethnicity; elections in which there is something to choose are preferable over ones in which one's vote does not make a difference; secret-ballot elections, finally, have clear advantages over ones without. An exclusive focus on six-pack democracy, however, increases the vulnerability of a political system. Elections are an important aspect of the democratic repertoire, but like markets, they only work when they are *really* free and fair – otherwise they lead to an erosion of the legitimacy of political power and popular distrust of the political system.

The theoretical position from which this chapter departs is non-reductionist and non-essentialist: it conceptualizes "democracy" as a *quality* of power constellations, institutions, procedures and practices and, more specifically, of the multiple *repertoires* that can be discerned within them. This quality is defined as the extent to which, in any situation of power exercised by some over others, the overwhelming majority of those over whom power is exercised have a relatively equal share and "say" in the fundamental decisions that determine that power. The presence or absence of this quality can be specified along six parameters: (s)election of the ruling; participation of the ruled in decision-making; public deliberation by the ruled; accountability of the ruling; recognition of plurality and conflict; and transformation of societal antagonism into political struggle (Mouffe, 2000, 2005). This implies that elections "are" not democracy but can themselves be more democratic or less democratic. It also implies that there is no simple dichotomy of democracy *vs.* dictatorship, but rather a scale, at either end of which these are the extremes.

The concept of democratic repertoires is adopted from the work of Charles Tilly (2004, 2006) and broadened to include not only oppositional, contentious and emancipatory repertoires but also repertoires that are part of established regimes.[8] This extension is necessary if we move from the historical context of social movements and the "rise" of democracy: in the contemporary world, "democracy" has become the norm, which implies that repertoires which once included

demands –universal suffrage, free party formation, for example – have become part of the reproductive mechanism of political systems. A non-exhaustive list of items forming democratic repertoires includes, at one end, demonstrations, petitions, the strike, the march-on-the-capital and occupations of public space. The occupation of a central square with a high level of symbolic value is a key element of the so-called "colour revolutions" which together with "Occupy!" and "Taḥrīr" forms a further oppositional repertoire.[9] At the other end, there are elections (including campaigning and canvassing), plebiscites, referenda, citizens' juries and crowd-sourcing as elements of established democratic regimes – the latter two attempts at further democratization from the inside, connected with the notions of *deliberation* and *participation.* In between are the formation of new political parties out of one-issue movements, internet forums, watchdog NGOs such as *Transparency International* and forms of civil disobedience, all of them "testing" the democratic quality of the established political order.

The guiding idea of this chapter is that democratic repertoires (like non- and anti-democratic ones) are relatively independent of their context of origin; they can be (re-) invented at any time and in any place (elementary democratic repertoires such as voting, election, rotation, mandating, petitioning and strikes are invented in schoolyards all over the world). This explains why they can be *transferred* to other contexts, where they can be imposed (as was parliamentary democracy after World War II in Japan or after the Second Gulf War in Iraq), imported (as were referenda in the new EU member states following the decomposition of the Warsaw Pact), adapted to local conditions or grafted onto local political traditions. Their lasting success – whether they "stick" or not – depends on the way in which they are implemented but also on the extent to which they are perceived as "foreign" ("Western") or as "one's own." Transfer can occur along four vectors: hierarchical (imposition, e.g. after a war), supranational (by means of introduction as part of a larger political framework, such as the EU or the former USSR/ Warsaw Pact), lateral (through NGOs, INGOs, social media, academia), and historical (reaching back to earlier periods). It has been argued that an approach of setting conditions by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) or the EU might be more effective than implementation 'through conferences, trainings, workshops and seminars' (Babayan, 2010, p. 61, 59). In any case, however, there should be a real demand in the target location for any transfer of democratic repertoires, whether this demand is connected to democracy itself or to the prospect of membership of an International Governmental Organization (IGO) that requires it.

The combination of a wide array of possible democratic repertoires, with the need to adapt them to local conditions and circumstances and to graft them onto locally existing political traditions, implies that when it comes to a "fitting" democratic system, there is no "one size fits all" – democracy is tailor-made by definition, and the tailors are "the people" themselves. The consequence is "multiple democracies" determined by, on the one hand, objective (but changing) conditions and, on the other hand, the (political-) cultural "genes and memes" of a given country. A pitfall is the assumption that democratization (by which is

meant the implementation/consolidation/improvement of democratic repertoires) and its possible failure or success is relevant for developing countries or "countries in transition" only. Democracy is a matter of regular reinvention, reshaping and re-gauging. Democracy as it exists in most Western countries, and has spread from there, is contested in its context of origin: theoretically by concepts like *post-democracy* (Crouch, 2004), *post-democratic future* (Li, 2013) or *post-democratic turn* (Blühdorn, 2013), and practically by *indignados,* "Occupy!" and other protests – and of course by citizens' apathy. The crisis of democracy is not a "third-world" phenomenon, and we witness the transfer of democratic repertoires in what could be characterized as a reverse direction.[10]

Finally, it remains true that, ultimately, politics is always local, but in a globalizing world, political topography is no longer concentric: many localities intersect and overlap. Moreover, new social media in particular have made possible transnational political spaces for the exchange of ideas and repertoires that disrupt the idea of the national political community with the state capital as its unique focal point. New democratic repertoires like the "colour revolutions," "Taḥrīr" and "Occupy!" still typically take place in capital cities, but their swift transfer onto the social media makes them (both in their formats and their momentum) nationwide and trans-national at the same time.

The normative position adopted in this chapter is that democracy, thus conceptualized, is first a *possible* quality and hence itself an object of political preference and choice; second, a *preferable* quality in many situations but not a panacea for all society's problems; and, third, not an end in itself. It is a *means* to other ends: arriving at collectively binding decisions, dealing with (the possibility of) conflict and channelling societal antagonism into agonistic politics. Paradoxically, however, it has to a considerable extent to be cultivated *as if it were* an end in itself: the value attached to democracy itself must compensate for frequent dissatisfaction and the resort to compromise solutions.

Context

In the South Caucasus, the constellation of national identity, geopolitics, religion, economic interests, (post-imperial *and* post-Soviet) history, diasporas, minorities and demographics is arguably more complex than in any other part of the world. As Bruce Grant and Lale Yalçın-Heckmann put it: 'For centuries, the Caucasus has been home to a dense conglomeration of religions, languages and communities imperfectly drawn together around changing allegiances of empire, Silk Road trade and state socialism. A long line of conquerors – Greek, Roman, Turk, Arab, Mongol, Persian, Ottoman, Russian and Soviet – changed the rules of Caucasus life in multiple ways' (2007, p. xi). Nicholas Griffin adds: 'Imagine walking around the Eiffel Tower on a busy summer's day and hearing the sounds of dozens of nationalities. Now imagine that no one has travelled more than fifty miles to get there. This is the problem: everybody is more or less at home and everybody is more or less in some kind of conflict. Not necessarily bloody, but often political, often territorial' (2004, p. 2). Given the intricate relationship between the

factors just mentioned, any judgement or analysis should be very cautious; even if we know that *all* these factors play a role, we still do not know *how* exactly or in which proportion.

Small countries are more exposed to influence by external factors than large ones. Countries situated between countries with regional power aspirations are more susceptible to influence from their surroundings. Countries on or near the borders of larger civilizational spheres or "worlds" are liable to be drawn into an opposition of "we" vs. "them." All this applies to the three South Caucasian countries, which, moreover, are not only small but also highly dependent on, for example, oil reserves, open borders and foreign ties. Additionally, all three display strong social contrasts between the state capitals and countryside; between "filthy rich" oligarchs and poor folk, politically conscious elites and apathetic masses. Finally, in the case of small countries, is it not so easy to distinguish between external and internal factors: the Armenian diaspora is both, as is the oil dependency/oil curse of Azerbaijan,[11] while the substantial numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs)/refugees are an *internal* factor of the South Caucasus as a whole and both an internal *and* external factor for each of the three countries.[12]

For these reasons, it is very difficult to predict the future. It seems doubtful that it will be determined exclusively by the "will of the people" in any of the three cases for the simple reason that they are each surrounded by the potentially stronger wills of larger states (Russia, Turkey, Iran), larger corporations (oil companies in particular), and larger polities (NATO, EU, Commonwealth of Independent States [CIS]). This situation is not likely to change: Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia will always be vulnerable and potentially dependent on one or several of the "Big Others" around them. Griffin began his widely read *Caucasus* by pointing to the powerful neighbours that the South Caucasus *inevitably* has: Iran to the south, Russia to the north Turkey to the west (2004, p. 1). Due to their own twisted territorial histories, they all border on two of their neighbours, Azerbaijan even on three (taking into account the autonomous republic of Nakhchivan).

The shared historical background of the countries under consideration is their Soviet past which makes their reality "post-Soviet,"[13] the brief period of independent statehood that preceded it and a shared history as part of the Russian Empire (with the difference that Georgia and Armenia, contrary to Azerbaijan, can refer to a history of statehood and nationhood). The South Caucasian republics gained independence from the former USSR, a system which was formally democratic, including "soviets" at all levels, a (single) political party with (highly selective) membership, and elections that were frequent and universal, but neither free, nor fair, nor competitive nor even secret. Effectively, the USSR was an authoritarian oligarchy – "nomenkleptocracy" would arguably be the best name – with an overarching official Marxist-Leninist ideology that condemned "bourgeois" democracy in the name of *true* democracy. The predominant idea, characteristic of any totalitarian system, of society as an *organic whole* populated by an *undivided people,* was one of the key ideas shared by Marxist-Leninist ideology and the religious worldviews, Christian or Islamic, that it mimicked.[14] The *denial* and *suppression* of societal conflict prevented the transformation of antagonism into

democratic politics and hampered the formation of politicians capable of populating a democratic polity. Both *apparatčiki* and *dissidents,* for contrary yet connected reasons, were largely unfit to become *professional* politicians within a pluralistic democratic setting.

Around 1990, the Caucasian republics participated in the "third wave of democratization" which included a number of predominantly Orthodox countries as well as the predominantly Islamic Azerbaijan, showing that religion was not, at that point at least, a decisive hindrance (Casanova, 2001, p. 1042f; Hashemi, 2009, p. 166; Huntington, 1991, p. 76, Lijphart, 1999, p. 55). In the geographic space of the former USSR, against the backdrop of the Soviet system with its combination of official internationalism and actual *divide et impera* nationalities policy (including Russification, folklorization, deportation) (Hirsch, 2005; Lerch, 2000, p. 70; Suny, 1993), the 'elections held immediately after the collapse of communism were won . . . by nationalist separatists' (Zakaria, 2004, p. 114). Thomas de Waal reports how the well-known Georgian philosopher Merab Mamardashvili, harassed and vilified by the Gamsakhurdia administration, 'famously objected, "If this is the choice of my people, then I am against my people",' thus neatly illustrating the contrast between *nation* and *demos.*[15] There is a clear contrast between ethno-nationalism as the ideological concomitant of statehood and the civic values and virtues constitutive of a liberal-democratic republic. The self-constitution of a nation specifically requires the presence or construction of a *constitutive Other,* which can both be the former oppressive power – *ancien regime* – or an ethnic or religious minority. Abkhazians and Ossetians offer clear cases in point: the disappearance of the Soviet framework turned them into different types of minorities, and their association with the (big) *constitutive Other,* Russia, was aggravated by the latter's granting of citizenship (Sabanadze, 2011, p. 169, 174).

Unsurprisingly, minority rights have become an important focus of the OSCE and other IGOs since then (Palermo and Sabanadze, 2011). Natalie Sabanadze writes: 'Democratization is the key to sustainable normalization and de-securitization of state-minority relations. However, it is not without its dangers since the early stages of democratization tend to be linked with the growing instances of internal tensions, conflicts and even violence' (2011, p.169f). She does not specify what is meant by "democratization" and fails to specify what is meant by 'the democratic ideal' that 'the South Caucasus . . . states fall short of' (Sabanadze, 2011, p. 182). We may venture, however, that a key element of this ideal is the concept of a sovereign state that is democratically legitimized *and* capable of 'offering genuine protection of human rights, including those of minorities' (p. 169). Clearly, if a state protects or even promotes minority rights and cultures, and if minorities indeed 'do not challenge the authority, sovereignty and territorial integrity of states in which they reside,' because 'there is sufficient democratic space for voicing minority demands and a willingness on the part of the state to negotiate and accommodate them' (p. 171), then this can become a mutually reinforcing process (but still a protracted one, as European states with Basque, Sami or Sinti minorities demonstrate).

When the nationalist governments proved incapable of governing, former Soviet elites returned to power in Azerbaijan and Georgia in a general turn toward what Fareed Zakaria labelled *popular autocracy*:

> Some countries have held no elections; there, popular autocrats hold sway. Azerbaijan's president, Heydar Aliyev, for example, is a former head of the . . . KGB, and a former member of the Soviet Politburo. He ousted his predecessor in a coup in 1993, but most serious observers of the region suspect that if a free and fair election were held today, Aliyev would win. . . . Georgia is run by the venerated Eduard Shevardnadze, Gorbachev's reformist foreign minister . . . Shevardnadze rigs elections in his favour (even though he would probably win a free one) and runs a country in which corruption is pervasive and individual liberties insecure.
>
> (2004, pp. 94–98)

What emerged, in all three cases, was a pattern of disputed elections and popular protests, variants of and attempts at a "colour revolution" (see Appendix, Table 3.2). FFFUCS do not, by themselves, warrant their democratic quality: more is required, and the "colour revolution" testifies, when it occurs, that this "more" is not in place.

Bulldozers, flowers, and colours: the "colour revolution" repertoire

Elections are an important means of generating political legitimacy, provided they are based on an unconditional prior acceptance of the outcome. If, however, either the elections themselves are disputed because they are considered to have been rigged or hijacked, or if the elected government proceeds to abuse its power, for example by introducing constitutional changes that go against the vast majority of the electorate, democratic legitimacy can be withdrawn. Of course, not every demonstration deprives a president or government of democratic legitimacy but sustained protest by large sections of a *dèmos* does. The "colour revolutions" in the capitals of the post-Soviet republics differ from the second occupation of Taḥrīr Square in Cairo (June 2013), but what they share is that they are not less democratic than the regimes against which they protest. There is, besides, nothing Egyptian about "Taḥrīr," nor does the fact that Ukrainian and Georgian activists were trained in Otpor camps in Serbia make the "colour revolution" distinctively East European (Broers, 2005, p. 341f, Cheterian, 2012, p. 110). They form part of a global democratic repertoire.

The "colour revolution" fits into a broader phenomenon: Georgia's *Kmara!* (კმარა!, meaning Enough!), Serbia's *Otpor* (Отпор – Resistance), Egypt's *Kifaya* (كفاية – Enough!), Ukraine's *Pora!* (Пора! – It's time!), Azerbaijan's *Magam* (It's time), Senegal's *Y'en a marre!* (I've had it!), and many others, are part of a global democratic impulse (Dobson 2013, Kouoh 2012, Ó Beacháin and Polese, 2012.). The transnational cooperation of all those who are "fed up" and take to

the streets 'with a copy of Gene Sharp's manual in their hands' (Ó Beacháin and Polese, 2012, p. xvi; cf. Sharp, 2012, inside cover and p. xvi) makes it clear that governments have new reasons to be fearful of the masses, especially as these masses generally are not a desperate mob but intellectuals, middle-class citizens and students, aptly labelled "rage citizens" (*Wutbürger*) by Dirk Kurbjuweit.[16] These protests entail not only a catchword or colour, but also broad passive or "silent" support in the form of coloured ribbons and bumper stickers, and the least one can say is that for a bumper sticker, you need a bumper to stick it on (Companjen, 2012, p. 22f). These groups, all of which have something to lose, are not only protesting but also self-empowering and self-organizing and often prefiguring alternative societal and political repertoires.

With "forerunners" like the 1974 Carnation Revolution in Portugal, the 1986 Yellow Revolution in the Philippines, and the 1989 Velvet Revolution in Prague, the repertoire gained momentum around 2000: the 2000 Bulldozer Revolution in Beograd, the 2003 Rose Revolution in Tbilisi, the 2004 Orange Revolution in Kiev, the 2004 Tulip Revolution in Bishkek. The repertoire spread beyond the post-socialist space with the Cedar Revolution in Beirut in 2005, the Green Revolution in Iran in 2009 and the Arab uprisings that started in 2011 with the Jasmine Revolution in Tunis. The attempted "White" Revolution in Russia in December 2011 also falls within this category.[17] The colour revolution repertoire is easy to transfer because it is relatively simple and flexible. It is not spontaneous: a lot of theoretical groundwork was done, by, among others, Gene Sharp and Srdja Popović.[18] In this repertoire, *political literacy* matters, which is why *students* often play an important role. The repertoire presupposes the possibility of communication, both in terms of hardware – cell phones, computers, printers – and of "software," such as a common language (English, Russian, Arabic, etc.) and a shared political vocabulary, e.g. in naming and blaming "nomenklatura" tricks. Crucially important is labelling itself, which is not just a fancy habit but related to the need to have a recognizable symbol, especially a colour that can be used for flags, buttons, ribbons, bumper stickers, bandanas and so on. The success and failure of the repertoire depends, obviously, on the participation of sufficiently large numbers of people who engage in *sustained* protests, such as the occupation of a square, and frequently repeated protests. Even such factors as the ability to physically *fill* a square are important and, hence, so also is the size and shape of the square itself.[19] Also important, finally, is the relative absence of external factors; of course, externally financed NGOs may play a role and international agents may try to influence events, for example by withholding or promising loans, but not to such an extent that a conspiracy discourse on the part of the government becomes credible on the street.[20]

Ó Beacháin and Polese employ the term "colour revolution" 'to describe as a single phenomenon a number of non-violent protests that succeeded in overthrowing authoritarian regimes during the first decade of the twenty-first century,' which 'involved thousands of people, wearing coloured symbols, taking to the streets and showing their discontent with the current regime while the opposition, legitimated by such crowds, have been able to negotiate political change with

the authorities' (2012, p. 1). This points to an important feature: the presence of an organized and united political opposition that offers a credible alternative for a substantial part of the population, including a "silent majority" that supports without directly participating. Another important feature is the (overwhelmingly) non-violent character of the protests. When a popular uprising spills over into civil war, the "we *vs.* them" logic that is part of any conflict switches from "we the people" vs. "them the oppressors/nomenklatura/mafia/ruling clan" to a conflict between – at least – two parts of the population that *both* qualify as "we" and thus are "the other we's them" – hence a regime may try to turn an uprising into a civil war in order to (re)gain legitimacy.

Authoritarian repertoires are just as transferable as democratic ones. Thus, for example, 'in Armenia, the Rose Revolution [in Tbilisi] had its impact not only on the determination and tactics of the opposition supporters, but also on the tactics of the government in dealing with the protests. The defeat of Eduard Shevardnadze was interpreted by many as a result of his . . . failure to crush the protests' (Zolyan, 2012, p. 93). What the colour revolution as a transferable repertoire demonstrates, however, is that no regime can resist the sustained non-violent protest of a unified multitude that represents the overwhelming majority of the population.

Breaking down the colour revolution repertoire into several factors makes it easier to understand why 'antidotes for the coloured virus' quickly become part of the 'dictator's learning curve' (Dobson, 2013): foster competition within the opposition; infiltrate it by partly organizing it, by, for example, establishing loyal opposition parties; unite with a portion of it; cut off the opposition's economic supply; curtail civil society; outlaw the opposition or criminalize its members; neutralize external ties, and so on. There is no particular reason why a regime should be more stupid than the multitude that protests against it. Therefore, success and failure can lie very close to each other and chance does play a role. In the case of Georgia, its well developed civil society has received considerable support from abroad, and *Kmara!*, initially a document signed by fourteen NGOs, became the name of a youth movement, appearing in graffiti and on posters, proving capable of serving as a unifying catchword (Companjen, 2012, p. 22f).

Ó Beacháin and Polese identify five 'main points,' as follows: the character of the regime, especially the extent to which it itself is 'democratically oriented' or tolerates critical voices; external influences, including the relations of other polities, both with the regime and with the opposition; civil society, the significance of which may vary strongly from one country to another; the people, which they consider the main point since power depends on people; and 'compact opposition,' which they consider the *sine qua non* for three reasons: opposition leaders should not be engaged in power competition with each other, the oppositional movement should not be illegal or criminal and it must have sufficient economic means. This approach has the advantage of treating any given colour revolution as the result of a set of qualitative variables, allowing equal attention to be paid to "failed" and "successful" ones (2012, p. 9). Adding the factor of the "right moment" and applying them to the would-be colour revolutions of Georgia (2003, successful), Armenia (2004, failed), and Azerbaijan (2005, failed) yields the following scheme:[21]

Table 3.1 Context factors of the revolutions in the South Caucasus

	Georgia	*Armenia*	*Azerbaijan*
Character of the state	weak and unstable	violent and divided	strong and undivided
Opposition	united	divided	small, outdated, divided
External influence	suspension of IMF and World Bank funds, sympathy	no support, little interest or sympathy	Western interest in stability
Civil society	well-developed, well-trained, well-equipped	well-developed, but disconnected from opposition	scattered
The people at large	fed up with corruption and failing state	not connected to youth, middle class, and intellectuals	population expectant of oil revenues
Moment	right moment	no "right moment"	wrong moment (two years late)

Democracy, anti-democracy, counter-democracy, micro-democracy

The ultimate aim of the "colour revolution" repertoire is to make itself obsolete. In a properly functioning democratic polity, demonstrations, occupations and strikes are normal components of repertoires, but they do not challenge the regime as such. A pattern of disputed elections and popular uprisings can continue for some time, but it is likely to come to an end, either because the regime manages to crush any serious opposition, thus precluding future uprisings, or because the uprisings lead to a different regime, one that entails FFFUCS as one of its repertoires. As Zolyan stated, colour revolutions typically occur in states that combine 'a democratic façade, including a formally democratic legal and institutional framework, with authoritarian mechanisms of decision-making and elite recruitment,' but this system of 'managed democracy' is not sustainable in the long run: it will either gravitate 'towards an openly authoritarian regime,' or it will take 'the other path, that of creation of functioning democratic institutions and mechanisms of decision-making' (2012, p. 84, 98). This means that the democratic impulse that manifests itself in the colour revolution repertoire will either die out (or go underground) or become part of the complex reality of a democratic polity that goes beyond the disputed elections vs. colour revolution dynamics *and* beyond six-pack democracy.

A useful analytical framework is offered here by Pierre Rosanvallon, who distinguishes *three major expressions of popular sovereignty:* i) the electoral-representative system; ii) the wide range of forms of *counter*-democracy, which include Tilly's contestatory repertoires but are not limited to them – most of these start as forms of protest or opposition but then become part of the democratic system as a whole; and iii) what he calls '*le travail réflexif et déliberatif du politique*' ('the reflexive and deliberative work of the political') (2006, p. 318). This third

one points to the plurality of ways of making the political visible, a concept introduced by Lefort, and readable (*lisible*), giving society its presence as an object of cognition, reflection and action – Rosanvallon's own work is part of this third sphere (as, in its own modest way, is this chapter).[22] The reason for including it under the notion of *sovereignty* is that the thinking and speaking – in academia, in public forums and on the street – by members *of* a given society *about* that society, is *sovereign* in the sense of not accepting any authority other than itself. In this sphere of reflection, in which society becomes visible and accessible to itself, there are many perspectives on the same society and all of them have *prima facie* legitimacy, so that *conflict* is present at this level, too.

In each of the three forms distinguished by Rosanvallon, *plurality* is both fact and norm. There are, first, elections and representative organs at several levels, and the lower levels cannot be conflated with the higher ones. Second, the forms of counter-democracy are by definition unpredictably numerous. Third, late modern societies no longer have a centralized academia nor do they house a single *Öffentlichkeit* – a situation reinforced by open sources like Wikipedia or semi-public forums such as Twitter or Facebook. The main innovation in Rosanvallon's conception is the recognition of *distrust* (*défiance*) as the legitimate foundation of the many forms of *counter-democracy*, further divided into *surveillance*, *impeachment* and *judgement*, which only obtain their meaning within 'the enlarged framework of the dialectic between action and control' ('*le cadre élargi de la dialectique entre action et contrôle*') (2006, p. 254). Additionally, he gives the dimension of reflection its place within the overall structure of a polity that has a "democratic" quality.

In a representative democracy, of which FFFUCS is a standard element, citizens are fully entitled not to place blind confidence in their representatives but to develop a multitude of ways of monitoring, controlling, blocking and judging them. A "mature" democratic system would be one in which systematic distrust – rather than blind faith which, when disappointed, is likely to veer into cynicism and apathy – is what guides citizens in their political lives. In actual political practice, this conception remains a normative ideal but the principle is clear: the only way to get out of the deadlock of six-pack democracy vs. apathetic electorate is to develop counter-democracy and critical reflection. Applied to the case at hand, the way out of the alternation of disputed elections and "colour protest" is the double path of the creation of institutions that control elected politicians and increase the political literacy and vigilance of citizens. Ultimately, the quality of democracy is present at the level of the smallest unit of a polity, the individual citizen, feeling free to participate in democratic processes, insensitive to blackmail and ready to take responsibility.[23] At this point, a collective political memory, including the narratives of successful and failed demonstrations, colour revolutions and other democratic repertoires, is crucially important. Marina Muskhelishvili stated that Georgia 'has experienced three major changes of government, each of which was preceded by mass mobilization and unrest. . . . The potential for the mobilisation of society against the state remains high' (2011, p. 321). Irrespective of the *outcome*, the experience of being able to oust an incumbent government, president,

or dictator, is what sticks – this is also why both "Taḥrīr-I" and "Taḥrīr-II" are only partial "failures."

The notion of counter-democracy gains relevance in connection with "democratic transition" as discussed by Susan Stewart: the external actors who supported the democratic opposition prior to the colour revolutions in Serbia, Ukraine and Georgia found themselves supporting new government elites afterwards. The switch from bottom-up to top-down democratization wrongly presumes that pro-democracy organizations and persons will remain just as pro-democratic after the balance of power has shifted in their favour (2009, p. 815, 818; and Broers, 2005, p. 333). The primary aim of internal actors is rarely, if ever, a "healthy pluralistic democracy" or "vibrant civil society." Their aim, much more concretely, is political hegemony in order to realize their political objectives, including, if necessary, the removal of the structures and representatives of the previous government. FFFUCS can end up in majority tyranny. Democratic government, therefore, needs counter-democracy as its *internal* check, just as authoritarian government calls forth *external* opposition (arguably, Taḥrīr-II holds the middle ground between these two). Stewart rightly states that there has not yet been developed 'a sufficiently complex strategy to ensure that democracy promotion endeavours are both wide and deep as well as sustainable' (2009, p. 820). However, can such a strategy possibly exist in the first place? Does not the very idea overestimate the possibility of democratization strategies and programmes? To the extent to which they have their intended effect, *viz.*, the democratization and political diversification of society, they are even self-defeating and their result becomes accidental because of the unpredictable interplay of the forces set free.

External pro-democracy actors can be important agents in the transfer of democratic repertoires. However, it should be born in mind, first, that the impact of foreign actors will as a rule be smaller than the causal effect of domestic actors and factors. Second, that their efforts may to some extent be annihilated by those of other foreign agents, who pursue other than pro-democracy goals; for example, strategic or economic ones. And, third, that the effects of their conscious, well-intended actions may be partially moderated by unintended side-effects; for example, when the support of a particular group creates an imbalance in the "target country," or when a "donor-darling" can be framed as a foreign agent. Surely this is not a reason to stop supporting civil society or opposition groups, but it is a reason to lower one's expectations with respect to the effectiveness of such support.

If, finally, there is truth in the idea that democracy, though it can be partly top-down implemented or laterally imported, ultimately is about the bottom-up movement of members of a *dèmos* who successfully claim a substantial say in the political decisions that determine their lives, then it is clear that *local* democracy is a crucial factor in the long-term development and sustainability of a polity that possesses the quality of democracy (Koryakov and Sisk, 2003). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to assess the democratic quality of local government in the region, but citizens of Western-type liberal democratic regimes know only too well that an exclusive focus on the democratic six-pack at the national level

results in a situation in which democracy shrinks to a heavily commercialized quadrennial selection of leaders, differences between whom are more of a personal than of a political nature. Democratic politics then stops performing its key functions of actually giving people a say and of transforming antagonism into an agonistic struggle for hegemony, with the rise of political apathy and citizens' dissatisfaction and resentment as a result.

Conclusion

Developments during the past decade have made it clear that, first, "democracy promotion" is not an easy game (Stewart, 2009); second, that democratization is easily overruled by geopolitical interests, security concerns, and the priority of energy supply (Gahramanova, 2009, pp. 777–797); and third, that internal factors may seriously impede the implementation of democracy. These include an underdeveloped tradition of democratic politics, the persistence of traditions of tribalism, clan relations and nepotism (different in the three republics, but present in all of them), frozen and latent conflicts and ethno-nationalism. At the time of this writing, Georgia seems to be stabilizing its democratic credibility after fair parliamentary and presidential elections in 2012 and 2013; Azerbaijan appears to have "given up" and is currently ranked among the Central Asian authoritarian regimes; and Armenia is finding itself somewhere in between – here, the role of Russia may be a decisive factor.

Regional cooperation in the form of a (con)federation is clearly unrealistic, if only because it might come across as a covert hegemonic project by the economically and demographically stronger Azerbaijan.[24] It remains true that the 'South Caucasus is the common home of those who live there' and that its prospect depends on 'the ability of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia to identify and act upon their common interests' (Mehdiyev, 2012, p. xi; Starr, 2012, p. xvi). It also is true, as Elmir Guliyev suggests, that 'participation in transnational projects, the experience of political integration among European states and opportunities offered in front of the common Caucasian house [may] stimulate the rapprochement of the Central Caucasian countries' (2012, p. 33). Today, however, this seems less likely than ever.

The settling of frozen conflicts would greatly improve the prospects of cooperation and increase resistance against foreign influence, but, paradoxically, democratically elected governments may be a hindrance rather than a help here as long as ethno-nationalism prevails at the level of national politics. Democracy is a condition of the possibility for addressing a society's problems, but it can also be the condition of the impossibility for solving them. Recently (re-)acquired independent statehood is dear to national majorities, but the question remains unanswered as to what extent small states can be both democratic enough to meet the demands, and thus earn the commitment of, the vast majority of their citizens, *and* strong enough to fulfil the responsibility and obligation that sovereignty carries with itself, *viz.* the protection of the rights of ethnic and other minorities (Sabanadze, 2011, p. 169).

Democratic development is always largely self-reliant. This calls for the active development of a variety of democratic repertoires, both at local and national levels, and not limited to FFFUCS, but including many forms of counter-democracy, i.e. the surveillance, impeachment and judgement of elected representatives as a normal part of the political life of a democratic polity. As for the third dimension distinguished by Rosanvallon, reflection and deliberation, regional cooperation *is* a serious option and already a fact (Dilanyan, 2005–2006). At this level, experiences and reflections can be exchanged, not only in order to facilitate the transfer of democratic repertoires – particularly counter-democratic ones – but also to discuss the way in which internal problems such as the frozen conflicts and issues relating to IDPs/refugees are instrumentalized for domestic political goals or the way in which ethno-nationalism hampers the development of a democratic polity based on civic rather than national values. The "software," in the sense of a *lingua franca,* whether Russian or English, is already in place and so is the shared political experience.

When national elections are reduced – at least in the *dèmos*' perception – to a competition between interchangeable oligarchic or managerial elites, one may still prefer FFFUCS to its unfair, unfree and so on alternative, but without a revitalization of other democratic repertoires, this type of democracy will match neither practical demands nor theoretical standards. The democratic future of the three republics will depend more on the democratic quality of local government, on active civic participation, on the development of additional democratic repertoires within the field of counter-democracy and on critical reflection, including its exchange across the region and beyond, rather than on the monitoring of national elections by international organizations like the OSCE. This is neither an argument against monitoring nor against national elections but against a myopic reduction to any of the two.

Table 3.2 Appendix: elections and colour revolutions in the South Caucasus[1]

Year	*Armenia*	*Azerbaijan*	*Georgia*	*Protests*
1988				Mass protests in Armenian SSR and Nagorno-Karabakh
1990		**parliamentary**	**parliamentary**	
1991	**presidential & parliamentary**	*presidential*	**presidential**	
1992		**presidential**	**presidential**	
1993		*presidential*	*presidential*	
1995	*parliamentary*	*parliamentary*	parliamentary, presidential	
1996	*presidential*	parliamentary		Failed colour revolution in Armenia
1998	*presidential*	*presidential*		
1999	**parliamentary**		parliamentary	
2000		parliamentary	presidential	
2001		*parliamentary*	municipal	Mass protests in Georgia

(*Continued*)

Table 3.2 (Continued)

Year	*Armenia*	*Azerbaijan*	*Georgia*	*Protests*
2003	*presidential parliamentary*	*presidential*	*parliamentary*	Successful Rose Revolution in Georgia; failed protests in Azerbaijan
2004			**presidential parliamentary**	Failed colour revolution in Armenia
2005		*parliamentary*		Failed colour revolution in Azerbaijan
2007	parliamentary			
2008	*presidential*	*presidential*	presidential parliamentary	Mass protests & crackdown in Armenia
2010		*parliamentary*		
2012	parliamentary		**parliamentary**	
2013	presidential	*presidential*	**presidential**	

Explanation: elections broadly considered **fair**, dubious, *fraudulent*.[2]

[1] Information taken from Dryzek and Holmes (2002), Hale (2005), Beachin and Polese (2012), OSCE reports, Freedom House, and Wikipedia.
[2] Obviously, the fair, dubious, and fraudulent nature of elections is a matter of debate and contestation, and there are both objective and subjective factors at play; elections, however, only perform their function as a democratic repertoire if neither procedure nor outcome are disputed.

Notes

1 Quoted from De Waal 2010, p.135 [no exact reference].
2 Not accidentally, it was the Rose Revolution bringing Saakashvili to power that urged the EU to include the South Caucasian republics in its European Neighborhood Policy a year after they had decided not to do so (Jafalian, 2005, pp. 4 and 7).
3 Held (2006, p.1).
4 I leave out of this account the *de facto* states in the South Caucasus (for a discussion, see Caspersen, 2011).
5 In *The Third Wave* (1991), here quoted from Zakaria (2004, p.18).
6 For a sophisticated discussion, see Sørensen (2008, pp. 55–65).
7 Throughout, I use "competitive" to indicate contestation *within* a democratic repertoire, e.g. when several candidates run for the same office or when voters can choose between different platforms or parties, and "disputed" to indicate contestation *of* a democratic repertoire, e.g. when election results are qualified as unfair.
8 Some repertoires can be both: Benito Mussolini's march on Rome in 1922 was obviously contentious, while Charles de Gaulle's march to a number of French cities in 1944 was part of the establishment of a regime.
9 Arguably, we witness the emergence of a "family" of repertoires here, ranging from short-term occupation with a primarily "negative" aim such as ousting an incumbent president, to more permanent prefiguration of a possible future society/community.
10 Protests in Tel Aviv (!), Istanbul, and Athens took some of their inspiration from Cairo.
11 Leyla Karimli, who substitutes "resource curse" for the more familiar "oil curse" has rightly pointed out that there is nothing "fateful" in this curse (2007).
12 A recent estimate of the number of refugees/IDPs gives 4,000 to 8,000 for Armenia, 300,000 to 400,000 for Georgia, and 600,000 for Azerbaijan (Radvanyi and Beroutchachvili, 2009, p. 32).

13 I use "post-" in the precise sense given to it by Wendy Brown: 'the prefix "post" signifies a formation that is *temporally after but not over* that to which it is affixed' (2010, p. 21).
14 Soviet-style Marxist-Leninist ideology, at crucial points, mimicked Judeo-Christian and Islamic visions of a conflict-free community under a shared world-view; on the connection between totalitarianism and an organic vision of society, see esp. (Lefort, 1986).
15 De Waal 2010, p.135. On the potentially violent, and even genocidal consequences of an identification of *dèmos* and *ethnos*, see Mann (2005, pp. 55–69) and Brubaker (1996, p. 56 and p. 169f).
16 Dirk Kurbjuweit, 'Der Wutbürger', *Der Spiegel* 41, pp. 26–27, referred to in Blühdorn (2013, p. 13).
17 See Lur'e (2012, esp. pp. 16–21) for an account of these protests and the centrality of the colour white; Masha Gessen speaks of a "snow" revolution (2012, pp. 278–290).
18 See the publications of CANVAS (Centre for Applied NonViolent Actions and Strategies) in Belgrade; Sharp's book exists in 30+ languages, including Azeri and Russian (Джин Шарп, 2012. *От диктатуры к демократии*. Москва: Новое издательство).
19 Freedom (or Opera) Square in Yerevan has been reduced in size by the authorities by placing a row of cafés on it (author's observation, June 2013).
20 An example was the suggestion, supported by video footage, that Ruslan Bashirli, a young opposition leader in Azerbaijan, had travelled to Tbilisi to receive money from the Armenian security agency (Cheterian, 2012, p. 108).
21 Bringing together the analyses of Companjen, Zolyan, and Cheterian in Ó Beacháin and Polese (2012).
22 See Rosanvallon (2006, p. 317) on *lisibilité*; Lefort on *visibilité* (1986, p. 19f, 27).
23 The Armenian opposition politician Nikol Pashinyan garnered a certain amount of fame in 2013 for saying that even if voters had been bribed or pressured into promising to cast their vote in favour of a particular candidate, during 30 lonely seconds in the voting booth, they could still decide otherwise (personal communication, 23 June 2013).
24 Cf. Mehdiyev 2012, p. x: 'Azerbaijan . . . now represents two-thirds of the economy and demography of the South Caucasus,' to which Starr adds 'that Azerbaijan's population is expanding and growing younger while Georgia's is shrinking and Armenia's is ageing' (2012, p. xvi); for details on demographic development in the three countries, showing that Azerbaijan has higher birth rates and lower death and emigration rates than both Georgia and Armenia (cf. Garagozov, 2012).

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Part II

Religion and politics

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Introduction

Ketevan Khutsishvili

An increase in the significance of the "religious factor" in contemporary societies is a global process. The end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries witnessed significant shifts in the value systems and interpretations of the national cultures, with the issues of cultural distinctions, subcultures, countercultures and multiculturalism coming to the fore. These changes are related to an overall shift to what some would call either the post-industrial society or late modernity. Religion, as the empirical data from the South Caucasus shows, became – for many, quite unexpectedly – one of the key elements of this transition process and – together with territory and nationality – also one of the most compelling anchors for identity formation. In a new situation of globalized pluralism, religion moved in many cases to the very centre of sociocultural tensions and conflicts.

Therefore, religion has become a frequent point of reference in politics. With its strong mobilizing and legitimizing potential, religion is being used by various political groups and has entered the political debates. The post-Soviet space offers obviously one of the most interesting opportunities to explore this increasing role of religion in politics. In the Soviet Union, religion was forced out of the public and political spheres; yet in late Soviet times, it developed a new political relevance by accumulating and channelling the aspirations and emotions of a number of social groups, gradually becoming a universal symbol of national revival. This is the case in each of the three South Caucasian countries, which share the same imperial past even though the particular settings in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are quite distinct in many ways.

In contrast to the Soviet past, religiosity has become one of the important factors influencing public life and politics. It has played the role of promoting collective solidarities which have helped many to cope with the disintegration of the imperial universe. One of the functions of religion is a response to the social need for spiritual security and unity and in creating respective tools for the protection of such unity (Berger, 1969; Durkheim, 1968; Strenski, 2006, pp. 283–307). Religion provides people with meaning, unifying them by means of common symbols, values and norms. Religious doctrines and rituals may form the foundations of "right/correct behaviour," which for its part creates the opportunity for social organization. Religion is a resource for establishing moral and emotional coherence in a society (Bowen, 2010, pp. 227–237).

Thus, the mobilizing effect of religion has indeed been crucial, especially as an underpinning – together with language and cultural memory – of a strong ethnic identity. These ethno-religions have become important components of the official national discourses in all three countries of the region. Those who wield power have used the dominant religion as a tool to legitimate the political system and the political status quo. Respectively, however, religion has informed the conflicts between these collective solidarities, ethnic groups and nations, sometimes threatening stability and security in the entire region. This latter development has been especially obvious in those poly-ethnic societies – in the South Caucasus, especially Georgia and some parts of Azerbaijan – where the various ethnic groups belong to different confessions. The "us–them" mentality, when sacralised by religious belonging, becomes a central catalyser of conflicts. In parts of the Caucasus – both north and south – religious radicalization has added a religious dimension to the emerging conflicts.

We can speak of religion's involvement in internal politics not related to ethnic conflicts. While the ruling regimes use religion as a tool for legitimizing the status quo, the opposition may develop a particular stance toward religion to justify its criticism and political claims: it can either refer to more radical (or less controlled) forms of religiosity (as in some cases in Azerbaijan, shown in Ismayilov's chapter in this volume) or, alternatively, target the "official religion," deconstructing its role as an ideological instrument (as do some liberal groups in Georgia and Armenia).

While studying the "religious dimension," we should, however, be cautious of exaggerating its importance and missing the economic, political or other clashes of interests, either between different ethnic groups or between political forces referring to religious symbolic and mobilizing potential. This "religious dimension" can be more or less determinant, more or less pronounced in various cases. The religious tensions are part of a complex social drama which is deeply embedded in political and economic processes. This "religious dimension" might be stronger in conflicts such as that in Nagorno-Karabakh or in tensions between ethno-religious groups in Georgia; in all such cases, religion is intermixed with minority claims and territorial conflicts. The "religious dimension" may be weaker, although definitely present, in the struggle between political parties and clans within each of the three nations, notwithstanding whether this struggle is set within democratic or other frames.

At the same time, when speaking about the interaction of politics and religion, we should approach it from another side as well: just as there may be a religious dimension to political conflicts, there is also, on the other hand, a political dimension to religious conflicts. These may be either inter-religious, such as the tensions between the Georgian and Armenian churches for some church buildings, or intra-religious, such as the mutual estrangement between various groups in Shi'a Islam or the Georgian churches which reflect different political positions and allegiances. In the contemporary South Caucasus the flexibility, or rather instability, of the political alignments has impacted strongly on the development of religious institutions and movements. Minor changes in the political context may be enough to bring a particular social or cultural issue into the religious domain.

In many cases, governments have been trying to promote secular arrangements and keep religion out of public affairs; this strategy was indeed a part of the democratic constitutional package to which they would show commitment. This strategy certainly looked like a wise position of neutrality with which to tame the interreligious and interethnic tensions, especially in diverse societies such as Georgia or Azerbaijan. However, having faced public pressure from those manifold groups who would refer to the power of religious symbolism, the governments have had to make revisions and seek a rapprochement with the religious institutions. The situation in Georgia is an example of such an uneasy compromise in which the government for its part oscillates between declarations of secular neutrality and the growing endorsement of the "national" Orthodox Church. In a way, with such an endorsement, the governments in Georgia and also in Armenia have become themselves desecularising forces, with the political leaders openly expressing their religious sympathies in pursuit of political legitimization. In Azerbaijan, the situation has been different: the ruling regime has continuously tried to tame religiously informed political agents, blaming them for "radicalism," while at the same time promoting a more consistent secularist position.

Overall, we witness two major developments in the South Caucasus: a) political groups are trying to use religion to promote their own interests; and b) religious organizations for their part are attempting to be politically involved to promote their public presence and preferences. These two developments are intertwined, affecting each other in a highly complex web of relationships that the authors of this section are trying to untangle.

Barbara Janelidze's chapter considers the correlation between religious vitality and the fluctuations of church-state relations in Georgia. In order to document both these sides, Janelidze combines several methods. While the main focus of the article is on church-state relations in Georgia on a more general level, she also examines the discourse of the Georgian Orthodox Church in connection with processes of secularization/desecularization and modernisation. Janelidze's perspective is based on three theoretical approaches: secularization theory, the religious market model and the thesis of religious individualization. The objective of the chapter is to test, on the basis of an empirical study, the potential of secularisation/desecularization theories in providing explanatory patterns for the growth of religiosity in post-Soviet countries.

Yulia Antonyan's chapter discusses the remarkable and – in the context of earlier twentieth century experience – dramatically changing attitudes towards church construction in Armenia. Antonyan argues that the activity of church construction as it has unfolded in the last two decades has emerged as a result of a post-Soviet desecularization process; it is a phenomenon which is multi-faceted and may be conceptualized from the perspective of several different social processes. She discusses the recent church construction boom in terms of its political significance, both at the level of huge projects supported by the new "oligarchs" and in smaller power-and-prestige games at the local level. The chapter discusses forms of symbolic legitimization and the consolidation of political and economic power by means of an almost ritual process of church construction.

Elnur Ismayilov's chapter on Azerbaijan argues that suggestions regarding the possibility of a religious revolution in Azerbaijan and the rumours that political Islam will become the dominant power in the near future are unfounded, as the historical background and context in this country do not allow the forming of such a perspective plausible. Using qualitative fieldwork data, press and other primary sources, Ismayilov aims to examine the dynamics of the religious revival in Azerbaijan since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the political implication of this revival and the response of the government in trying to control, downplay and instrumentalize this revival in the name of social stability.

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4 Secularization and desecularization in Georgia

State and church under the Saakashvili government (2003–2012)

Barbare Janelidze

Debates about the concept and processes of secularization have long existed in the fields of the social sciences, political philosophy, the philosophy of religion and so on. Academic discussions about processes of secularization and desecularization are still quite important in the social sciences. It is hard to find a discourse on modernization, democratization or other important social changes which does not refer to these concepts.

The establishment of the post-Soviet states not only opened up new prospects in international politics but also created a large arena for social research. The increasing power of religion as an ideology and the rising number of churchgoers in these countries have provided an incentive to analyse and research the process of secularization or/and desecularization there, as well as the rising political influence of the traditional churches.

Almost all the post-Soviet countries, Georgia included, have undergone a rapid rise in the level of religiosity since the 1990s. In Georgia, the 1980s can be seen as the time when religion began to return to the public sphere. During this period, the National Liberation Movement gained power and its leaders, Zviad Gamsakhurdia (the future president of independent Georgia), Merab Kostava (a political dissident and poet) and others, gained popularity. The official discourse of the movement centred around a nationalist and anti-communist ethos. In this context, the leaders of the movement found in Orthodox Christianity an important tool for popularizing nationalist ideas. Thus, Orthodox Christianity was seen as an important part of independent Georgian history, which the Soviet regime was fighting against with the aim of dismissing the country's "traditional past." Such an understanding of the role of the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) in the history of Georgia became more widespread from the beginning of the 1990s, when the Soviet Union fell and Georgia became a sovereign state with nationalism being a crucial factor in development of the new state's consciousness. With this emerging trend, the GOC slowly began to gain more influence in society and political circles.

After the Rose Revolution of 2003, the Georgian government declared that the country's official political orientation is towards the West. On the one hand, a new political narrative on Western, democratic values was becoming quite popular. On the other hand, despite the official Western-oriented political narrative, the

dominant GOC was creating a different climate in the country. Church and state are constitutionally separated in Georgia, but the church still plays an important role in almost all social institutions, including the family, politics, the media and so on. For example, in 2011, 83 per cent of the population associated themselves with the Christian Orthodox Church (CRRC, 2011). Such a tendency is, of course, quite interesting for sociological research, especially considering that Georgia has been trying to establish itself as a nation-state following the fall of the Soviet regime.

Thus, the following questions arise: what is (or are) the reason(s) for such a rise in popular religiosity in Georgia? How has the dominant GOC managed to achieve its popularity? I will begin by answering these questions, and as a next step I will investigate the influence of the GOC on the United National Movement (UNM), the governing political party, led by Mikheil Saakashvili, from 2003–2012. This will be relevant not only for this study but also for a more general sociological understanding of church-state relations in Georgia after the Rose Revolution, when the popularity of the GOC was significantly increased.

Understanding the reasons for the growth in popularity of the GOC is vital for this study, because I will be arguing that one of the main reasons for its growing power lies in its well-integrated narrative and a high level of popular trust in its authority. Consequently, the following research questions arise: did the UNM seek an alliance with the church? If so, why? And, on the other hand: does the GOC actively seek political influence in the country?

Thus, my article offers an analysis on a number of different levels: it gives a presentation and analysis of the rise of religiosity in Georgia; an analysis of the discourse on nationalism provided by the GOC and its popularity in society; the condition of church-state relations; the political role of the church; and the level of cooperation between the church and the UNM.

It should be added that the nature of the relations between the UNM government and the Orthodox Church varied throughout 2003–2012. Even though their attitudes towards each other can be generally evaluated as negative and tense, there were definitely periods of coexistence. Increasing the funding of the GOC and the reconstruction of Bagrati Cathedral are examples of such a coexistence.[1] The instrumentalization of the GOC in the pre-election period, with the aim of gaining more popularity, is another example. As Silvia Serrano notes, pre-election periods are particularly fruitful for the patriarchate; at such times, for example, plots of land were generously transferred by presidential decree to the patriarchate (2010, p. 50).

An empirical and sociological investigation of the relationship between the dominant religious organizations and politics in the post-Soviet countries (based on the example of Georgia) may be an interesting illustration of and adjustment for current theoretical discussions on secularization and modernization in post-socialist states.

Theoretical perspectives

Disputes about the validity of the concept of secularization are quite common today. The question as to whether secularization automatically means modernization, or

vice versa, is the subject of ongoing discussions between sociologists of religion and social theorists.[2] Roughly speaking, sociologists of religion engaged in the debate have three distinct theoretical approaches to the role and function of religion (Pickel, 2009, p. 91): secularization theory,[3] the religious market model[4] and the religious individualization thesis.[5]

Secularization theory refers to the 'continuing correctness of the persistent loss of the social relevance of church and religion in modern societies' (Pickel, 2009, p. 91). This theory argues that modernization and religion are not compatible due to the processes of rationalization and functional differentiation which are by-products of modernization. In this situation, a privatization of religion takes place, which at the same time results in a loss of the traditional functions of religion. Religion thus becomes less prominent in the everyday life of societies and the norms set by religion become more or less irrelevant (Pickel, 2009, pp. 91–92).

Rational choice theory is actually a critique of the theory of secularization. It uses the religious situation in the US as its principal model. According to this theory, religion is one of the most important aspects of human life and will remain so for a long time. This is because human beings have different wishes and demands, which should be satisfied. In modern, individualistic societies, characterised by religious plurality, traditional churches can no longer satisfy the various and growing interests of individual believers. Also, the explanations and worldviews provided by traditional religions are becoming too general and unsatisfying (Stark and Bainbridge, 1996, p. 27). With the failure of traditional churches to provide satisfactory explanations for individual believers, the market opens up to new religions, sects and cults, which become the main competitors of the traditional religions. The main argument that the market model wages against secularization theory is that religious pluralism has a positive effect on religious vitality (Stark and Bainbridge, 1996, p. 92).

The religious individualization perspective also offers a critique of secularization theory. The famous "invisible religion" thesis, developed by Thomas Luckmann, argues that even though the traditional, social form of religion loses its importance, religion modifies itself at an individual level (Pickel, 2009, p. 92).

Despite these critiques of the theory of secularization, empirical studies in different countries show that the process has its effects and influence on societies[6] (Pickel, 2009, p. 93). One such empirical study is the World Values Survey, carried out by Inglehart and Norris (2004).

The main argument of Inglehart and Norris is based on the so called "level of social security" in a given society: in societies where social security is low the level of religiosity will be high and vice versa. The authors use the following method of measuring religiosity in different countries: on the one hand, they measure the number of people who identify themselves as religious and on the other hand, the number of people who participate in religious rituals. Consequently, they assign each country to a certain type: modern, postmodern or traditional (Inglehart and Norris, 2004, p. 16).

Additionally, one more perspective should be mentioned here. José Casanova introduces a distinction between three different processes referred to as

secularization: a separation of religion and the state, a decline in religious belief and the privatization of religion (Casanova, 1994). Thus, for example, if there is no decrease in religious belief in a society, we cannot assume that there is no secularization at all because there may be a differentiation of state and church.

Alongside the concept of secularization, researchers often refer to the concept of desecularization. As Peter Berger describes it, desecularization is a counter-process of secularization. For Berger desecularization can only take place in a society where elements of secularization can be detected. Desecularization is a reaction against secularization and a revival of religion that has a societal influence (Berger, 1999; cited in Kaprov, 2012, p. 114). In the framework of this article, desecularization does not designate a pure rise in the numbers of religious people. Desecularization includes in itself several tendencies: 1) a formal and informal crossing over of former secular institutions and religious norms; 2) a revival of religious beliefs and practices; 3) the return of religion into the public space; and 4) the revival of religion in different cultural subsystems, be they the arts, philosophy or literature, and so on (Kaprov, 2012, p. 136).

Research methodology

This chapter is a case study of the struggle between the GOC and the UNM, Georgia's former governing party. The case study is mainly based on one-shot, qualitative research on the conflict between the GOC and the UNM government regarding the implementation of a new law on religious minorities which was passed by the Georgian Parliament in 2011.

My research looks at church-state relations in Georgia and the discourse on nationalism within the GOC. The semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with Georgian Orthodox clerics, mainly priests and archbishops. This gave me the opportunity to explore such sensitive and complicated topics as the attitude of the Georgian Patriarchate and its representatives towards the UNM government, issues of human rights, religious minorities and church-state relations. Apart from the representatives of the church, one interview was conducted with a lawyer (to receive an expert's outlook on the implementation of the law). These interviews helped to determine the main issues on which the church tries to exert influence, as well as what are the major areas of conflict and cooperation between the church and the UNM government.

A primary method of qualitative research – discourse analysis – was used to determine the main themes of mutual interest between the church and the UNM government. However, as this article focuses on discourse within the church, I conducted analysis by looking at several of 40 issues of religious periodicals, issued by the Georgian Patriarchate, either weekly or monthly, between May and August 2011. These periodicals are: *Tabori*, *Kvakutxedi*, *Karibche*, *Kandeli*, *Krialosani*, *Sapatriarkos Utskebani*, *Mrevli* and *Karozi*. My criteria for selecting these periodicals were their frequency of publication and size of circulation, in addition to the fact that they were all issued by the Georgian Patriarchate. Examination of these periodicals, and particularly of the interviews, articles and sermons

contributed by priests, bishops and the patriarch of the GOC, Ilia II, gave me the opportunity to study the perspectives the church seeks to provide on the everyday life of Georgian society. The articles address themes of education and religion; family and religion; media and religion; the lives of the Christian Orthodox saints and the Georgian kings; interviews with priests, archbishops and the patriarch; and discussions of other important socio-political events from a religious standpoint. However, in view of the topic of this study, I concentrated only on those topics that have a direct connection with state policy, outlining two main subject areas: issues connected to religious and ethnic minorities and general criticisms of the UNM government by Orthodox clerics. Two topics of remarkable interest both to the church and to the UNM government were revealed: the issue of the re-establishment of the monarchy and the implementation of a new law on the registration of religious minorities as public entities within civil law. In the framework of this study, I focus on the new law because of the relevance of the topic and the mutual involvement of both sides.

In addition, I present statistical data in the form of quantitative surveys from different sources (for example *The values of Georgian society* from the OSI; *Caucasus Barometer* from the CRRC; *Public Attitudes in Georgia* from the NDI). These data cover the time period between 2006 and 2012 and aim at depicting the level of religiosity and its specific aspects in Georgian society.

The level of religious vitality in Georgia

The end of the Soviet regime was followed by a re-emergence of religiosity in the post-Soviet countries, Georgia not being an exception. It is almost impossible to speak about religious practices or the role of religion in Georgian society during the Soviet era because of a lack of objective empirical data. Officially, atheism was the norm in both the social and public spheres, including education, science, politics and the media. Under the Soviet regime, Georgia experienced an "enforced process of secularization" due to the repressive regime of the Soviet Union.

However during the 1980s, religious awareness in Georgian society started to increase and slowly the society was transformed into a highly religious one. The process of a reactivation of Orthodoxy, then, began in the 1980s, intensified in the 1990s and reached its peak after the Rose Revolution of 2003.

Nowadays, the number of people who consider themselves to be religious is quite high. To sum up, during the years 2003–2013, approximately 80 per cent of the Georgian population affiliated themselves to Christian Orthodoxy and approximately ten per cent attended religious services once a week or more (Table 4.1).

Combining these statistical data with the method of measuring religiosity devised by Inglehart and Norris (2004, pp. 20–25), we have, on the one hand, a high proportion of people who see themselves as "religious" and a high percentage of trust in religious institutions but, on the other hand, a low level of participation in religious practices; however, an increase in the attendance of religious services is notable.

Table 4.1 Religion in Georgia (2006–2011)

	2006	*2008*	*2010*	*2011*
Affiliation with GOC	77%	85%	82%	83%
Trust in GOC	54%	70%	56%	63%
Religious Practices: attendance once a week or more	6%	4%	18%	17%
Importance of religion in everyday life	–	51%	50%	50%

Sources: OSI Georgia (2006); CRRC Georgia 2008–2012: Caucasus Barometer Georgia (2008–2012).

The discrepancy between the number of people who identify themselves as religious and the attendance rates of religious services can be interpreted in various ways. In the framework of secularization theory, and according to the proponents of this perspective, one can argue that low rates of attendance point towards a decrease in religious beliefs in Georgian society.

Proponents of the theory of individualized religion would argue that such data provide evidence for the individualization of religious beliefs even if there is still a lot of trust in the religious institution. Representatives of the "market model" would argue that the so-called decrease in church attendance for religious services does not mean anything. According to this perspective, a decline in religious practices is sheer myth. We cannot depict a stable decline in church attendance over the last two centuries. Apart from anything else 'claims about a major decline in religious participation in Europe are based in part on very exaggerated perceptions of past religiousness' (Stark, 1999, p. 260). As Rodney Stark argues, church attendance was always consistently low, even in the Middle Ages (1999, p. 255).

However, none of these three perspectives is capable of giving a fully satisfactory explanation. It would not be right to assume either that the level of religiosity is decreasing in Georgia, that religion is individualized or that secularization is not taking place at all.

A high level of religiosity among the young generation is rather striking. 84 per cent of respondents aged 18–35 declared themselves to be members of the GOC. In the age group 18–35, religion is very, or rather, important for 91 per cent of the respondents (see Figure 4.1). The rates of attendance at religious services are the highest in the same age group (see Figure 4.2). About 60 per cent of young people think that they are very religious or rather religious (see Figure 4.3).

The reason for the high level of trust in the GOC could lie in the Soviet past, in the corruption of state institutions and in the low levels of social security which pertained during the 1990s. The existence of high levels of unemployment, the civil war, the war with Abkhazia and ethnic conflicts are also plausible reasons for the popularity of the GOC.

Increased attendance at religious services indicates that levels of religiosity and the importance of the Orthodox Church increased during the period of the UNM government. The rise of nationalism, grave social problems, high unemployment level, and a gradual disillusionment with Saakashvili's government, as well as the increasing authority of the Patriarch Ilia II, also contributed to this tendency,

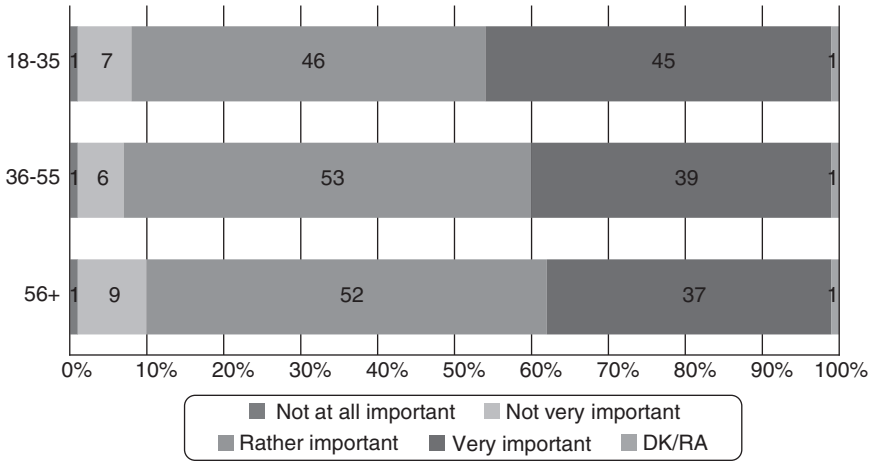

Figure 4.1 Importance of religion in daily life by age (Georgia 2011)

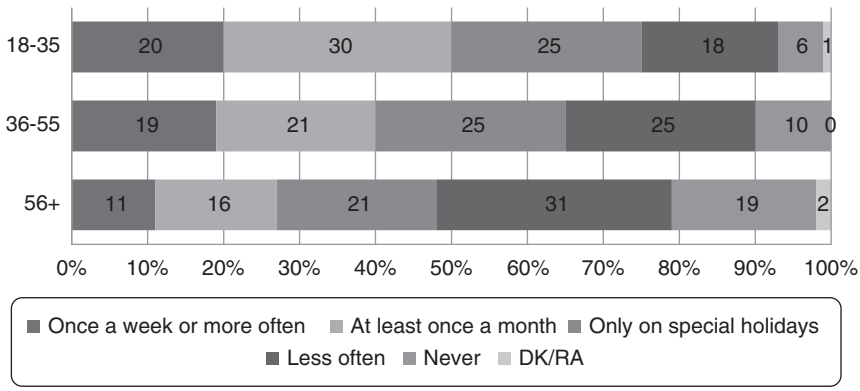

Figure 4.2 Rate of attendance of religious services by age (Georgia 2011)

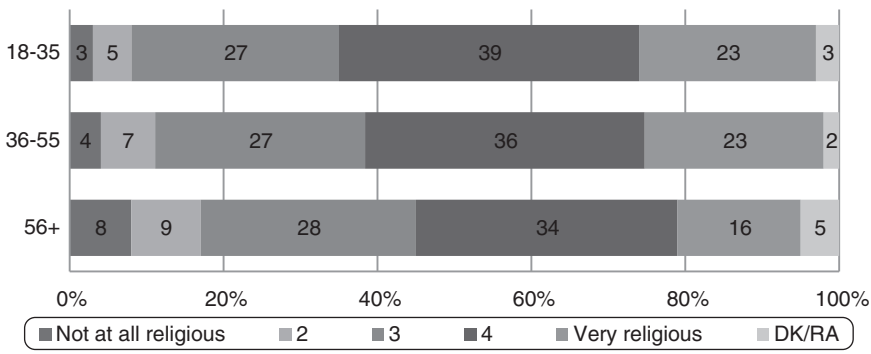

Figure 4.3 Religious self-description by age (Georgia 2011)

which corresponds to the thesis of the impact of the level of social security posited by Inglehart and Norris (2004). However, in the case of Georgia, it would be too simplistic to assume that its high rates of religiosity stem only from social insecurity.

I suggest that nationalism, state and church politics and trust in the GOC are interrelated and have a deep impact on the religious situation in Georgia. An analysis of the development of nationalism and the example of inconsistent relations between the church and the UNM government during the latter's ruling period (2003–2012) will better explain this situation.

Church-state relations in Georgia: a general overview and an illustrative case

Since the 1990s, after the end of the Soviet regime, Georgia began to take shape as a nation-state. The formation of a country as a modern state is often connected to nationalism. Under such circumstances, the GOC was able to gain more power and popularity in society. In contemporary Georgia, having a "Georgian" identity also implies being an Orthodox Christian.

The 1980s witnessed the emergence of a new perception of Orthodoxy as an innate feature of Georgian society: 'Every kind of nationalism is an attempt to regain your lost past and to re-establish the lost nationality' (Ratiani, 2009, p. 40). This process is always linked to the reinvention of old traditions and the introduction of new ones. Increased nationalism was characteristic of almost all the post-Soviet countries, including Georgia. During this search for a new identity, Georgian society started to perceive the Christian Orthodox religion as the country's oldest tradition and one of the most important aspects of Georgian identity.

An agreement between the GOC and the Georgian state, signed in 2002, demonstrates the central role of the church in the state politics of nation-building already during Eduard Shevardnadze's government of 1995–2003. The agreement guarantees an exclusive role for the church in Georgian history and culture. The GOC is recognized as a public entity in civil law, one which carries out its activities under the church's own canonical norms (Constitutional Agreement, 2011). Despite a declaration of the freedom of religious beliefs in Article 9 of the Georgian Constitution, the special role of the church in Georgia history is also recognized (Constitution of Georgia, 2011).

In this regard nothing changed at the constitutional level after the Rose Revolution of 2003. However, the new UNM government introduced Western, modern values by means of reforms in state structures (specifically, reforms in education, police, the economy, the formation of a modern infrastructure and the promotion of international organizations such as NATO, the EU and so on). Officially, the UNM government also presented itself as a group of young politicians with clearly Western-oriented political values, recognizing human rights, freedom of religion and the separation of church and state. 'The defence of religious freedom and pluralism was one of the key issues for the new government. . . . The authorities have indeed taken action to end violence against minority faiths, repeatedly denounced in international reports' (Serrano, 2010, p. 49). After the UNM party

came to power, the process of nation-building became more intensive in comparison with that of Shevardnadze's government. On an analytical level, it can be argued that at the early stage of its period in office, the UNM government did not use Orthodoxy as an instrument for nation-building nor did it particularly sympathise with the popularity of the church in society. The government was primarily concentrating on reforming the educational and economic systems, the police and the army and on ensuring the unity of Georgia (*Strategy of the State*, 2012). However, this situation changed after 2007, when the popularity of the ruling party started to wane. Annual funds allocated to the GOC from the state budget presented in Table 4.2 are a good illustration of these changes.

As Table 4.2 shows, funding dramatically changed during the years 2005–2011. It is worth mentioning the almost threefold increase in 2009, which correlates with the decline in the government's popularity after mass opposition protests in the capital in 2007, war with Russia in 2008 and increasing criticism of state politics by the patriarchate. We can suppose that the government was trying to make up for the lack of popularity by gaining the support of the most popular institution.

As we can see, the relationship between the church and the UNM has been tense and ambiguous from the very start, in 2003. I will put just one case in point under the microscope. This was revealed during the study of periodicals published in 2011. It clearly shows the conflict and lack of cooperation which pertained between the church and the UNM government. However, the conflict resulted in a pact with a certain degree of consensus.

In June 2011, the Georgian Parliament issued a new law, according to which religious organizations recognized as legal by the EU and traditionally connected to Georgian society could officially be registered as civil law public entities. The GOC and Patriarch Ilia II protested against this law, arguing that it endangered the future of Georgian society and could harm the state. Since the independence of Georgia only the GOC had possessed the above-mentioned legal status. Following the adoption of the new law, other religious organizations (i.e., organizations which have historical connections with Georgia) can officially be registered. This grants them legal status and allows them to control their properties freely. Furthermore, such legislation is in agreement with the liberal values characteristic

Table 4.2 Financial support of the Georgian Orthodox Church by the government (2005–2011)

2005	*2006*	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2010*	*2011*
1,290.1 million Lari – 0.5%	4,794.4 ml. Lari – 0.10%	4,208.7 ml. Lari – 0.15%	9,517.1 ml. Lari – 0.20%	25,659.9 ml. Lari – 0.25%	25, 255.3 ml. Lari – 0.30%	22,800.0 ml. Lari – 0.35%
(Share of GOC in State Budget -%)	(Share of GOC in State Budget -%)	(Share of GOC in State Budget -%)	(Share of GOC in State Budget -%)	(Share of GOC in State Budget -%)	(Share of GOC in State Budget -%)	(Share of GOC in State Budget -%)

Source: Ministry of Finance Georgia; www. mof.ge / http://www.mof.ge/4980 (*State Budget*)
(Numbers are given in million Lari)

of modern societies. However, the GOC objected to the legislation and encouraged the population to protest too. Patriarch Ilia II made known his wish that the Georgian President Saakashvili veto the legislation (*Sapatriarkos Utskebani*, June 2011, p. 6). Despite these efforts, the president signed and legalized the new law.

On July 5, 2011, the day after the signing of the new law, public protests began. Several political parties put forward an initiative to legally recognize Georgian Orthodoxy as the state religion. The main danger, according to the perception of the protesters, was the Armenian Apostolic Church. It was declared that on the basis of the new law, the Armenian Church would misappropriate some properties of the GOC. The Holy Synod gathered at the patriarch's residence and discussed the newly created situation, while hundreds of people waited on their pronouncement. The Holy Synod advised the parliament of Georgia that it should issue such major laws only after consulting with the GOC. Based on these developments, an explanatory document was attached to the new law on July 12. The document reinstated the privileged status to the GOC and confirmed the existence of a Constitutional Agreement between the Orthodox Church and the state. With this, the public protests were ended.

Statistical data show that the public was on the church's side in this conflict. In the public opinion study conducted by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), respondents were asked about the new law concerning religious minorities (NDI Georgia, 2011). The data show a high level of interest to the case: 48 per cent of the respondents said they were aware that the civil code had been amended to allow all registered religious entities to have equal status (NDI Georgia, 2011, p. 30). 69 per cent of this 48 per cent did not support the amendment and 24 per cent did. 81 per cent thought that the general public should have been consulted prior to this decision. 78 per cent agreed that the decision was taken too quickly. 86 per cent of the respondents said that the GOC should have been consulted prior to the passage of the legislation (NDI Georgia, 2011, pp. 31–34) (see Figure 4.4).

The patriarchate's main argument against the draft law was its unexpected implementation. As priest G.Z. suggested in an interview, 'The patriarchate was not informed about the changes in the law. There were no consultations with the

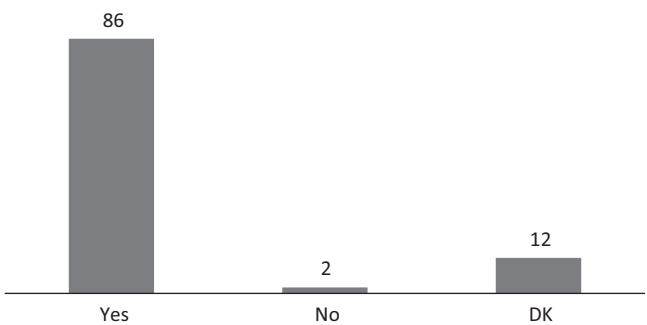

Figure 4.4 Opinion poll in Georgia after legislation (Sept. 2011)

church. No special council was organized to discuss this new status of religious organizations, nor was the public asked about it'[7] (Interview, Nov. 15, 2012).

However, members of the former UNM government had a different opinion. In an interview broadcast by the Maestro TV channel, the former Member of Parliament and Vice Speaker Rusudan Kervalishvili claimed that discussions about, and work on, the draft law had started five years before its implementation. Kervalishvili states:

> The necessity of issuing the law is based on the international status of the Georgian state. Special state departments were working on it for years, thus there was no need to hold consultations with the representatives of the public sphere. I want to repeat once more that working discussions on the draft law continued for several years; however, the exact date for issuing the law was not fixed. Maybe that is the reason for the discontent which has arisen.
>
> (*Status of Religious Confessions*, 2011)

One of the archbishops, I.G., commented on the statement of the former vice president:

> I do not know anything about this working period, or that the representatives of the Orthodox Church were included in the consultations. In every situation the former government acted just as they wanted. What I know is that there are no laws about religious organizations in Georgia, neither are there laws about freedom of speech, or responsibility thereof. Thus, there were no laws about religious organizations and maybe the government wanted to do something about it, but the law was issued too quickly and spontaneously. Why was this done? Maybe because there was a meeting of the Holy Synod on the same day the law was issued and the government did not want the Synod to discuss this subject.
>
> (Interview, Nov. 23, 2012)

In an official statement, the Public Defender of Georgia Giorgi Tugushi stated that many discussions and consultations were held on the subject in the Council of Religions, established in collaboration with the Public Defender's Office, especially in 2010–2011. Members of the patriarchate were also invited to the meetings but they refused to participate (*Public Defender's Speech*, 2012).

Archbishop D.A. commented:

> The conflict and displeasure around the new law were caused by the constitutional agreement. When there is such an agreement between the Orthodox Church and the state, how can the parliament issue a law about religious organizations without consulting the Patriarchate? And with such a background, the equalization of all religions based on the democratic principle at least includes in itself some kind of inaccuracy, if not hostility. In reality, such an attitude and democratic principle is dangerous for the consciousness of

> the young generation, because throughout history religious minorities were never equal to the Georgian Orthodox Church.
>
> (Interview, Dec. 5, 2012)

In a special interview on Imedi TV, President Saakashvili also responded to the events surrounding the new status of religious organizations, disagreement with the Christian Orthodox Church and public protests:

> Everyone who tries to gain something from this event is nothing more than a classic remnant of the Soviet Union. These are the people with red stars on their foreheads. They come from families who were shooting people. This was the rule of government in the Soviet Empire. In this situation, apart from the United National Movement, the absolute majority of the politicians and the opposition presented themselves as remnants of the Soviet Empire. However, the most outstanding Georgians were Mikheil Tamarashvili[8] or Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani.[9] They were Catholics. [. . .] The reason for the implementation of the law is the equality of our citizens. We wanted to show them how much we respect them all. [. . .] If the government is afraid of 100 people protesting on the streets and it cannot realize fundamental values, then it should not govern. I would sign this law even if 100,000 people came out in the streets to protest against it. [If there were even 100,000 people protesting in the streets 2011.]

The lawyer, N.B., stated that from a legal point of view nothing was wrong with the law on religious organizations nor was the parliament obliged to consult with the patriarchate or consult with representatives of the public sphere. The law was issued according to legislative procedures. However, she added, 'not as a lawyer, but as a citizen of Georgia, I personally think that the parliament should have consulted the patriarchate, due to its historical roots in Georgia' (Interview, Dec. 16, 2012).

The conflict between the church and the state ended without any further confrontations. The Holy Synod only advised the government of Georgia to consult with the patriarchate before issuing other religion-related laws in the future. The government, in return, issued an amendment to the law, once more confirming the privileged status of the GOC.

Archbishop I.G. stated:

> Ultimately the Holy Synod was lenient because the new law in its present formulation does not mean anything; it is neutral. That's why the synod did not want to agitate society any more. However, it was mentioned that the constitutional agreement gives us the right to consult the state regarding the subjects of mutual interest. In this particular case the constitutional agreement was ignored and the patriarch's personal request was disregarded publicly. In fact, there was an attempt to dishonour the patriarch and the church. These two negative incidents were discussed at the meeting of the Holy Synod and

> it was said that such a thing should never be repeated in the future. As of today, there is no future for them anymore.
>
> (Interview, Nov. 23, 2012)

After a week of tension, some representatives of the UNM government attended a liturgy performed by Ilia II in Sameba Cathedral. The mayor of Tbilisi Gigi Ugulava explained in a TV interview:

> [T]he law does not create any danger for Christian Orthodoxy. The relationship between the Georgian Orthodox Church and the state is regulated by the constitutional agreement, which is hierarchically the highest legal document after the constitution. In this sense, the role of the church is reinforced and established above other religious organizations in Georgia.
>
> (*Status of Religious Confessions*, 2011)

Though the conflict was resolved without further confrontations, both sides have clearly displayed a "struggle" for power. The GOC has manifested its influence on society by gathering quite a large number of protesters on the streets, and the UNM showed that despite the significant influence of the GOC, they won't allow the latter to interfere in state-level decisions.

Discussion

In-depth interviews and official comments by members of the UNM government clearly show that the situation related to the implementation of the law about the status of religious minorities in Georgia was quite highly charged. Despite its peaceful ending, the conflict revealed more generally a lack of cooperation between the church and the UNM government. One thing is obvious: the GOC demonstrated its power and influence on Georgian society. At the same time, through the proclamation of the new law, the Georgian Parliament (and the state) also displayed its power. Thus, we can characterize this case as a struggle for power between the GOC and the UNM.

What are the reasons for the conflict and the negative attitudes expressed in public by both sides during the interviews? The process of nation-building became very intensive following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and especially during the period of the UNM government, and, as a result, Christian Orthodoxy emerged as the oldest tradition and a major element of Georgian identity. The first reason was a by-product of the government's efforts to develop a discourse based on a form of civic nationalism which included the defence of religious freedoms and pluralism, making changes in the law to help minority religions with the difficulties of registration and so on (Serrano, 2010, p. 49). The identity construct "I am Georgian, therefore I am Christian Orthodox," by contrast, was strengthened through the discourse of the Orthodox Church which aimed at promoting religious nationalism. Although the church focuses on traditions, glorifies history and generally anticipates Western perceptions of modernity, still

its discourse is not traditional as such. On the contrary, it is a modern discourse, actually creating a different type of national identity. Consequently, two differing projects of modernity, with differing discourses on civic and religious nationalism, co-exist.

Generally speaking, national identity is a cultural phenomenon; it can represent an ideology or a political project (Tevzadze, 2009, p. 17). In this regard, religion can also be a central aspect of national discourse (Knox, 2005, p. 135). If the development of national identity can be a political project, then it is logical to assume that it also can be used for specific political and social purposes. For instance, it can be employed by the elites by alluding to tradition, culture and religion. In other words, nationalism can be an instrument for gaining popularity in society and obtaining consent on specific political issues (Knox, 2005, p. 136).

Discussions about nationalism and processes of secularization in post-Soviet countries are not new. José Casanova writes: 'The attempt to build "pure" nations inevitably results in ethnic-religious cleansing either through suppression or through expulsion and destruction' (Casanova, 1994, p. 286; translation mine). According to Casanova, nationalism developed in all of the post-Soviet countries and the absence of pluralism in these countries is connected to the attempts to build nation-states (Casanova, 1994, pp. 285–290). Of course, the individual histories of the establishment of nationalism and the re-emergence of Orthodox churches vary from country to country. The analysis of the Georgian case leads us to assume that the diverse and sometimes even tense relations between the Orthodox Church and the state have their roots in the struggle for power, based on two different nationalistic narratives.

The data about Georgian society's trust in various institutions shows that the church is the only institution in Georgia which largely succeeded in becoming part of Georgian identity. Despite many reforms in different state institutions, the UNM government did not succeed in developing two of the most important institutions which should regulate relations between the state and the individual and which are at the "heart" of civil society, namely political parties and non-governmental organizations (Zedania, 2011).

In this situation, the Orthodox Church was able to establish its own powerful discourse which established what it means to be a Georgian. Patriarch Ilia II said in one of his speeches concerning the new law about religious minorities that 'the church's position will continue to be protected. Protection of the church's interests equals the protection of the country's interests, because it is Christian Orthodoxy that established the Christian state of Georgia and that helped to keep this land together' (*Krialosani*, July 2011, p. 5). In other words, the church tells the people that the Georgian nation was chosen by God, that the "heart" of Georgia is Christian Orthodoxy, that liberal modernity is not acceptable for Georgians (Zedania, 2011), that there exists the "Georgian Idea," which says patriotism means the defence of Christianity, that the kings of Georgia followed this "Idea," that the people who do not believe in this idea and do not live according to it cannot be called Georgians and that the people who follow the "Georgian Idea" build the Georgian nation.[10] This is the discourse of religious nationalism.

The discourse of civic nationalism proclaimed by the UNM government did not gain much popularity, as is shown in the statistical data. It is also worth mentioning that this discourse was mainly oriented towards reforms in the army, police and so on, and most of all towards the ideal of a unified Georgia. After the war with Russia in 2008, the "Unified Georgia" narrative lost its potency, while the religious discourse became even stronger. At the same time, the latter became one of the main discourses and way of life for the young generations (see statistical data above).

Thus, after the Rose Revolution in 2003, the government introduced a modern discourse into Georgian society through the development and popularization of Western-oriented values and through the establishment and strengthening of state institutions (for instance, education, police and legal reforms). If this programme had been successful, the GOC would have lost most of its power, influence and popularity, since such a project of modernization by the government would have placed limitations on the discourse of the Orthodox Church (such as focusing on "traditions," the "Georgian Idea" and the sacralization of history). In such circumstances, the GOC started to criticize its oppositional discourse. The GOC wins popularity through the development of religious nationalism in Georgian society.

Conclusion

The study of church-state relations during the UNM government in 2003–2012 has revealed an interesting trend of co-existence and a "battle" between two national discourses – civic nationalism and religious nationalism. The study also have revealed that such a mixed-model of relations between the UNM government and the GOC is an inherent part of the nation-building processes. This study has not yielded any evidence that the Orthodox Church seeks to have an immediate political role in the country, though it does create a general discourse in society which has an indirect influence on state politics. A popular narrative, strong authority and a high level of trust in the church allows it to exert its influence on the government.

What is most striking, and different from the other post-Soviet states, is the high rate of religiosity among the young generations. It is still difficult to pinpoint the exact reasons for this tendency; it is not yet clear whether the answer lies in social insecurity, the popularity of the Orthodox narrative or other conditions. So far, the most appropriate answer seems to be that of the narrative of the GOC, which currently clearly wins over the discourse of UNM, at least at the level of trust and the construction of a social identity.

From a theoretical point of view, the empirical example of Georgia reveals the following trend: It is difficult to apply any of the three dominant perspectives of the sociology of religion which were outlined at the start. Obviously, the religious market model is not valid for explaining the religious situation in Georgia, because of the absence of pluralism in the country and the monopolistic position of the GOC. The perspective of religious individualization is also inadequate for the Georgian case. Where there is an absence of privatization

of religion and religion plays an important role in the formation of national identity, it is hard to speak about an "invisible religion" or the transformation of religion's social forms. As for secularization theory, the empirical example has revealed that classical and modern theories of secularization can more or less describe social changes and the transformation of religion in Western cultures. However, it is hard to integrate the theories of secularization with the countries of the post-Soviet Bloc. The perspective on different levels of secularization by Casanova seems to be most appropriate. We cannot speak about a privatization of religion or a decrease of religious beliefs, but we can see a form of secularization in the differentiation of church and state. However, we still have a problem at this level with the strong influence of the GOC on politics and state-level decisions, as the study has revealed that the GOC is not an agent with direct political power.

It is important to mention that in October 2012, the "Georgian Dream" party, hitherto the party of opposition, won the parliamentary elections and the former UNM government became the parliamentary party of opposition. It is too early to predict how the relations between the GOC and the post-Saakashvili government will develop. We can only say that today Georgian society represents a mix of two narratives: traditional and modern. However, survival of such a mix is not certain since the conflict between the two discourses is bound to become more problematic for the generations of Georgians born after the 1990s. For these young people, being Christian Orthodox has become a way of life and not a compensation for their lost Soviet identity.

Notes

1 For more information on Bagrati Cathedral See Silvia Serrano (2010, p. 45) Also: The Government and Oppositional Forces Gathered at Bagrati Cathedral by the Patriarch's Call [პატრიარქის მოწოდებით ბაგრატზე მთავრობა და ოპოზიცია შეიკრიბა] www.netgazeti.ge http://www.netgazeti.ge/GE/105/News/12824/
2 This view originates from Max Weber's famous work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (see Weber 1988).
3 The proponents of secularization theory are Peter Berger (1967), Bruce (2002), Dobbelaere (2002), etc. (see Pickel, 2009, p. 91).
4 The proponents of the religious market model are Stark/Bainbridge (1987), Stark/Finke (2000), etc. (see ibid., p. 92).
5 The proponents of the thesis of religious individualization are Cipriani, Luckmann, Pollack, Pickel (2009).
6 Such empirical studies were made for example by Bruce (2002), Norris and Inglehart (2004), etc.
7 All quotations by the priests in this section are from in-depth interviews. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Georgian are mine.
8 Mikheil Tamarashvili was a Georgian public figure and Abbot of the Roman Catholic Church (1858–1911). President Saakashvili mentions him, because of his belonging to the Catholic Church [B.J.].
9 Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani was a Georgian writer and political figure. He was an Orthodox monk who later changed his confession to Catholicism (1658–1725). President Saakashvili mentions him, because of his belonging to the Catholic Church [B.J.].
10 See the predicts of the Patriarch Ilia II (Krialosani April, 2011, p. 7).

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If there were even 100 000 people protesting in the streets, [ქუჩაში ასი ათასი ადამიანიც რომ გამოსულიყო], Sept. 25, 2011. Video: Tbilisi. [online] Retrieved from: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NR3q7hXCO24&feature=related [Accessed Nov. 6, 2012].

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5 Political power and church construction in Armenia

Yulia Antonyan

A man dies and God sends him to Hell.
'Why Hell?', the man asks,
'I spent so much money and built a lot of churches.'
'Ok, go to Hell now', God answers,
'and then we will pay your money back.'
(Armenian joke)

The late twentieth century was remarkable in terms of dramatically changing attitudes towards religion and churches. A period of anticlerical annihilation of the Armenian religious heritage and the destruction of functioning churches was followed by a partial restitution and even reconstruction of some monasteries and churches in the 1960s and 1970s and then again by a resumption of church construction in the first decade of Armenia's independence. Each period can be explained in its own terms at the level of political regimes and policies but also in the context of the general cultural situation in each of the periods.[1] The active phase of church construction which has unfolded in the past two decades cannot be understood only by referring to a general desecularization process characteristic of the post-Soviet space following the era of socialism, when everything religion-related was strongly limited and criticized. Although it may have emerged as a result of a global, post-Soviet desecularization process, the phenomenon of contemporary church construction is multi-tiered and can be conceptualized from several different social perspectives. One of these perspectives is political power. In this chapter, the recent church construction boom in Armenia will be discussed in light of political and oligarchical[2] power as a means of symbolic legitimization and fixing of political and economic power.

Church (re)construction in the context of post-Soviet politics and economics

By constructing a church, an oligarch or a political leader seeks to legitimize his position and power in the people's eyes because he thus appears to be sanctioned by God. Why do they choose this way of obtaining legitimacy and does it really

make sense? This question cannot be answered unless it is embedded in the social and cultural context which renders concepts of power and religion coherent and mutually dependent.

I consider that the concept of "neo-feudalism" is appropriate to describe some recent social and cultural developments in post-Soviet Armenia. This term does not usually appear as a coherent concept, and its use is rather limited, sporadic and situational. For example, neo-feudal characteristics were detected in the imperialist doctrines and structures of the national socialist states of pre-war Germany and Italy (Koehl, 1960) and in the contemporary predominance of oligopoly and oligarchy in capitalistic states (Sen, 1991), as well as in post-Soviet democracies as particular cases of privatized governments and economies (Fairbanks, 1999, 2000; Inozemtsev, 2011). Bearing this last usage of the term in mind, I would refer to neo-feudalism not merely in the economic or political but rather in the anthropological sense; as a system of socially meaningful and valued attitudes, signs and practices that are developed around specific forms of economic, social and political power.

Medieval feudal states without a specific role for religion and the church were unimaginable. Religion and the church were the main and the most important sources of legitimacy, political influence and motivation for medieval feudal sovereigns and lords (see e.g. Kantorowicz, 1957). There is nothing extraordinary in the fact that the so-called "neo-feudal" economies and political structures also make recourse to religion in search of legitimacy. Nor is there anything new in practising politicians, even in developed secular democracies, using religion as a legitimation or motivation tool in many possible ways (Fox, 2013, pp. 80–83). Obviously, it is not necessary to be a religious state to implement religious formulations in politics and public life. The world knows many examples of secular states in which clearly articulated religious rhetoric and values are put to use in the in foundation of state ideologies (classic cases of this can be found in the US, Poland and others).

Robert Bellah's famous concept "civil religion" was conceived to explain the sorts of mechanisms, reasonings and motivations deployed in this controversy. He argues that references to religion made by politicians 'reaffirm the religious legitimation of the highest political authority' and 'provide a transcendental goal for the political process' (1970, pp. 171–172). However, despite the similarity of practices and goals with those of the post-secular epoch, Bellah's concept of civil religion has been developed in reference to a different type of religious and political reality. Civil religion has not been clearly associated with any particular version of Christianity or other religions, it has not implied any social or ethnic hierarchies and it has always been very flexible and adaptive towards 'the moral and political issues of the day' (Bellah, 1970, p. 182) without promoting any religious doctrines. For the "neo-feudal" cultural and social context in Armenia, the predominance and overt preference of a "national" church is crucial. If civil religion operates religious symbols and texts, embedding them in the context of secular practices, then the Armenian version of a "neo-feudal" use of the political resources of religion, on the contrary, "secularizes" religious practices and

symbols by attributing non-religious meanings and purposes to them. What are those meanings and purposes?

Religion has played a significant role in the formation of the post-Soviet nation-states as part of their national identity (Pelkmans, 2009, pp. 6–7)[3] and has been an effective tool for the mobilization and empowerment of the cultural and political capital hitherto oppressed by the communist ideological regime. The first step was the return of monopoly religions, assisted by the state (Froese, 2008, pp. 154–164). The second step was the political and ideological cooperation of state and church, where the clerics demonstrate loyalty to parties in power and authorities demonstrate model piety and devotion to the national church.

The constitution proclaims the Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC) to be a national religious institution of the Republic of Armenia, though it does so in a very indirect way: 'The Republic of Armenia recognizes the exclusive historical mission of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church as a national church, in the spiritual life, development of the national culture and preservation of the national identity of the people of Armenia' (Article 8.1.; see Constitution of the Republic of Armenia). The presidential inauguration includes a rite involving making an oath on the Bible and blessings by the Catholicos and every other session of the Armenia Parliament starts with a prayer. Live translations of the Easter and Christmas liturgies at Etchmiadzin[4] demonstrate the presence of almost all the country's VIPs, including the president, the prime minister, ministers, and members of parliament.[5] Anecdotal events such as blessing the crops by a priest on the invitation of the minister of agriculture (2012) have been widely covered by the local media. Another example of an "institutional" partnership can be found in the business sphere. Almost no public opening ceremony of enterprises, public constructions or institutions is conducted without a priest's blessing.

A deal with God: the "business" piety

The "business" piety is a phenomenon common to all the countries of the post-Soviet space. T. Köllner considers them in the context of newly formed social norms and moral practices (2013, pp. 41–43). Thus, in the light of discourses of public morality, donations made by businessmen for the construction of churches are considered as gifts requiring "reciprocity" in the form of repentance and salvation (Köllner, 2010, pp. 209–210). Such kinds of "reciprocity" may be important for some of the Armenian businessmen, but it also may be argued that other incentives impel them to demonstrate excessive piety through religious practices, donations to the church and construction of churches.

Study of church construction practice among the Armenian businessmen or "oligarchs" also provides interesting points that might help us to a deeper understanding of the social dimensions of the religion-state and the religion-power relationships in the country.

The process of construction and renovation of churches in Armenia was launched after the establishment of the independent Republic of Armenia in 1991. At the beginning of the post-Soviet era, the restitution of the AAC was part of the

process of nation-building and the construction of the Armenian national identity (Panossian, 2002, p. 129). The reconstruction, or construction, of churches was perceived more as a cultural process aimed at a restoration of the Armenian cultural heritage, a spiritual and physical "rebirth" of the Armenian nation. Thus, among the first churches to be reconstructed were the Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shushi (Karabakh), destroyed during the Karabakh war, and the Amenaprkich (Lord Saviour) Church at Gyumri. Both churches were rebuilt to symbolize the rebirth of the cities, one of which was devastated during the war and the second destroyed by the earthquake of 1988. This rebirth stood for a spiritual renaissance of the Armenian nation as a whole.[6] The reconstruction of the Gyumri Church was undertaken by Mayor Vardan Ghukasyan. Although the whole community was involved in the process of reconstruction, nevertheless it may be considered as one of the first instances of using the fact of the reconstruction of a church for the promotion of one's political career.

In most early cases of the construction, or reconstruction, of churches, funds were provided by the Armenian diaspora, who had their own motivations for being symbolically "enrooted" in their homeland. Thus, the Foundation of Louze-Simon Manookian supported the construction of the cathedral of Grigor Lusavorich in Yerevan – to celebrate the 1,500th anniversary of Christianity in Armenia – as well as the Trinity Church in the Malatia district of Yerevan. The participation of the diaspora in church construction still takes place, but it has changed somewhat. Along with large foundations such as Louise-Simon Manookian's, which further national-level development goals, more and more individuals or families are undertaking constructions or reconstructions of churches in pursuit of a memorialization of their own ancestors or in accordance with their religious and even spiritual aspirations.[7]

The political and ideological alliance between the state and the church was officially documented in 2007 by a law regulating all legal, social and economic relations between the two parties. This law gives the church the authority to construct and renovate religious buildings, to be funded out of the state budget (Sarkissian, 2008, p. 169). By bestowing other rights, tax exemptions and freedoms on the church, and through the formation of joint bodies and by opening the field for joint activities, the state has started a process of conflating secular and clerical resources, levers of control, and of an "oligarchization" of the church in both economic and socio-cultural terms.[8]

The early 2000s were marked by the active construction of churches in various communities within the country and in districts of Yerevan. Most funds were still raised from the diaspora, but local oligarchs and community leaders (sometimes, these two categories coincide) gradually took the initiative into their own hands. The construction of community churches in most cases is being done with funds and other forms of support from former community members who have emigrated to Russia or other countries for a better life and acquired wealth there. The appearance of "migrants' churches" has coincided with a period during which the AAC has strengthened its institutional capacity and influence on the political and social life of Armenia. Though motivations for church building vary at the

individual level, the whole process looks like a symbolic regaining of social status, frequently lost in emigration.

Labour migrants, especially men, usually suffer from the loss of their status even if they have succeeded in reaching an average or even good level of income.[9] As strangers they never fully integrate into local hierarchies and always remain, though affluent, outsiders. In such cases, migrants often try to fill this gap through symbolic demonstrations of wealth and power in the homeland, often through the construction of churches. The church as a symbol of religious and, in most cases, ethnic identity, as a marker of morality and cultural values, a way to memorialize oneself and one's family and as a social project the whole community would make use of, fits very well to this purpose. Besides, as many confess, the construction of a church is the easiest of social projects because it does not require much bureaucracy, unlike the construction of schools, hospitals and other social objects. The construction of migrants' churches – "money churches" as one of the architects called them – proliferate especially in village communities, where the consequences of such a construction would be socially more visible and stable. The church-building migrants also presume to exert a sort of "remote control" over the social, economic and political processes in the home village or region by having their relatives and close friends as local authorities and influential businessmen. As A.S., an architect I spoke to, said: 'In villages people say: one becomes a labour migrant, then a billionaire and then builds a church. Therefore, his acquaintances and power are enhanced; one of his relatives becomes a mayor, the other runs a shop.'

Such situations may evoke protests from those who are at odds with such kinds of social changes in their community, especially of those whose own status has strongly declined in the post-Soviet period (including the "village intelligentsia," previous communist leaders, WWII veterans). The protests may also have an anticlerical and antireligious nature, especially in those regions where during the antireligious campaign of the 1930s and 1940s most of the rural churches were either obliterated or turned over to other functions, such as storehouses, cultural centres and even schools, as in the Lori, Tavoush and Syunik regions (Stepanyants, 1994, p. 67). The populations of those regions had not hitherto attended churches or followed church rituals, though they had largely practised grassroots religiosity, worshipping shrines and treating the extant, inactive churches and monasteries as shrines.

In the post-Soviet period, the politics of desecularization and the empowerment of the AAC at the national level strengthened the re-institutionalization of grassroots religiosity and made the restitution and construction of churches in the regions one of the imperatives of the day. For this reason, the AAC fervently supports every church-building initiative in the regions. Representatives of the church rarely discuss or moralize over the motivations of community donors. In most cases, they do not seem to be interested in the motives or the moral character of the donors or in the origins of their funds. In the few cases where the AAC has not accepted the newly constructed church, refusal has been motivated by a worsening of the personal relationships between the donor and the AAC or between the

donor and the local authorities, through the official explanations for it might have a formal nature, such as a violation of construction regulations.

As the involvement of the AAC in the realms of political power coincided with the development of oligarchy and oligopoly in Armenia, the ACC is said to be a part of the problem. Thus, the Catholicos is said to be the owner of hospitals and a monopoly in the health sphere. The head of the Ararat Eparchy, Navasard Kchoyan, has several times been engulfed in public scandals regarding illegal business activities and connections with criminal circles; for instance, he was publicly accused of having received the gift of a Bentley car as a present from a donor with a criminal reputation.[10] Oligarchical connections discredit the church authorities and, in fact, deprive them of legitimacy in the eyes of the flock: 'We often see Garegin II in the residence of the president, in parliament, municipal offices and other official places. He is always with our authorities and never with the flock' (citation from a media article[11]).

On the other hand, oligarchs and criminals seek sympathetic treatment from the church by various means and for different reasons and motivations. Some may seek safety and immunity, others atonement and salvation, but in most cases religion and the church are invoked as important and powerful supporters of the oligarchical power system in all its economic, social and political aspects. Paradoxically, close relationships between the church and the oligarchy jeopardize the reputation of the clergy but remain the most effective legally and socially accepted practice for bestowing legitimacy on oligarchs' power claims in both secular and religious contexts.

Churches and the political career of an oligarch

Not every Armenian "oligarch" prioritizes the construction of churches. But almost all those who claim to play serious social and political roles have been more or less involved in the construction or reconstruction of churches by means of full or partial donations and non-financial contributions. I will analyse the church-building activities of one of the most prominent Armenian oligarchs, Gagik Tsarukyan. Tsarukyan is a head and a founder of a political party "Prosperous Armenia," which was able to attract a huge number of partisans during the course of the parliamentary elections of 2012 and is part of the ruling coalition. After the vertiginous success of the oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili in the Georgian parliamentary elections of 2012, it was expected that Tsarukyan would follow his example and stand as a candidate in the presidential elections of 2013. But this never happened for a number of reasons. However, Tsarukyan's political image-making process before, during and after the 2012 election campaign is of interest in the context of our theme.

In the strategic programme[12] of the charity foundation named "Gagik Tsarukyan," church construction was prioritized over other policies, such as education, relief for socially vulnerable families and so on. In recent years, the name of Tsarukyan frequently has been associated with the construction of churches. The Kentron TV channel, which belongs to Tsarukyan, always broadcasts video coverage

of the founding or opening of churches. The churches in Arinj, Ayrum, Nubarashen and Nor Hachn, as well as a huge cathedral in the city of Abovyan have already been built. All of these churches are consecrated to Surb Hovhannes (Saint John the Baptist), whom Gagik Tsarukyan considers to be his family's patron.

An analysis of some examples of broadcast media coverage of episodes in Tsarukyan's election campaign demonstrate how the church topic is embedded in his image-making machine. Thus, one of the videos tells about the church foundation ceremony in Nubarashen, one of the remotest and most underdeveloped districts of Yerevan. The interpretation of the events by journalists, it would seem, coincides with that of Tsarukyan and his publicists, because nothing can be broadcast on this TV channel without his approval. The video consists of two parts that may be conditionally entitled "Making a promise" and "Dreams come true."[13] In the first part, during the pre-election meeting in Nubarashen, Tsarukyan promises to construct a church and in the second part the entire ceremonial foundation of the church, along with the corresponding ecclesiastical ritual, is broadcast in detail. In his speech, Tsarukyan says that everyone can witness him always keeping his promises. But he also says things that change the tenor of his whole speech from the rational to the religious: 'I am sure, that it is a divine will that is responsible for everything. Not everyone is endowed [by God, he means] with such opportunities. When the people's wishes and God's will coincide, it's me who makes them come true' (all translations from Armenian are mine, Y.A.). In fact, Tsarukyan represents himself as a kind of mediator, one who implements the will of God, the servant of God and the people. In the other video coverage of a church foundation ceremony, this time in Nor Hachn, Tsarukyan once again highlights the same idea of himself as mediator of God's will: 'It so happened, by God's will, that this space has been given to us and therefore, it's our duty to build a house of God here' (the translation is mine) (Tsarukyan, 2012).

Such utterances evoke formations of a pre-modern mentality, construing human power and authority as a "divine will," which is being translated and implemented by those who are chosen for this particular mission by God himself. People have no choice but simply to obey the Lord's will through the formal ratification of power, which has already been approved "from above." Such a theodicy attributes a completely different significance to the church building itself. It becomes a visual symbol for the divine approval and support of the person who constructed it.

The oligarch has always highlighted the fact that he merely mediates in the effectuation of the people's "wishes" coming true, and by this he implies that his activities are democratic and transparent, because there is nothing personal in them. The equation "God's will is the people's will" becomes a key concept in this theological democracy.

The popular opinion in journalistic reports was represented by quoting statements deliberately picked from the crowd (all translations are mine):

> Everyone in our community has dreamt about a church, but we have had no opportunities to have it built so far. Mister Tsarukyan made us a promise and kept it.

> He did a good deed again, so that the Armenian people would not forget its own faith.

The words of ordinary citizens are followed by an interpretation by a priest of the AAC, which directly reiterates the main idea of Tsarukyan's utterances: 'Your [he means "the people's," Y.A.] wish, uttered during the last meeting was heard both by God and the benefactor Gagik Tsarukyan, who took on a sacred and sacrificial duty to build a church. Today the Lord came down from Heaven and blessed all of us!'.

The words of the priest were accompanied by a journalist's comment that 'Gagik Tsarukyan promised to provide every kind of support to the members of the Nubarashen community and offers his hand every time it is needed.' The divine presence and support are thus being presented as having materialized through the personality of an oligarch. In turn, the divine nature and origin of oligarchical power – inexhaustible financial capacities and extensive influence – get their temporal and spatial reification in the form of a church by virtue of the significance attributed to it in discourses.

The culmination of power: "Tsarukyan's cathedral" in Abovyan

Tsarukyan commenced his church-building project with a modest church near his house in the suburbs of Yerevan, known as the home church of Tsarukyan family. The late '90s were the period in which all oligarchs marked out their "territories" with small-sized churches (examples of this are the newly constructed churches in the Davitashen and Avan districts of Yerevan). Although currently the churches are active, in some cases the "oligarchs" may have reserved some privileges regarding them. Thus, I was told that during the traditional spring pilgrimages, some villagers from a neighbouring village did not manage to get to a more remote pilgrimage site and decided to attend the Tsarukyan's "home" church instead but were not allowed for some private reasons.

Following the construction of a series of small churches in various communities, a huge cathedral was built by Tsarukyan in the city of Abovyan. This city, previously one of the fast-growing industrial communities of Armenia, was deprived of its industrial capacities during the post-Soviet period and actually has become a suburb of Yerevan. The greater part of its population is employed in Yerevan. However, Abovyan has been chosen as a centre for Tsarukyan's public activities and currently is considered to be a part of his "feudal estate," including the whole region of Kotaik. Local inhabitants respectfully (or sarcastically) call him the "king." It suffices to mention that all administrative power in the city belongs to Tsarukyan's family members, his friends or relatives. The economic and cultural life of the city and its vicinities are fully controlled by local branches of the "Prosperous Armenia" Party. The politics and strategy of Tsarukyan and his party may be characterized as the implementation of as many as possible charitable projects (providing assistance to socially vulnerable families, students' support, free

transport from Abovyan to Yerevan and back, sponsoring the spheres of sport and leisure, improvement of urban environment and so on) on condition of the complete elimination of a competitive environment for economic and social development. The construction of the cathedral seems to be a culmination of Tsarukyan's *conquista* of the city space in a symbolic and political sense.

The St. Hovahannes Cathedral is built on a hill far enough from the centre but can be seen from anywhere in the city. According to the inhabitants of Abovyan, there was previously a children's park with merry-go-rounds there. When Tsarukyan decided on this situation for his projected church, he suggested moving the park to somewhere else. And, indeed, he did move it a little distance away, down the hill and furnished it with new and modernized amusements.

From the very beginning, the idea of the cathedral has been excessive in its ambitions in terms of size, resources and architectural and artistic value. It has been conceived of as the biggest church in Armenia, even bigger than the Cathedral of St. Grigor Lusavorich in Yerevan. In addition, it aims at being entered into the Guinness Book of Records as having the largest image of Christ, painted on the inner side of the dome. The process of its construction, starting from the selection of design, materials and craftsmen, and ending up with the spatial configurations of the cathedral and construction deadlines, paid service to the idea of creating a building which would be superior to everything that had been achieved so far in this sphere.

The cathedral is ornamented from top to bottom; carvings represent figures of all the people deemed important in the history of Armenian Christianity; it contains a huge number of *khachkars* (traditional tombstones with crosses), which are incorporated into the walls. Small mock churches nest at the tops of the narthexes, the gutters are made in the form of lions' heads. Lions are also pictured on the plaque over the back doors. The lion is the favourite symbol of Tsarukyan, who puts pictures or statues of lions everywhere to "mark" his domains. Before the cathedral was inaugurated, nobody was allowed to enter it, except for those authorized by Tsarukyan himself. Usually, Tsarukyan himself accompanied those who were thought to deserve the "honour" and made a presentation of details of the cathedral. The cathedral should have been built within seven years and the symbolism of the number seven is reflected in the dates of the construction, carved on the gate "2005–2012," though the actual dates are 2005–2013.

The cathedral was designed by the architect Artak Ghulyan, famous for his ecclesiastic constructions in the Armenian neo-classical style. The paintings inside were made by Abraham and Hayk Azaryan, icon painters and founders of the Armenian contemporary icon-painting school.

The cathedral is associated with Tsarukyan's own personality and his family, because it bears the name of Saint Hovhannes, which is also the name of his eldest son. During the ritual of blessing the site of the future church, the Armenian Catholicos, who performed the ritual, Tsarukyan and his teenage son Hovhannes were standing side by side, as if they were equals, and some of my respondents were astonished by this fact.

Near the cathedral there is another construction, a huge temple-like building built on a slope of the same hill, just one level lower than the cathedral, all covered

in carved ornaments and fenced. I was told that it is assumed to be a shrine to the Tsarukyan family. The new custom of building huge "shrines" has recently arisen in Armenia. These "shrines" are usually huge constructions of various styles created in cemeteries. Some of them may take the form of a martyrium. The construction sparked many rumours and much speculation amongst the inhabitants of the city. It was variously thought to be a separate place to light candles, a house, etc. To the left of the church, there is a private house which is built of the same sort of stone as the church itself and seems to belong to the environs of the church. This is said to be a house of one of the Tsarukyan's bodyguards, who was privileged to build a house in such a "symbolic" place after he had saved Tsarukyan's life during an assassination attempt. The building's symbolic "connection" with Tsarukyan's family continued after the cathedral had been opened. Thus, the first people to be baptized there were Tsarukyan's granddaughters and the first couple to be married there were also relatives.

The opening ceremony for the cathedral took place on May 14, 2013, the day on which Abovyan City Day is celebrated. To witness the event, hundreds of ordinary people were brought, free of charge, from Yerevan and Gyumri by buses which had been sent for the purpose by Tsarukyan. Participation in the opening ceremony was voluntary, but there was obviously no lack of those who were eager to go to Abovyan and take part. Tens of buses were filled and took off one by one from the central spots of Yerevan.

The ceremony was structured strictly. The first, official part, which incidentally became the most important because of its clear political context, was reduced to little more than a welcoming of guests. The huge area in front of the cathedral was fenced off and guarded by policemen and policewomen. Ordinary people stood in crowds outside the fence. The guests arrived in the following order: local public

Figure 5.1 Opening ceremony of Tsarukyan's church in Abovyan on May 18, 2013

people, local authority officials, the builders and the architect of the cathedral, the clergy, politicians and public people of intermediate importance. After Gagik Tsarukyan had arrived, other top personages, politicians, oligarchs, and VIPs, the prime minister, the Catholicos, the ex-President Robert Kocharyan, and the incumbent President Serzh Sargsyan also arrived, met by Tsarukyan personally. The next day the names of those who had and had not attended the ceremony, who had been invited and who not, filled press releases, media reports and discussions on social networks. Forecasts of possible political alliances and collisions proliferated. The appearance of the highest-ranking people (Tsarukyan, the prime minister and the presidents) was welcomed by applause of varying intensities. Gagik Tsarukyan's applause was the strongest; people from the crowd cried out words of acknowledgement and blessing. Tsarukyan made a very short speech and the first liturgy, conducted by the Catholicos, was begun.

The "flock" was not allowed to enter the cathedral with the invited guests, but they could observe the liturgy on big screens. However, they were furnished with a couple of tables laden with free food and drink. Journalists took pictures to show how these tables were devastated by the crowd. Later, this was presented as highly "uncivilized" behaviour and became one the most debated aspects of the ceremony as a whole. Hundreds of people were waiting to be allowed to enter the cathedral. After the high-ranking guests had gone to the "celebration" for the opening, which took place in a restaurant newly built by Tsarukyan,[14] the flock, consisting of visitors and locals, was able to enter into the cathedral. Free candles were distributed to all the devout, to be lit in the premises of the main hall. In the middle of the scene, a large cross had been placed with a relic of St. Hovhannes and believers queued to kiss it. The political show had transmuted into a folk-religious festival. The outskirts of the cathedral's precincts were occupied by sellers of candles, icons, crosses, other religious objects and festive commodities such as food, toys, balloons, decorations, etc. People were praying, amazed by the interior and exterior of the cathedral, and took photographs of each other.

Tsarukyan's speech was criticized for having not mentioned the names of the architect and builders. He just expressed his thanks to those who participated in its construction, mentioning, in particular, that 'This church has been in my mind for the last seven years. I felt happy with every new stone put and felt sorry for every handicap encountered. And finally I can give the church out to those who are its true owners, our people. The charity is my duty before God and the people' (translation is mine).

The following day Artak Ghulyan, the cathedral's architect, wrote on his Facebook page: 'I have endured sleepless nights for seven years. For seven years I have spent days under the sun and the rain in the building yard, with builders, professionals and sculptors and celebrated every new arch and sculpture. And as it has turned out I do not deserve even a mention of my name' (the translation is mine).

The similarity of the texts indicates that the donor and the architect are seriously contesting the credit for the cathedral and this argument is not just between two personalities; it is between two different value systems. One, in which the

main role is given to the actual implementer and designer of the construction is modern; while the other, in which the principal constructor is a feudal lord who undertakes and finances the construction and who is the principal conveyer of God's will, is somewhat medieval. The other approach also tends to criticize oligarchs mostly for their immoral lifestyles and for "wasting" their money (the following translations are mine):

> Our authorities think that by building churches they'll be able to repent their sins and will be remembered by people who will say: He was a sly guy, but at least he was afraid of God, look what a church he managed to build!
>
> (Remark from a social network user)

> The churches are usually built in repentance of sins. Do they have so many sins to repent? Let them live in an honest and fair way and ultimately they won't be obliged to build churches.
>
> (Remark from a social network user)

> How much has been spent on this Abovyan church? 60 million dollars? As far as I know, 2–3 million would be enough to repair several ancient churches.
>
> (From an article by journalist Hovsep Khurshudyan[15])

> In the past our princes, like our oligarchs built churches to repent their sins. Enough! Dear oligarchs, repent your sins by arming and equipping the military.
>
> (Excerpt from a blogger's post)

Conclusion

It may be argued that oligarchy and oligopoly has been enrooted in post-Soviet Armenia because, in addition to economic and political levers, the oligarchs have in their possession social and cultural instruments of manipulation and power.

Post-secular developments have brought the AAC back to the top of the hierarchy of national institutions of social control. At the same time, to fulfil its recovered duties the church needed institutional and financial support that was available from the nascent national oligarchy. In return, the church could offer the legitimacy that these *nouveau riche* oligarchs evidently lacked.

If we browse the official biographies of the top Armenian oligarchs (Gagik Tsarukyan, Ruben Gevorgyan, Ruben Hayrapetyan, Samvel Alexanyan and others), we can see that the periods of their enrichment have either coincided with their incumbency as administrative officials and political leader, or are lost in a blur caused by an absence of biographical details, which may point to a criminal past. However, almost everyone in Armenia is informed about the compromising details of their biographies. Public discourse constructs anodyne images of these oligarchs, who receive more publicity as they become more influential. The paradox of the situation is that none of them really need legitimacy to exert power, but

all of them want to be justified in the eyes of society, they want to be respected, honoured, and memorialized for something they and their descendents would not feel ashamed of. This is why each of them is involved in charitable activities. Incidentally, even in this case a typically oligarchical approach has been taken: the areas of charity have eventually been divided among them. Gagik Tsarukyan and Ruben Hayrapetyan are prominent donors for sports and youth, Samvel Alexanyan sponsors the health sector, and so on. However, social spheres of charity do not get so much publicity or have such an impact as the church constructions do. The influence of the churches reaches out to all strata of the population, the churches are not associated with their businesses and religion always is morally justified.

Turning to religion may be an expression of repentance, remorse and the desire to adopt a new, better and more moral lifestyle. At the same time it may indicate that God is supporting this person and his success and that his achievements are endowed by heaven. This is actually what Pierre Bourdieu has described as a symbolic struggle for a monopoly of legitimate nomination by means of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 72).

Almost all oligarchs have tried this "religious" approach to legitimize themselves, but Gagik Tsarukyan also has successfully applied it to his political aims. As we have seen, he introduced and experimented with the idea of a theological democracy, trying indirectly to persuade his electorate that by voting for him they would fulfil God's will and one who has already been selected by God is the one most worthy to be elected by the people.

The AAC always has been more of a national institution than a religious one. Supporting it structurally meant supporting the nation. However, this perception has changed, because the church is currently associated with state institutions and, according to this perception, the ethnic and communitarian characteristics of the AAC are giving way to an authoritarian style. Also, desecularization may be understood as not only a return to the alliance between the state and the church which actually takes place in Armenia but also in bringing back mechanisms of social control. In fact, oligarchical power emerges as the main supporter and the main beneficiary of these mechanisms. This situation corresponds to the social aspects of religion in feudal societies (Luckmann, 2003, p. 279), which makes the "neo-feudal" approach valid here.

The process of a cohesion of religion, state and power in Armenia is still taking its course. The politics of desecularization in vitally important spheres such as governance, education and mass culture is becoming more and more obvious. As we have seen in this chapter, the process of desecularization is not univocal; it has different social and cultural dimensions which are in a process of constant change.

Notes

1 For a detailed analysis of the position and developments of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Soviet and post-Soviet times, and its links to the formation of the nation state and different dimensions of ethnic and national identity, see Tchilingirian (1998), Panossian (2002) and Sarkissian (2008).

2 The notion of the "oligarch" in the Armenian public discourse refers to an influential businessman who has usually made his fortune in a criminal way and who wields economic, social and political power over a community or the whole country.
3 For basic discussions of religion, state and nationalism issues see Casanova (1994) and Hastings (1997).
4 A spiritual and administrative centre of the AAC, where its main cathedral is located.
5 See, for example, the media coverage of the anointing ritual of Holy Resurrection Church in Spitak, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXCtbEy5faA (accessed Sept. 10, 2013).
6 According to the mayor of Gyumri, the city would be considered to have been reborn on the day when the Amenaprkich Church is reconstructed (Shagoyan, 2008, p. 161).
7 I address this and similar topics in my upcoming article.
8 The Armenian Apostolic Church and the person of the Catholicos are said to be stakeholders of lands, medical institutions and other establishments. Legal mechanisms of such a "stakeholding" are not explained in public discourses.
9 Surveys on migration point out the fact of a decrease of social status in a host country, see, e.g. Minasyan et al. (2007, p. 47). Labour migrants often start their life outside their own country by doing low status jobs they would never have taken in the homeland. They would feel ashamed if someone knew what they are obliged to do (Shahnazaryan, 2013, p. 10).
10 See, for example, his interviews for different media outlets like "7 or" (seven days): http://7or.am/am/news/view/52647/ (accessed Sept. 10, 2013); or Armenpress: http://armenpress.am/arm/news/723818/navasard-arqepiskopos-ktchoyany-kiprosum-ynkerutyan-grancman.html (accessed Sept. 10, 2013).
11 http://www.epress.am/2012/10/15/Եկեղեցին-և-քաղաքականությունը-Գարեգի.html (accessed Sept. 10, 2013).
12 I found the programme on the "Gagik Tsarukyan" Foundation's web page, which is now unavailable.
13 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFkniHTFjsM (accessed Sept. 10, 2013).
14 The opening of the restaurant was also planned for the same day and some people made this a topic for moralizing talk.
15 https://www.facebook.com/hovsep.khurshudyan/posts/10151455745142199?ref=notif¬if_t=close_friend_a (accessed Sept. 10, 2013).

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6 Islam in Azerbaijan

Revival and political involvement

Elnur Ismayilov

Azerbaijan's location at a crucial geostrategic crossroads involves not only external political powers but also religious movements and organizations which are oriented towards the country. With the end of the repression of faith groups and religious communities by the Soviet totalitarian regime, a new era started in the late 1980s which permitted political and ideological pluralism as well as religious freedom. The new ideological pluralism gave religious communities an opportunity to reclaim their positions at the centre of religious life in the post-Soviet state. With the dissolution of the Soviet regime, Azerbaijan's Islamic heritage became an alternative ideology, and interest in religious values increased rapidly in the newly independent society. It is impossible to understand the role of Islam in Azerbaijani society without knowing the legacy of Soviet religious policy. It was one of the reasons that in the late 1980s and early 1990s there were erroneous expectations about the possibility of a religious revolution in Azerbaijan, as well as rumours that political Islam would shortly become the dominant political power in the country.

The formation of religious identities in a society is a very complex process, and in order to gain a good understanding of a religious identity, a socio-political analysis of this process is very important. For more than 70 years, atheism had been part of the official state ideology in the post-Soviet republics. Although religious activity and religious organizations were discouraged and repressed, in other fields religious policies encountered strong resistance, and in Azerbaijan, just as in the other Soviet republics, the total elimination of religion proved to be impossible.

According to a 2012 Gallup poll, Azerbaijan is one of the most secular and tolerant Muslim countries in the world and belongs to the top 11 least religious countries (GALLUP Worldview, 2012). Azerbaijan is one of the few Muslim countries in which Islam is not the state religion, while secularism is enshrined in the constitution.[1] In the Azerbaijani context, however, secularity should not be understood as an expression of anti-religiousness: a secular tradition does not wholly preclude the existence of religious components in public life; rather it involves the absence of any religious influence on the political life of the society. According to official figures, about 93 per cent of over nine million Azerbaijanis are adherents of Islam. The remainder of the population consists mostly of Russian Orthodox,

Armenian Orthodox, and the followers of other Christian groups, as well as Jews and nonbelievers.[2]

Although it is a fact that today Azerbaijan is noticeably more Islamic than it was 20 years ago, Azerbaijan is still among the most secular of Islamic societies (Cornell, 2006, p. 8). It has a pluralistic legislation that allows for the coexistence of many different religions and confessions. However, despite the fact that most non-Islamic religious leaders praise Azerbaijan for its religious tolerance, Islam itself and Islamic communities may become subject to restriction by the political authorities because of their affiliations with foreign powers. On the one hand, Baku was declared the annual capital of Islamic culture in 2009; on the other hand, the government adopted a policy of closing mosques, outlawing *adhān* (the call to prayer) and *hijab* (the female headscarf) in the same year. There was censorship of all religious literature in Azerbaijan, which was explained by the official bodies as a preventive measure against the spread of radical extremism (Corley, 2012). At the same time, the government has built new churches, synagogues and mosques. Between the years 2003–2013, the Azerbaijani government has constructed around 200 mosques and has renovated more than 80 mosques (as documented in a speech by Ilham Aliyev in 2013). Religious policies are also important as a factor which influences the current sensitive geopolitical position of Azerbaijan, a country that is located between three regional powers – Iran, Turkey and Russia. One of the most commonly asked questions today is whether religion is being politicized in Azerbaijan and whether there is a threat of Islamic radicalism in the society.

This chapter provides an analysis of the role of Islam and puts into perspective the dynamics of the religious revival in Azerbaijan since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the last two decades. Although there are a lot of problems regarding the revival and rise of Islam in Azerbaijan, the existence of some radical religious groups and movements and fundamentalist and radical Islam does not pose any threat to the country. Nor do they enjoy popular support in Azerbaijani society. Radicalization, moreover, is only supported by external powers. In describing the survival of Islam in Azerbaijan, mainly as a cultural and traditional phenomenon, and by examining the nature and scope of the religious revival of the post-independence period, I will mainly analyse two aspects – internal and external factors – which have an impact on the Islamic revival process. By internal factors, I mean those which foster the significance and influence of Islamic groups in society. By external factors, I mean the influence of some religious groups and movements which are supported by organizations outside Azerbaijan.

This chapter has two objectives: First, to examine the process of Islamicization in Azerbaijani society since the 1990s; and second, to analyse the phenomenon of the politicization of Islam. By using the phrase "politicization of religion" in this context, I mean the use of Islamic references and religious symbols for political and social purposes. It is also interesting to note that the politicization of religion in Azerbaijan can take place both from above and from below. With regard to politicization from above, I examine the policies and actions of the current governing party and also try to answer the question: to what extent does the

ruling party politicize religion? A discussion of politicization from below involves examining the interests of political parties and religious social groups. These two levels have partially conflicting goals. Finally, this chapter examines the development of radical religious trends in Azerbaijan.

The chapter begins by outlining major developments in the religious sphere, including the evolution of respective legislation, and concludes by considering the implications of the possible radicalization of Islam as a threat to the secularity of Azerbaijan.

Islamic revival in independent Azerbaijan

Islam plays an important role in the formation of the nation (The Conception of the Azerbaijan People's Front Party on Islam, 1999). As the post-Soviet challenges of the religious communities in Azerbaijan during the early years of independence were primarily a product of the Soviet experience, we should start with the status and conditions of religion in the Soviet Union. With the declaration of *glasnost* policies by Michael Gorbachev in 1986, there began a period of liberalization in Soviet religious policy. By the end of the 1980s, a new law on freedom of conscience was drafted by the Soviet authorities and the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations Law was adopted in October 1990 (Codevilla, 1991). The preamble stated four objectives: 'to guarantee citizens' rights to express their attitude toward religion; to guarantee the right to exercise religious rites; to guarantee equality regardless of religious conviction; and to regulate the activity of religious organizations.' If, up until this period, religious administrations and communities in the Soviet Union had been instruments of Soviet foreign policy (Motika, 2004, p. 264), the *glasnost*-era policies marked the commencement of profound changes in the religious sphere.

According to Raoul Motika (2001), Azerbaijani Islam was intrinsically shaped by the specific circumstances which pertained in the country. It was different from Islam in other Islamic countries and international Islamic trends. If Islam in the Soviet period was viewed only as a set of holy rituals confined to funerals, after independence it was a form of cultural identity and historical heritage. The Muslim faith was at the centre of this recovery of identity. Thus, the aforementioned policies restored the role of Islam at the core of Azerbaijani national identity and cultural consciousness. Religious persons were free in their activities by comparison with earlier times. For a short period, conferences about Islam were organized by different societal groups in Azerbaijan and articles about religious freedom were published in newspapers. In order to solve the problem of a lack of religious education, the Islamic University was established in 1992. By 2012, the number of mosques had increased to 2,000 in comparison to only 18 mosques at the end of the Soviet period (Speech of . . . Pashazade, 2012).

Research carried out by various institutions since the beginning of the 1990s explain the level of religiosity in society. Generally, it should be mentioned that one trend is evident: religiosity in Azerbaijan has been increasing. For example, 71 per cent of respondents regarded themselves as believers in 1998 (research of

the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan) and the percentage of believers in God increased to 97 per cent in 2005 (Hadjyzadeh, 2005). Another survey, conducted by the Strategic Center in 2012 (*Political Islam in Azerbaijan*, 2012)[3] gives the percentage of believers; according to these findings, only 30.2 per cent belonged to the *dərindən inanan* (committed believers) in God, while approximately 66 per cent of respondents identify themselves as *inanan inamlı* (simply believers).[4]

Although the figures indicate that 65–70 per cent of the population is Shi'a and 30–35 per cent belongs to the Sunni branch of Islam, in reality most people are unaware of the basic differences between those branches. A survey showed that 45 per cent of respondents do not care about their affiliations and call themselves just Muslim, without belonging to any of those branches. Only 38 per cent answered that they belong to the Shi'a branch, while 14 per cent belong to the Sunni branch of Islam (Political Islam in Azerbaijan, 2012).

My interviewees have explained the revival of Islam by arguing that in comparison to Soviet times, where religion and religious practices were mostly forbidden, religion was allowed and people in general did not feel any restrictions in those practices. In his report, Svante Cornell (2006) gives reasons for the rise of Islam in society during the first years of independence and connects it with specific factors, such as the conflict with the non-Muslim Armenia. From Cornell's (2006, p. 11) point of view, the conflict itself and support of Armenia by Western governments stimulated the rise of Islamic radicalism in Azerbaijan. But, in the last 20 years, the existence of the conflict situation with Armenia does not have a bearing on the rise of Islam or radical religious movements in Azerbaijan.

Hacı İlqar İbrahimoğlu is a religious leader well known as a religious Shi'ite reformist and human rights activist in Azerbaijan. İbrahimoğlu explains the revival of Islam in Azerbaijani society at the beginning of 1990s as a movement towards redemption from atheistic ideology. In the post-Soviet period, the impact of the national movement in Azerbaijan was one of the main reasons that people were acquainted with their national identity and Islam had become a part of it (personal communication, Sept. 18, 2012).

He was the only one among the interviewees in this study who openly criticized the ruling regime. İbrahimoğlu received his religious education in Iran. He is also well known for his oppositional activities. After the presidential elections of 2003, which ended with post-election demonstrations, İbrahimoğlu was arrested as a participant in the unrest and charged on the grounds that he used his religious authority for political ends. According to Azerbaijani law, this kind of activity is illegal. In 2004, the state authorities closed the *Cümə məscidi* (Juma Mosque), where İbrahimoğlu was the head of the community (*imam*), on the grounds that it had been illegally occupied since 1992. But there is no doubt that the main reason behind this action was İbrahimoğlu's political activity. The ex-chairman of the State Committee of Work with Religious Associations (SCWRA), Rafik Aliyev claimed that İbrahimoğlu had abused his religious position for political purposes and also criticized him by explaining: 'You cannot be both a religious and a political leader' (Mosque Controversy Deepens in Azerbaijan, 2004). His

community was expelled from the mosque and could not pass registration at the SCWRA.

Therefore, İbrahimoğlu represents oppositional Islam. During my interview with him, I observed how he tried to propose a synthesis of religious and liberal democratic values. He stated that he does not support the Iranian model. His anti-governmental rhetoric was manifest, especially when he tried to explain the problem of religious freedom in Azerbaijan. He criticized state policy in the sphere of religious freedom and argued also that restrictions and abuses are not confined only to religious issues; the restrictions and abuses of freedoms are typical of an authoritarian state.

According to Altay Goyushov (2008), present-day Islamists in Azerbaijan do not represent historical and traditional religious ideas. There are imported religious ideas in society, such as the Iranian version of Shi'ism, Arabian-inspired Salafism and Turkish religious movements such as the Fethullah Gülen and Nurcular movements and the Naqshbandi Sufi order. Since the beginning of the 1990s, preachers from Turkish and Arabic Sunni groups have been coming into Azerbaijan. Among these the Gülen movement is without doubt the most successful one, which has the capacity to expand and integrate with Azerbaijani society. By comparison with its activities in Turkey's political scene, the Gülen movement is not active in Azerbaijan, or at least its influence in education, the media and business fields can be successfully camouflaged in terms of its political agenda.

Hacı Ramin, a member of the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan, explained that in the last decade of the twentieth century, society experienced a hunger for everything that was related to morality. The role of former government members who helped missionaries from Arabic countries in establishing their activities in the country should be also mentioned. This was one of the main reasons why Salafism has proliferated in Azerbaijan. One of the main symbols of the Salafist tradition in Azerbaijan is the Abu Bakr Mosque.[5] Its religious leader, Hacı Qamet Süleymanov, argued that the brutal policy against the Salafi community could fuel radicalization in society and as a result some radical forces could use this to win supporters (personal communication, Aug. 25, 2012). Personally, he and his community do not use religion as a propaganda tool, and they are against any kind of violence. But if the state behaves cruelly towards community members merely because of their beliefs or clothing, then this can prove counterproductive.

The official religious structure and the politics of religion

The Supreme Board of Caucasus Muslims (SBCM) forms the official religious hierarchy in Azerbaijan. Before 1989, it was called Spiritual Board of the Transcaucasia Muslims.[6] Since 1980, the head of this association is Şeyxulislam Hacı Allahşükür Paşazadə. The authority of the supreme board theoretically extends over all Muslims with Shi'a identity in the former Soviet republics, and as well as the Muslims with Sunni identity only in the Caucasian region. At the same time, Şeyxulislam Paşazadə is head of the High Religious Council of the Caucasian People, which was founded in 1993.

Among the general public, this organization has a poor image: it is seen as a remnant of Soviet power, and believers loathe the communist background of religious people in that state religious body. According to a research conducted by the Caucasus Barometer, 63 per cent of the population has trust in the religious institutions of Azerbaijan (Charles, 2010). In this context, the term "religious institutions" refers, most likely, not to the supreme board. Another survey conducted by the FAR Center also shows that only 4.1 per cent of respondents said that they felt they could trust the supreme board (Ismailzade, 2005).

In the early 1990s, Paşazadə tried to establish positive relationships with independent preachers and groups as well as with new religious organizations, not only in Azerbaijani society, but also in the Muslim societies of neighbouring countries. To increase his popularity, he even proposed to reintroduce the Arabic alphabet to Azerbaijan, but this move only damaged his authority (Goyushov, 2008). Paşazadə's attempts to extend his power over Muslims throughout the Caucasus were partially successful in the early 1990s. Recently, however, the North Caucasus religious leaders have started to criticize the function of Caucasus Muslim Board and its head for having become a political tool of the Azerbaijani state authorities. In addition, an All-Georgia Muslims Administration was created in Georgia in April 2011. The Muslims in this region had been governed by the SBCM since the Soviet period, but have now become independent from Azerbaijan.

The Republic of Azerbaijan regarded it appropriate to conduct a number of reforms on ensuring the freedom of state religion and the regulation of the relations between state and religion. One of the important reforms in the religious sphere was the creation of the above-mentioned SCWRA. It was established by Decree No. 512 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on June 21, 2001. The decree determined that the main duty of the committee was to create proper conditions for the implementation of Article No. 48 of the constitution, guaranteeing freedom of religious faith and to ensure control over the abidance with other legislative acts on the freedom of religious faith and to regulate more thoroughly the relations between the state and religious institutions. The other objectives of the SCWRA are to prevent the formation of an artificial environment for religious radicalism and to provide for religious education. Together with the SBCM, the SCWRA became responsible for regulating all religious authorities in the country. In fact, however, the supreme board lost its position as the main religious institution in Azerbaijan. All Muslim communities are still compelled by the law on religion to be under the control of this state-favoured institution, but the registration process of religious societies came under the authority of the newly founded committee. Although both religious bodies constitute government positions on religion, they are different in mandate and rhetoric. Cornell (2006) argues that the creation of the state committee was supposed to counterbalance the corrupt reputation of the supreme board.

On March 18, 2009, a national referendum approved a series of amendments to the constitution: two amendments limited the dissemination and propagandizing of religion. Additionally, on May 8, 2009, parliament passed an amended law on

the freedom of religion, signed by the president on May 29, 2009, which could result in additional restrictions on the system of registration for religious groups (International Religious Freedom Report, 2009). Article 18, Part 2 of the constitution was changed to read: 'The dissemination and propagandizing of religion (religious movements), humiliating people's dignity, and contradicting the principles of humanism are prohibited.' A new section was added to Article 48, which is called Part 5: 'No one shall be forced to express (to demonstrate) his or her religious faith and belief, to execute religious rituals or participate in religious ceremonies.' According to this new legislation, people holding foreign Islamic university diplomas are not allowed to acquire a nomination to be in charge of a registered mosque.

The Ministry of National Security is also one of the government bodies which deals with the radical movements unofficially. Without authorization, secret service officers have the right to prevent radical and illegal religious activities. A representative of the SCWRA argued that "Wahhabi/Salafist Muslims" and "radical Shi'ites" present the most significant political threats to the state (personal communication received from an official on the state committee, Aug. 15, 2012). Apart from these, there is a third group, called the "secret radicals." Described as a pro-Turkish group, they are weak and this is why they are spreading in secret. Paşazadə described a Turkish-based Nurcular movement as an extremist group and postulated it to limit its activities (Goyushov, 2008, p. 77). But in reality, the Nurchular movement represents the moderate type of Islam which is far removed from any extremist activity (Mamedov, 2012). Paşazadə's criticism of this movement was predictable. Rumours about Turkey's religiously oriented ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) connection with the Gülen and Nurchular movements, was one of the main reasons for fear among the Azerbaijani political elites, who regarded their activities in Azerbaijan as potentially dangerous.

The politicization of Islam

With independence, the transition to democracy and a multi-party system coming into effect from the beginning of 1990s, a period characterized by a politicization of religion in Azeri society also commenced. The post-Soviet religious policy can be divided into two phases: a liberalization followed by a restriction of religious rights. In the aftermath of the Soviet era, the secular political elites of the Republic of Azerbaijan realized that religion in general and Islam in particular offered various advantages to them in their struggle for popular support. Henceforth, religion became one of the major and integral features of the political parties' rhetoric. An appeal to religious symbols and traditions was seen as a useful political tool in efforts on the part of these parties to reinforce their legitimacy; for example, taking the oath on the Holy Qur'an by newly elected presidents during the inaugural ceremony, Heydar Aliyev's pilgrimage during his visit to Mecca as the first Azerbaijani political leader in 1994, the incorporation of religious holidays into the official calendar, and so on. Following independence, greater religious freedoms were granted. The Republic of Azerbaijan's Law on the Freedom

of Faith was adopted in 1992. According to this law, all national and external religious groups and communities were independent of the state. Also, religious communities obtained a lot of freedom of activity, which was comparable with Western European societies. Most significantly for the shape of religious life, the law guaranteed freedom of worship for both indigenous and foreign religious associations (Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the Freedom of Faith, 1992).

Still the political elites feared radical Islam, which might have hampered the difficult nation-state building process. Through introducing a policy of supporting a moderate form of Islam, they tried to prevent all political manifestations of a more radical one. The rationale behind this was that since there is demand, it is better to meet it through moderate and secular institutions. In official state discourse this was formulated in terms of keeping a distance from religious extremism.

But later, Azerbaijan resorted to more strict religious legislation. State policy began to change in the direction of assuming total control over religious activity. At the same time, Azerbaijan has been confronted with the problem of how to regulate religious activity and deal with new religious groups which have emerged by means of external support. These have included Muslim religious groups from Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, as well as non-Muslim religious groups. This was one of the reasons why Heydar Aliyev's period (1993–2003) was characterized by extraordinarily strict regulations against religious groups. During the period when political parties were required to renew their registration, the authorities refused to renew the registration of the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan. Officials cited the name of the party as a reason for this (Yunusov, 2004, p. 192). Some members of the party were accused of treason and of being Iranian spies, of sending young followers to Iran for military training, and also of preparing for an Islamic revolution. But the party leader denied these indictments, arguing that the aim of the party was always to strengthen the statehood of Azerbaijan and to achieve a unity of Muslims in the society (personal communication with a member of the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan, June 17, 2012).

The government banned not only the party but also its individual supporters from participating in the parliamentary elections in 2010 (Future of Azerbaijan, 2011). The government authorities arrested the chairman Hacı Mövsüm (Haji Movsum) and other members of the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan at the beginning of 2011 (Azerbaijani Islamic Party Members Arrested, 2011). The reason behind this arrest was probably Hacı Mövsüm's speech in which he criticized President Ilham Aliyev for shutting down mosques, banning the *hijab* and *adhān*, eventually demanding the resignation of the president by urging his supporters to rise up against the regime. The Islamic party is against any kind of relations with the US or Israel. According to one of the members of the party, the presence of these countries in Azerbaijan increases regional instability (personal communication with a member of the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan, June 17, 2012). The party is also against the cultural imperialism of the West, which from its point of view damages the cultural and religious values of Azerbaijan. This kind of ideological attitude, referring to Israel as Zionist and getting financial support from Azerbaijan's southern neighbour, connotes a distinct proximity of the party to Iran.

In 1996, the state addressed the activities of foreign religious missionaries, and the article of the 1992 law concerning the activities of foreign-based religious groups was changed. According to the amendment, foreigners were no longer allowed be active in the religious sphere and all religion-based groups and societies became answerable the supreme board. Later, the government demanded the re-registration of all religious communities. Salafist Muslims, Pentecostalists, Jehovah's Witnesses, other evangelical Christians and Hare Krishnas are the main religious groups which are considered to be non-traditional by the state authorities.

In recent years, there have been violations of religious freedom by the government. These violations include the closure of three mosques. The state committee officially claims that there is no pressure on Islamic communities by the government and it only intervenes in cases of illegitimate religious activity (personal communication, Aug. 15, 2012). There is a number of mosques that have been closed in several neighbourhoods of Baku in recent years: the Abu-Bakr Mosque was accused of promoting Wahhabi ideas; the *Cümə məscidi* (Juma Mosque) was not registered and its *imam* was arrested, because of his alleged dangerous radical religious views; Shahidlar Mosque, built with Turkish support at the beginning of the 1990s, was closed for repairs. On May 11, 2009, the authorities closed down a mosque located on an offshore drilling settlement, the Oily Rocks, for alleged safety reasons. On April 26, 2009, the police destroyed the Prophet Muhammad Mosque of the Yasamal District Religious Community. The Yasamal District Religious Community (a Muslim organization) had started construction of a community mosque in the summer of 2005, having acquired the necessary administrative permits from the district authorities as well as from the state committee and the supreme board. In October 2008, the district executive authority responsible for administration of the Yasamal region claimed that the construction of the mosque was illegal and ordered it to be stopped. Some local observers believe that the motivation behind the destruction was the acquisition of the land for commercial use; there was no indication that the mosque was targeted for ideological reasons. For its part, the state committee claimed the community was not acting in accordance with the decisions of the relevant authorities.

The abrupt closure of Turkish mosques in 2009 was obviously connected to Turkey's rapprochement with Armenia. It was an expression of displeasure with Ankara on the part of the government in Baku. İbrahimoğlu described the government's mosque closure policies as 'mosquophobia' (personal communication, Sept. 18, 2012). But state officials reject this opinion and argue that there is no reason to politicize the circumstances of these closures. More specifically, during the most recent parliamentary elections, the ex-chairman of the SCWRA said that some mosques were providing religious and dangerous propaganda against the security of the state and the government, and that this should be prevented (personal communication with R. Aliyev, Jan. 15, 2012). Hacı Ramin also criticized the state's approach to Islamic communities. Hacı Ramin argued that the government in Azerbaijan is violating the rights of Islamic communities in particular. By comparison with non-Muslim religious communities, Islamic organizations

incessantly face barriers which have been contrived to hamper their activities. For example, there are restrictions not only on the creation of religious media outlets, but also restrictions on presenting Islam in non-religious media. There was an Islamic programme called *Friday Conversations* on one of the secular TV channels, which after a very brief period was shut down. Hacı Ramin criticized the state policy of creating barriers during the official registration period of the Muslim communities, which was realized by the governmental religious authorities. Hacı Ramin mentioned that the prime movers behind such obstacles and restrictions in Azerbaijan are the "imperialist forces." By these he specifically meant Israel and the US. He added that if any member of an Islamic organization which applies for official registration is an opponent of Israeli or US policy, registration is impossible (personal communication, June 16, 2012). My interviewees, from the southern and northern parts of the country, also expressed similar kinds of critiques. From their point of view, Israel is behind this anti-religious policy in Azerbaijan. But to link such developments to Israel or any other Western country would not be right. Hacı Ramin was convinced that the government itself is interested in maintaining the secular image of the country and accordingly uses all possibilities to obliterate the root of religious radicalism in Azerbaijan. One widely practised propaganda method against Muslim religious organizations in Azerbaijan is the constant accusation that these Islamic communities are proxies of Iran, Turkey or Arabic countries. The main aim is to create suspicions about their activities among the population.

Another problem which is directly related to the politicization of Islam in Azerbaijani society is a ban on headscarves (*hijab*) in publicly funded schools. There is no law which directly prohibits the wearing of the *hijab*, but the Ministry of Education cites a law on education which regulates the clothing of students in school (Lomsadze, 2010). From time to time, there have been protests against an informal ban of the *hijab.* In the late of December 2010, on the Shi'ite Muslims' holy day of Ashura, there were initial protests, mainly in Baku and conservative suburb Nardaran. Two years later in October 2012, there was a renewal of demonstrations for the removal of the ban on Islamic-style headscarves in schools. Hacı İlqar characterized the *hijab* controversy as part of the government's Islamophobia; he predicted that if the current government cannot solve the problem of the *hijab* issue, a rise in emotional religious protests would be unavoidable.

Reactions to these protests among religious persons and politicians were varied. Azerbaijan's senior cleric, Paşazadə, argued that 'wearing the *hijab* was decided by God and has to be followed by Muslims,' but that 'laws cannot be violated, either' (Abbasov, 2011). The human rights chairperson of the national parliament, Rabiyat Aslanova, also supported the idea that the government does not interfere with religious freedom, but women's free choice of dress style should be their right only after reaching maturity (Abbasov, 2011). At the same time, among officials there is a view that permitting the wearing of the *hijab* in state schools might lead to the separation of schooling for boys and girls. Some officials explained that a number groups both inside and outside the country were organizing the protests. A total of 46 per cent of respondents in the survey supported the idea that

wearing the *hijab* in secondary school is not to be permitted; 40.2 per cent were neutral in their view on the problem. And 13.8 per cent expressed the opinion that the state has to respect a person's personal choice in this question (Political Islam in Azerbaijan, 2012).

Radical Islamic tendencies

Jean-Christophe Peuch (2004) argues that Islamic diversity in Azerbaijan makes it different from any other post-Soviet Muslim country. Only in Azerbaijan are there Turkish, Iranian and Arabic influences and models of Islam all at the same time. But, the lack of a strong national framework in the religious tradition of the country was one of the main reasons why all of these foreign religious influences were able get support from among the population and religious missionaries could attract people. All of these Islamic groups claim that only *they* represent the real significance of Islam. Cornell (2006, p. 9) also argues that these external influences have had a paramount importance in developing radical Islam in the country.

In Azerbaijan, there are religious fundamentalist groups which are engaged in changing the political structure, and in order to do this they support the use of military and violent methods. For these groups, secularism is considered to be the main rival of Islam. The early 2000s was a period when the authorities were particularly consistent in emphasizing the danger of the existence of radical Islamic movements in Azerbaijan; especially Salafi (Wahhabi) and pro-Iranian religious groups were on the agenda at that time.

Indeed, during the early years of independence, there was an invasion of Iranian clerics and missionaries in great numbers into all parts of Azerbaijan. Their aim has been to exert influence over the future of Islam in Azerbaijan. Raoul Motika (2001) explains Iranian missionary activities in the country as using the period of instability as an opportunity for creating the basis for further agitation and influence. One of the main bulwarks of radical Shi'a Islam in Azerbaijan is Nardaran. In the past ten years there have been a variety of protests against the regime, mainly involving demands for solving social and economic problems in the community. During one of those protests in 2006, a citizen and two policemen were killed. Subsequently, believing that an upsurge of religious radicalism in the community is connected directly to economic problems, the government has tried to alleviate the radical tendencies and prevent Nardaran from any external influences by putting into effect economic policies in the region.

The term *Vəhhabilik* (Wahhabism) entered the public discourse in the context of the first Russian-Chechen war of 1994–1996. With the beginning of the second Russian-Chechen war of 1999, a new Wahhabi expansion into Azerbaijan began. By 2003 there were 65 mosques which were controlled and ruled by Salafis. The rapidly increasing number of these mosques and their oppositional stance toward the ruling regime forced the government to persecute the Wahhabites. Government officials stated that a number of Arabic countries were interested in spreading radical Wahhabi ideology in Azerbaijan (Valiyev, 2005). According to the

ex-deputy minister of national security, Tofiq Babayev, the Wahhabi community attempted to mobilize active members into acts of terrorism in the country (Valiyev, 2005).

But probably the most important reason for this persecution was the events of September 11, 2001 in the US. Immediately after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the Azerbaijani government launched a campaign against the Salafis. Within a short period of time, all Salafi mosques were closed. The government authorities were obliged to avert the Wahhabi danger, which could threaten the unity of the country and might lead to terrorist acts in Azerbaijan. The Salafi community was criticized for being connected with illegal actions perpetrated under the guise of religious activities (Yeni Musavat*,* May 5, 2001). The aforementioned Abu Bakr Mosque was one of the main centres of the Salafi community and was associated with militarist and extremist religious groups in Azerbaijan. In 2008, there was a terrorist attack at the mosque and its *imam*, Hacı Qamet Suleymanov, was wounded. State authorities, including the head of the supreme board, Paşazadə, explained this as being the result of an internal struggle in the Salafi community (Report on Azerbaijan, 2008). But there was another version of events, according to which behind the terrorist attack there may be another group of fundamentalists: the Qutbist, or so called Havaridj group. The Qutbist community, named after Sayyid Qutb, is one of the religious Muslim groups in Azerbaijan which criticized Suleymanov's views. The Qutbist Muslims argued that the Salafi Muslims were mostly apolitical and they rejected any form of violent action against the state.

Hacı Ramin argued that although the Wahhabi organizations do not pose any major obstacles to religious unity in Azerbaijan, all the same Wahhabi religious and nationalist ideas create tensions in society. He gave as an example an incident which occurred during the aforementioned mosque attack, when a few Wahhabi media portals condemned Shi'a Muslims. Still, Hacı Ramin doubted that Wahhabism could damage the Sunni-Shi'a unity in Azerbaijan.

İbrahimoğlu expressed a very special opinion on the matter: he argued that radical Islam was created by the government because of its need to legalize the regulation of the religious situation, as well as to divert public attention from the violation of fundamental freedoms in the country (personal comment from Mr. Ibrahimoglu, June 18, 2012). The results of a survey show that 30.2 per cent of respondents expressed the opinion that the Wahhabi movement represents a radical and extremist ideology; 42.8 per cent said that extremist religious ideology is alien to the traditions of the country, and, therefore, the respondents expressed their negative attitude to Wahhabism. Only 2.6 per cent answered by arguing that the Wahhabi ideology strives for the purity of Islam (Political Islam in Azerbaijan, 2012).

The state is particularly suspicious of fundamentalist-oriented Muslims – especially those linked or suspected being linked to Iran and other Arab countries. The government appears to be fearful of losing control of traditional Islamic congregations if fundamentalist Islam gains greater regional influence. In 2000, Iran supported the militant religious groups Jeyshullah and Hezbollah; activists

were arrested and sentenced to prison. At the end of the 1990s, members of the religious group Gama-Al Islami, which was closely connected to Al Qaida, were arrested and extradited to Egypt. To prevent any kind of religious tension in the society, the government takes serious measures against the so-called terrorist and radical religious groups or communities, coercing them to respect the policies which have been implemented by the government. Although religious groups and movements of Turkish origin are not considered to be radical, the state has exerted strict control over their activities. In this context, the Azerbaijani government receives support from the Western countries, which are also not keen to see an arising of radical Islam in the country.

Conclusion

The pattern of religious revival has varied amongst the post-Soviet societies. There is consensus in the literature that Azerbaijan has been experiencing a religious resurgence since the period of *glasnost*. The particular case of Azerbaijan shows how religion more generally may cause system-threatening ruptures within a secular society. The complexity of the religious situation in Azerbaijan is connected to the process of state building, but it also should be mentioned that the nonexistence of any serious disputes between the Shi'a and Sunni communities in Azerbaijan is an important factor that counteracts the growth of radical Islam in the country.

During the early years of independence, the religious environment in the country can be described as having been unregulated and uncontrolled. Foreign religious groups and missionaries entered onto the social and political scene. As a consequence, there were changes of the constitution that undermined religious freedoms. But since the early 2000s, there have been mosque closures and reports of discrimination against worshippers based on their religious beliefs, largely conducted by local authorities who have detained and questioned worshippers without any legal basis and who have confiscated religious material.

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that more than 80 per cent of the population are in favour of a secular state. Only five per cent of respondents support establishing a religious state in Azerbaijan (Political Islam in Azerbaijan, 2012). According to the results of a poll called *Islam in Azerbaijan*, the absolute majority of the population is against religious radicalism, and it is a fact that neither fundamentalist Islam nor political Islam has any popular support in Azerbaijani society, so the religious processes in the society can be characterized as the revival of a moderate Islam. Generally speaking, such a religious revival is not directed against secularity in Azerbaijan. All of this could be explained in terms of the long history of secularism in Azerbaijan, which can be traced back to the ideology of Turkish nationalism and to European culture. Additionally, it should be noted that the state itself emphasizes tolerance toward other religions (although with some exceptions toward non-traditional religions).

Today, the politicization of Islam from below is much stronger than the politicization from above. An increased interest in Islam among the population in itself

does not pose any threat to either political stability or national security. But still there are small numbers of religious groups who represent and support radical religious ideas. They passionately oppose secularization and aim to introduce *Shari'a* into all spheres of life. There are a few examples in recent history of Muslim countries where the confrontation between religious movements and secular regimes have ended in disaster. The Azerbaijani official structures use the rhetoric of differentiating between "traditional Islam" and "dangerous Islam." Today, radical and extremist religious movements are hiding behind Islam. Therefore, to prevent the spread of radical religious ideas, the Azerbaijani government takes some legal and coercive measures, which at the same time limit the religious freedoms guaranteed by the constitution. To protect religious tolerance from the influence of radical communities, the government seeks to control the religious revival and political movements in the country. These policies end sometimes with the politicization of Islam from above.

Notes

1 The Constitution of Azerbaijan was adopted by popular referendum on November 12, 1995, and amended on August 24, 2002, and most recently on March 18, 2009; The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Chapter II, Article 7, http://azerbaijan.az/portal/General/Constitution/doc/constitution_e.pdf (Accessed Oct. 10, 2012).
2 The majority of Christians are Russian Orthodox whose identity tends to be based rather on culture and ethnicity than religion. The majority of the Armenian population lives in the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh. Other Christian religious groups are Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Baptists, Molokans, Seventh-day Adventists.
3 Survey entitled "Political Islam in Azerbaijan: realities and public opinion" by the Center for Strategic Studies (translation from Azeri to English is mine; E.I.).
4 The question, which was addressed to respondents, was about the level of belief in God. "Committed believers" are people who believe in God without doubt and are practising religion; "simply believers" are people who just simply believe and are not practising religion.
5 The Abu Bakr Mosque was founded by the Azerbaijani branch of a Kuwaiti organization "The Revival of Islamic Heritage" in 1998.
6 The first board, known as a Spiritual Board of the Transcaucasian Muslims, was created in 1872 in Azerbaijan by the decree of Alexander II.

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Part III

Religion, nationalism and education

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Introduction

Farda Asadov

According to John Dewey, society exists through a process of transmission quite as much as at the level of biological life. This transmission occurs by means of the communication of habits of doing, thinking and feeling from the older generation to the younger (Dewey, 1930). The accumulation, preservation and transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next are major functionalities of the education system in any society.

The turning points in the history of a people inevitably will bring about changes in educational content and systems. Consequently, the study of educational systems and policy, including the ways in which members of a society may be seen to have benefited from and responded to the services provided, can reveal much about the status of the identity of the people.

One such turning point was the Russian conquest of the contemporary states of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and the inclusion of their lands into the Russian Empire. The consequence was a remarkable shift in the political and cultural conditions of the South Caucasus. Groups of advanced intellectuals emerged in these three nations as part of a move to articulate an aspiration to modernity. Obviously, they addressed the challenges of education in their respective nations. In the preceding centuries, the autonomous Christian churches of Armenia and Georgia had maintained a religious educational system based on the respective national languages and historical traditions of those countries. Azerbaijan had come to this point having been a part of the wider Muslim world, which did not recognize formal organizational borders when it came to Islamic religious institutions; thus, religious schools and educational institutions did not focus on values, symbols and heroes which might distinguish Azerbaijani Turks from other Muslims.

A demand for secular education emerged in response to the needs of the Russian colonial administration. In pursuit of a general trend to increase the presence of Russian culture, language and education in the South Caucasus, the Russian administration sought to eradicate other foreign influences – Persian and Arabic – from the education system in Azerbaijan. There was a brief period when the interests and the goals of a growing nationhood on the one hand and the Russian empire on the other temporarily coincided; subsequently, the religious and national education systems have started increasingly to drift apart (Isakhanli, 2006, p. 91). In Georgia and Armenia, where the church used to be a custodian and transmitter

of the Georgian and Armenian national identities, the Russian Orthodox Church wanted to influence and even organizationally subjugate the national churches.

Armenia and Georgia previously have created their own unique alphabets, in which the primary religious texts in their national languages have been translated. National alphabets functioned as symbols of identity, but as a consequence they also strengthened the links between the religious congregations and the concept of nationhood. In Azerbaijan, the Arabic alphabet used before the Soviet period did not entail a national symbolism, and, therefore, the reform of the alphabet became an important part of the overall nationalization reforms, with a significant impact on education.

The Soviet period from 1920 onwards featured three prevailing trends in education: the rejection of religion and the religious segment in nationhood; the promotion of communist ideology; and Russification. The collapse of the Soviet Union immediately revitalized the opposing trends. On the other hand, membership in the Council of Europe and the extension of European neighbourhood policies pertaining to the EU to the South Caucasus have signalled the entrance of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia into a new political space which nevertheless retains many unresolved issues from the past and uncertainties with respect to the future. How do the new political realities, the Soviet legacy and the growing sense of religious identity clash on the battlefield of the renovated national education system?

The authors of this section, "Education and Nation," do not aspire to cover the whole spectrum of this question. Each of the contributors has chosen only a single issue through which to study national identity at the cutting edge of educational reforms. These research topics can only contribute small pieces to the mosaic of competing values and ideas about contemporary identities which pertains in the South Caucasus nations. However, having represented views from three countries, each of the research projects is nevertheless dealing with the same factors of influence on education: a) youth aspirations for renovated identity; b) government policy and interests of dominant elite; and c) the revival of religions and the increasing gravity of faith-based communities.

The research projects documented in this section have a few features in common. They include comparative analyses of the two phases of independent statebuilding; namely, the pre-Soviet and post-Soviet eras (Tatia Kekelia and Nigar Gozalova), and a view of religious identity as seen through the prism of national identity (Tatia Kekelia, Satenik Mkrtchyan, and to some extent Nigar Gozalova). However, the three chapters vary in the extent to which they address the full range of challenges which were laid down in the broad concept of this volume – to study democracy and human rights from the perspective of religious and national identity dynamics. Gozalova's study has an obvious connection with human rights concerns and women's right to education in particular. Kekelia has taken on a research project which deals with two competing models of contemporary Georgian identity and which monitors the educational sector as a scene in which these contesting social viewpoints play out. The research by Mkrtchyan is crucially located within the perspective of the role of education in the construction of national identity: she shows how citizens, the government and religion-driven

communities interact in the "reintegration" of religion into post-Soviet education in Armenia.

What also brings these three investigations together is a shared methodology. Comparisons between the first phase of the construction of nation-states, interrupted in 1920, and the second phase, resumed in 1991, demonstrate the continuity of the process. Government policy and the interests of the ruling political elites were tracked in the presentation of the relevant legislation and by-laws. The actual effect of educational reforms has been set out by means of statistical data (Gozalova) and public opinion surveys (Kekelia), and in all three research projects, citizens' responses have been highlighted by means of the documentation of interviews conducted as part of the research.

What can be said as to the combined value of the three different research projects represented in this section? After the collapse of the Soviet secularism, religions have started to regain lost ground in steering national transformation. Some contemporary scholars argue that it is indeed the role of religion to provide the values which delineate national identity. This role is not universal, but it does apply to a great variety of societies, including secular ones. To take an example of the state of Israel, national symbols used to be secular manifestations of religious symbols, and the secular ideology continued to contain at least the Messianic idea of Judaism. Consequently a new, religion-based national identity is becoming increasingly widespread to remove the intrinsic contradictions between an articulated secularism and the historically religious origins of core integrative values (Weissbrod, 1983, p. 188). Is this also the case in the nations of the South Caucasus?

As some of the most recent research has proposed, religious identity and national identity can be seen to be the opposite sides of the same coin. In a country with a majority religion, people define themselves in terms of this shared religion. But in countries split between different religions, religious identity becomes less important, and so people begin to identify themselves in terms of their shared nationality (Rees, 2012 [online]).

Taking the three leading nations of the South Caucasus as a whole, the region is religiously deeply divided. Findings of a Georgian case study justify the assertion that religious diversity tends to enhance secular national identity: in the nineteenth century, Ilia Chavchavadze referred to the Muslim Adjarians as the "brothers" of the Christian Orthodox Georgians, whereas Ilia II, the Georgian Orthodox patriarch, blamed the ethnic Georgians of a Muslim congregation in Turkey for lacking creativity and failing to contribute to cultural progress (see Kekelia's contribution).

The spread of Islam in the South Caucasus has gone hand-in-hand with the expansion of Turkic ethnicity. However, after a rise in national feeling, the resulting conflict of identity has become conspicuous. Islam actually does not recognize national boundaries. Similarly, the religious education system has never served any particular national interests in the Muslim world. The majority of Azerbaijani Muslims – up to 70 per cent – subscribe to the Shi'a doctrine, which actually brings them closer to the Iranians, but the Sunni congregations are both more visible and powerful. The shared values might more easily be composed of

secular national sentiments which bring Azerbaijanis closer to their Turkish ethnic relatives than the Shiite Iranians. Nigar Gozalova's analysis of statistical data on women graduating from secondary schools and gaining admission to higher education indicated the lowest percentage of higher school admissions for the southern regions, where the Persian-speaking minorities live and the level of religiosity is the highest in the country. In the western and northern regions, the percentage of women's access to higher education is even higher than that of men.

The significance of the Armenian Church in the concept of nationhood is most evidently rooted in the idea that Armenians are a nation chosen by God and were the first nation to declare Christianity as their state religion. "Faith and religion" are among the basic values of the Armenian national identity as it is presented in secondary schools. However, the challenges and realities of the modern world have certainly diminished the significance of a "chosen nation" idea, which is not present in the educational programmes of Armenian schools (see Mkrtchyan's contribution).

The Christian churches in Georgia and Armenia have long been perceived as institutions that have preserved the unique identities of their people. However, a higher level of religious and ethnic diversity in Georgia has led to an emphasis on the value of a secular national identity to serve as a core value for the consolidation of the nation. In recent years, this issue has been revitalized with the introduction of competing values of democracy and European integration.

Having played an even more outstanding role in national history in the centuries during which the country has lacked a national state, the Armenian Church is largely perceived of as the unopposed guardian of national identity, which is embedded in key historical events and legends. The absence of any significant religious diversity within Armenian ethnicity has made the role of religion almost indispensible in producing a value of common nationhood. However, Georgian society is substantially ahead of Armenia when it comes to the amount of trust placed in the church institutions: according to a survey, in Armenia those who 'fully trust' or 'somewhat trust' the Church constitute 71 per cent of the respondents; whereas in Georgia this figure reaches 87 per cent (CRRC, 2011).

Interestingly, the corresponding figures for Azerbaijan present a radically different picture: only 19 per cent of respondents evince full confidence in their religious institutions, whilst 28 per cent say that they somewhat trust them, making only 47 per cent altogether (ibid.). Indeed, in compliance with such survey results, religious institutions are much less visible in the public sphere and the education system in Azerbaijan. The specifics of the presence of Islam in international policy, controversies concerning the relationship of Azerbaijan with Muslim countries and the conflicting values of the national Turkic and the religious identities are some of the major reasons for such attitudes.

We should assume that national governments in the South Caucasus have not been meeting their peoples' expectations in public services, social welfare, peace and war resolutions, freedoms and aspirations for democracy. This might increase the levels of trust in religious institutions in Georgia, where the church and the government evidently have been competing for influence over the society and by

the same token might reduce the percentage of support for the Armenian Church, which historically has maintained a more formal and harmonious relationship with the government.

The growth of significance of religions is not about a revitalization of their pasts. Whether or not religion can dispense values which can be shared while the church contributes to national integration depends on their ability to move forward, not dragging people back. 'Today's religious forces are different. They are often more a matter of personal motivation than of toeing a line, following a scripture, or obeying a leader' (Marshall, 2011, [online]). It is an open question as to whether the thinking of the clergy and religious organizations in the South Caucasus can adequately respond to such global trends. And that is why a struggle/interaction between secularism and religion continues, although with varying intensity, in the sphere of education of all the South Caucasus countries.

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7 Building Georgian national identity

A comparison of two turning points in history

Tatia Kekelia

Having been part of the Soviet Union for 70 years, Georgia has been going through a transitional period since 1991 and is still searching for its identity. Twenty years have passed, but the controversy about identity is getting more and more intense. Soviet values, norms and systems of relationships are being denigrated, while new ones have not yet emerged. Since the '90s, the growing religiosity of the population has allowed the Georgian Orthodox Church (hereafter the GOC) to take an active role in the process of identity formation: its formula for a national identity includes Orthodoxy as an integral element.

In order to understand the situation, we should take history into account. In the later decades of the Soviet regime, when the severe repression of the GOC was over, the church staff was totally replaced and heavily infiltrated by the KGB. The government changed its aggressive policy towards the GOC, "reconciling" itself with the church and tolerating its existence while maintaining strict control over it. Churches continued to function but were subordinated to government control. Today the GOC is independent, but in the transition period from the totalitarian to a post-totalitarian system it has remained unchanged. Thus, the twenty-first century GOC differs essentially from the one which pertained in pre-Soviet times.

The Soviet period gave birth to values which formed the religious interpretation of national identity and the association of religion with nostalgically viewed "traditional Georgian" values. However, the complex sets of values from the Soviet, pre-Soviet and earlier times are extensively mixed up and not historically relevant. This is especially true regarding the place of religion in the formation of the Georgian understanding of national identity. The question which needs to be asked is the following: Was religion as present and influential in constructing the Georgian nationality as it is actually thought to be? How was the Georgian nationality created and who were the actors? This study analyses the place of the GOC in the process of constructing national identity and examines the methods it uses to spread its ideas.

Theoretical background and methodology

This study draws upon Benedict Anderson's classic definition of a nation: an "imagined" community where people share a sense of belonging with other people

they do not know personally. Anderson explains this in terms of industrialism and capitalism, stressing the role of "print-capitalism" in creating national consciousness: 'These fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community' (Anderson, 1996, p. 44).

The classic theory of secularization predicted that the processes of modernization, rationalization and bureaucratization would ultimately push religion out into the private domain. However, the early 1990s saw a rise in the importance of religion throughout the world, which represented the empirical basis for rethinking the old theory. An illuminating example is provided by José Casanova, who distinguishes three different meanings of secularization: 1) the functional differentiation and emancipation of secular spheres; 2) the decline of religion; and 3) the privatization of religion, i.e. its marginalization in the modern world (1994, p. 211). Accordingly, any process of desecularization can be examined at these three levels: 1) secular/worldly spheres becoming religiously influenced; 2) the rise of religion; and 3) the deprivatization of religion – religion moving to the public sphere in modern secular societies. The new theory suggests that today the world is as religious as ever before and the idea of the inevitability of secularization was a mere illusion of the Enlightenment. In spite of the critique, defenders of the secularization theory have claimed that instead of disappearing, religion becomes equal to other institutions and ceases to present itself as the only bearer of truth. This means that religion loses influence over other spheres of life, such as politics, art, education and so on (Zedania and Ghaghanidze, 2009, p. 10).

This chapter consists of two parts: one dealing with late nineteenth and early twentieth century nationalism and another examining the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries; these two periods can be seen as turning points in the history of Georgian nation-building, and, therefore, they deserve to be compared.

For the era spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, my sources are articles from the early Georgian newspapers (*Iveria, Mnatobi, Sasoflo Gazeti, Tsiskari*). During that period, the press was the only way to spread ideas, and it also constituted the predominant arena for public discussion. As for the period between the 1990s and the 2010s, I base my findings mostly on the results of the research project 'The Role of the Orthodox Church in the Formation of Georgian National Identity.'[1] This research used several quantitative and qualitative data, which give us a relatively complete picture of the issue. First, we used existing quantitative surveys: the World Values Survey (2008), the Caucasus Barometer (conducted by The Caucasus Research Resource Centers on a yearly basis), and the European Values Study (2008). These surveys illustrate people's attitudes towards religion. Second, our research was based on a study of the Georgian press for the years 1999 and 2008–2010. This is a field where the GOC's activities in the public sphere can be seen, as well as the ideology that the GOC intentionally disseminates. Third, in the second half of 2011, we conducted in-depth interviews with two groups: clerics from different regions of Georgia and Georgian politicians. This method helped to sort out the perceptions (both normative and descriptive) of priests and politicians regarding the role of the GOC in the formation of national identity and

the relations between the GOC and the state, as well as their level of tolerance towards other religious and ethnic groups. When describing the GOC's stance, I am referring to the position of the patriarchate, which is at least nominally shared by all the priest respondents, although their personal positions may sometimes be different and even be articulated contradictorily. Fourth, the project included the study of religious movements in Georgia: religious movements represent specific groups of people (mainly composed of non-clerical figures) who unite as associations and set as their main goal the defence of Orthodox Christianity. Overall, my study takes into account the main institutional actors in forging national ideology (mostly the GOC and the state of Georgia) and does not examine in depth the lay (non-clerical) movements and forces of the twenty-first century; these latter are presented only through quantitative surveys and partly from religious movements. All the documents, except the quantitative surveys, are in Georgian.

Georgian national ideology in the nineteenth century

In the nineteenth century Georgia was part of the Russian Empire. It was precisely during this period that Georgian national ideology first started to emerge (Suny, 2003, p. 114). In the 1860s, a group of young educated men, known as the "Georgian Enlighteners," as well as the *Tergdaleulebi* ("those who have drunk the river Tergi" – meaning the people who went abroad to Russia to study), having returned to their motherland from studying in St. Petersburg, decided to create a unified sense of Georgian solidarity across the different provinces (*guberniyas*) which hitherto had separated Georgians. According to the Georgian scholar Gigi Tevzadze, 'We can say with quite a high historical precision when this ideology, which was quite developed and established in the Georgian elite, started to transform into a larger identity. . . . This identity started to emerge in the second half of the nineteenth century – at the time when first Georgian newspapers were published whilst the beginning of the transformation of an ideology into an identity is directly linked with the establishment of "The Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians" and the step-up of the society's activity.' (2009, p. 16).

Since 1811, the Georgian Church was downgraded to the status of exarchate within the Russian Orthodox Church (reporting directly under the Holy Synod) and, like the latter, was subordinated to the imperial state. This fact brought a significant change to the importance of religion. Religious services no longer being conducted in Georgian, people lost their link to the Orthodox Church, which until then had been an important defining feature of national identity. Documents of that time report a dramatic decline in churchgoing in Georgia (Mchedlidze, 1911, pp. 4–5, 11; Vazha-Pshavela, 1986, pp. 675–676). The Russian government's policy of Russification was an attempt to assimilate the Georgian people into Russia by means of cultural conquest and fought against 'the unifying force of the Georgian people – the Georgian language . . . [n]aturally, this struggle was against the two Georgian cultural hearths – educational institutions and the church as the fundamental bases of the Georgian language'[2] (Apridonidze, 2004, p. 14). This was strongly opposed by the elite – among them were some religious figures struggling

for Georgian national ideals, rather than specifically Orthodox ones. One good example is Father Anton Kekelia: he opened a few state schools, a court, a bank, and that important agent of nationalization, the post office-telegraphic department (Apridonidze, 2004, p. 5).

As another Georgian scholar, Giga Zedania, notes, this first national struggle was totally secular and 'was decisive for the development of Georgian culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Without it, the cultural integration of the linguistically and religiously extremely diverse populations of Georgia would have been far more difficult, if not impossible' (2011, pp. 123–124). Religious confession had been a crucial factor in defining a person's identity (for example, Catholics were called "French," etc. and only Orthodox Christians were called "Georgians"), and, therefore, the *Tergdaleulebi* tried to unite people regardless of their confession. Ilia Chavchavadze, also known as the Father of Nation, called Muslim Adjarian Georgians "our brothers," and in doing so, he urged religious tolerance among people and fought for their integration. In his letter, "Ottoman Georgia," we read: 'In our history, there is no precedent that Georgians wanted to oppress the faiths of others. Armenians, Jews, even Muslims living among us cannot blame us. . . . We are not afraid of the presence of different religions in the country. Georgians who were crucified for their religion do know the value of other religions . . . we are not afraid of the fact that our brothers who live in Ottoman Georgia believe in Mohamed' (Chavchavadze, 1877, p. 3).

This first national ideology in Georgia was oriented towards modernity. From the very beginning, the "fathers of the nation" were trying to modernize the existing culture, as they believed that the process of unification of the people into one nation was hindered by Georgian patriarchal traditions. As a modern national culture, this was to integrate the different regions and social classes into a standardized culture to provide a basis for a united Georgian nation (Reisner, 2009, p. 44).

The most significant change in their ideology can be expressed in the notions of "Fatherland, Language, and Faith" – which became a famous slogan. These notions were given a modern rendition by Ilia Chavchavadze: the "Fatherland" becoming the territory in which Georgian-speaking people lived (rather than the Russian Empire as a whole), "Language" becoming the right and property of the whole nation (instead of only the elite) – corresponding to the "national print-language" as used by Anderson (1996, p. 46), and "Faith" no longer being restricted to Orthodox Christians only, so as to include non-Orthodox Georgians into the Georgian nation too.

Nineteenth-century public figures actively called for general education, work and a striving for the public good and harshly criticized those who were inactive and indifferent towards their neighbours, society or the public good. Preaching on the importance of education emphasised it as a way of keeping up with modernity: 'The new life brings about new needs and knowing those needs requires education. . . . Without it (education), we are as useless in this time as a broken ploughshare to plough land' (The Rural Paper, 1869b, p. 6). To achieve a well-developed society, it was believed that education and work were necessary, being the key to improved living conditions, success and happiness (Bishop Gabriel, 1868, p. 4;

Janashvili, 1869, p. 6; The Rural Paper, 1869a, p. 5). Besides, education was thought to be crucial for national freedom too: '[e]conomic security alone does not guarantee freedom to a nation, unless the nation is equipped with general mental maturity, education and knowledge' (Vazha-Pshavela, 1986, p. 762). And indeed, this was the time when great efforts were made to promote literacy and to open schools all over the country.

Religious nationalism at the turn of the century: Intolerance, isolation and nostalgia

The 70 years of the Soviet period extinguished the national spirit of the *Tergdaleulebi*. Instead, a new Georgian national spirit started to emerge from the late 1970s. This nationalism emphasized the importance of "traditions" (stated as vaguely as possible) and Orthodox Christian religion – the GOC, becoming independent in 1943, was the only institution that served as a link to the glorious days of the "independent Georgian past." Moreover, after the dissolution of the USSR, when Georgia underwent a critical economic crisis and witnessed corruption in all the institutions of power, the GOC appeared to be the only institution that had survived unchanged. A little later, the Rose Revolution in November 2003 brought into power a new political elite – the "United National Movement" (which was the governing party until October 2012); known for being "Western-oriented," it consisted of young people (in their 20s and 30s) and was promising to bring significant progress to the country. Quite similarly to the *Tergdaleulebi* of the nineteenth century, this group adopted a Western policy and has been trying to implement civil consciousness based on the principle of the equality of all citizens (regardless their religion or ethnicity) and human rights. As a result, the twenty-first century in Georgia began with two major contrasting types of nationalisms: civic nationalism – also referred to as "revolutionary" nationalism (Zedania, 2011) – which was shaped by the government of Georgia, and religious nationalism, which is led by the GOC.

The strength of religious nationalism has been growing gradually. According to the latest studies, 67.6 per cent of the Georgian population has a great deal of confidence in churches, while 26.6 per cent has quite a lot of confidence (World Values Survey, 2008 [online]). Moreover, Patriarch Ilia II holds unconditional and unquestioned authority not only in society but within the GOC, too. An archpriest from Mtskheta-Tbilisi Diocese declared: 'I trust my Catholicos Patriarch, his spiritual wisdom and political experience . . . I am very concerned about the inner condition of whoever did not listen to him. How can they sleep at night?! These people do not know how dangerous it is to disobey the patriarch.' In saying this, the archpriest not only called for unconditional obedience to the patriarch but also reflected the existing predisposition for this in society as a whole.

At the turn of twenty-first century, the GOC encourages isolation by propagandizing the idea of Georgia's uniqueness with the argument that Georgia is the "Mother of God's allotment" (Mamaladze, 2008). It is a point of pride that the GOC left the World Council of Churches on May 20, 1997, and that all agreements with "heretics" were abolished in 1998 (Didebulidze, 1999). The World Values Survey

reveals an issue of trust towards people of different (non-Georgian Orthodox) religions: only 3 per cent of the Georgian population trusts them completely and 36.1 per cent trust them a little (2008 [online]). Ilia II himself assesses 'the massive introduction of other religions' as a very dangerous problem, against which the state needs to take 'decisive measures' (Giorgadze and Tarkashvili, 1999–2000). Moreover, 81.1 per cent of Georgian respondents agree to the statement that there is only one true religion and no other is a bearer of a share of the truth (European Values Study, 2008 [online]). A journalist concludes that '[i]f no other religion apart from Orthodox Christianity manages to be installed in Georgia, then its territorial integrity will also be secured, whereas where another religion manages to set foot, the danger of losing the territory will arise' (Tarkashvili, 1999b, p. 25).

In an interview, when the patriarch was asked about the role of Orthodox Christianity in forging the Georgian nation's consciousness, he replied: 'Our nation has internalized Orthodoxy into its entire essence; Georgian nationality and Christianity have become identical concepts' (Giorgadze and Tarkashvili, 1999–2000). Later, in 2004 he said during a sermon: '[it] is known that more than 5 million Georgian people live in Turkey. They are Muslims and have become so narrow-minded because of this religion that they have not created anything over the last few centuries. By contrast, in spite of being constantly involved in wars and conflicts, in spite of never having had a peaceful time, Georgian Orthodox man has always been creating marvels – and he still does' (Patriarchate of Georgia, 2004a).

In the opinion of the GOC, it is perfectly acceptable to have any kind of relation with people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, except religious ones. This view is based on the idea that salvation can be achieved only through Orthodoxy. However, some respondents have taken a softer line: for example, a monk from Mtskheta-Tbilisi Diocese says: 'What do I know? . . . The Lord does not omit to value anything a man does, but there are greater and lesser chances.' Another respondent, an archpriest from the same diocese, is even appalled: '[h]ow can I be insolent enough to touch upon the issue of salvation of anyone, no matter what ethnic and religious background they have! . . . This is not an issue that man decides. I cannot send anyone to hell.' An archimandrite from Akhaltsikhe and Tao-Klarjeti Diocese explained that '[a]ccording to the Bible, the Father God has many refuges.' One respondent expressed his confusion due to contradictory sources: '[t]he Holy Fathers have said clearly that people of other confessions would go to hell. On the other hand, Paul the Apostle said that everyone would be judged according to his faith. Thus I cannot tell you the answer' (Archpriest, Mtskheta-Tbilisi Diocese).

The majority of priests affirm that the citizens of Georgia with different ethnic or religious backgrounds should be considered as full-fledged citizens. However, some of them also affirm (contradictorily) that a Georgian should necessarily be Orthodox and share the idea of a third category which clearly states, as does a priest from Alaverdi Diocese, that 'the terms "Georgian" and "Orthodox" have always been and will always be inseparable. If we split them, there will always be problems on various issues, thus they have to be united. Just as a person is the harmony of body and soul, the subsistence of a nation is its faith, and it is

intolerable to split them.' An archpriest from Zugdidi and Tsaishi Diocese gave a more detailed explanation:

> Unfortunately, there exists among us the atheist attitude according to which a person cannot be a citizen of Georgia if he/she is not Georgian [by ethnicity, T.K.]. This is not right. There were Azeri and Armenians in the old times too, but the relationships were normal, they used to live normally – although they were not called Georgians, they were citizens of the country. This should not oppress them anyhow, and they should not feel inferior for this reason. On the contrary, I think if you call an Armenian "Armenian", this is a matter of his dignity. If I were living in Russia and were called "Russian," I would really feel humiliated. I would be Georgian there too, like here.
>
> (Interview, October 2, 2011)

Nevertheless, even those respondents who share the abovementioned opinion have a different attitude toward places such as Javakheti and Marneuli which are being densely populated by ethnically non-Georgians. They think these regions present a national risk, and this notion was well articulated by an Archimandrite from Akhaltsikhe and Tao-Klarjeti Diocese: 'They [Armenians, T.K.] try to execute the interests of their country in our country. . . . they just live here and try to unite with their homeland together with the places where they reside. They do not consider Georgia as their homeland' (Interview, October 1, 2011).

As for the broader position of the GOC, we can point to its generally anti-globalist orientation. It views westernization and globalization (and therefore both NATO and the EU) as forced processes which break the bounds of nationality, faith, traditions and culture. It is declared that 'the whole Orthodox world is threatened by globalization' (Giorgadze, 1999a) and consequently, by the West: '[t]he West demagogically uses the notions of freedom, equality and justice, depriving them from their true meaning' (Tsutskiridze, 1999). In general, "the West" is viewed as an unspiritual domain, focused only on physical salvation (Patriarchate of Georgia, 2004b). Western values include 'entertainment, freedom – which often ends in freedom from morality – and, most importantly, debauchery' (Giorgadze, 1999a). No wonder the Georgian Patriarch disapproves of studying abroad (Civil Georgia, 2010c). Just like other Orthodox churches, the GOC thinks that if there should be unification, it must be *within* Orthodox Christianity 'without any dogmatic or conceptual compromise . . . Orthodoxy has nothing to compromise' (Giorgadze, 1999b).

In the eyes of the present GOC, modern values represent a danger because they distance people from Christian teachings (Tarkashvili, 1999a) and directly threaten Orthodoxy. The weapon Orthodoxy uses to combat modernity is a nostalgia for earlier, more "traditional" times. It is contrasted with modernity as its denunciator. An archpriest from Mtsketa-Tbilisi Diocese complains: '[u]nfortunately, men today are adjusting to European style and forgetting their language, faith and traditions . . . Has anyone ever heard that, in the times of the kings in Georgia, religions were enjoying equality?' (Interview, July 30, 2011)

The Orthodox Church sees the way to get back to the "idyllic past" in a faithfulness to the old way of life, as opposed to the modern way. This goes to such extent that part of the clergy is for restoring monarchy in Georgia. They think that the king would protect Orthodoxy and the threatened Georgian traditions and, therefore, it is necessary to establish a constitutional monarchy, but some respondents also state that the conditions are not favourable yet. They even fear that a revival of the monarchy would be dangerous. As an archpriest from Zugdidi and Tsaishi Diocese says, 'The king needs to be prepared morally and spiritually. I think, unfortunately for us – and hard as it may be to hear – today we are in the phase of decadence, and this will continue for years' (Interview, October 2, 2011).

Somehow defying the latter respondent's despair, recent surveys (the World Values Survey 2008 and the Caucasus Barometer 2008–2011) suggest that modern values have not arrived in Georgia yet. The reason for this are historical: the Soviet era was a stranger to such basic principles of modernity as the notions of private life, individual freedoms, demythologization and rationalization.

Religion in the public sphere

Since the late 1990s, the GOC has been interpreting public events and fighting to implement its ideas in the public sphere. The famous slogan by Ilia Chavchavadze, "Fatherland, Language, Faith," has also been interpreted religiously – for example, Archbishop Nikoloz of Bodbe suggests that patriotism is fulfilled only in religion and that Ilia Chavchavadze has probably borrowed his slogan from Grigol of Khandzta, a Georgian Orthodox monk living at the turn of the eighth and ninth centuries (Shevardnadze, 1999).

In 2002, the state and the GOC signed the Constitutional Agreement (Concordat), since which the GOC has been legally backed by the state. This document, acknowledging the special role of the GOC in Georgian history, grants it certain privileges in decision-making as well as economically. According to this agreement, 'The State and Church shall be authorized to make agreements on joint-interest fields, and take the appropriate action for their implementation. . . . Ecclesiastics shall be exempt from the draft,' and, 'The State shall acknowledge material and moral damage sustained by the Church during the loss of state independence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (especially in the period from 1921–1990). Being the factual owner of a proportion of stolen property, the State shall take responsibility to partially compensate material damage' (Patriarchate of Georgia, 2002).

Between 2003 and 2012, religious movements and the clergy got more actively involved in public life. For example, in May 2010, two religious movements (the Orthodox Parents' Union and the Public Orthodox Movement), protested against the presentation of a young writer's book[3] at Ilia State University. In reaction to this, a peaceful demonstration was held to defend freedom of expression, but the members of the religious movement, among them priests, attacked the demonstrators, using verbal and physical violence (Bukia, 2010). The police did nothing to stop the aggression. The opposition between religious movements and social groups continued on the independent TV-channel *Kavkasia* (the Caucasus) in the

form of live debates, and again the members of the Orthodox movement were aggressive, this time towards the journalists too. They insulted them and damaged the studio. The police responded and arrested the eight aggressors, who were members of the movement and all lay people. The next day, Ilia II awarded Davit Isakadze, an archpriest involved in these confrontations, 'with a decorated pectoral cross and the right to wear the mitre for, as he put it, "his service to welfare of our nation and the Church"' (Civil Georgia, 2010a). A week later, the GOC called on the authorities 'to "promptly" adopt a law, which would "defend religious feelings" and "defend the population from indecency"' (Civil Georgia, 2010b). The patriarchate reported Ilia II's words: 'the struggle against national values, as well as against the Georgian Orthodox Church has been ongoing for several years already' (Civil Georgia, 2010b; Patriarchate of Georgia, 2010).

Ecclesiastic respondents were asked their opinion about declaring Orthodox Christianity as the state religion in Georgia. The most typical answer implied that it was undesirable, as the church would lose its autonomy, having become one of the state ministries. Besides, the government did not embody, as an archpriest from the Batumi and Lazeti Diocese said, Orthodox values:

> Orthodox Christianity was the state religion in the Byzantine Empire. The Emperor was Orthodox and was viewed as a bishop. He was considered to be the defender of the Empire's interests, the Orthodox Christian traditions, Christian values, and he himself followed the Holy Scriptures and the teachings of the Church. In such a case it was acceptable for the Church to represent a state religion, but in the case when the government is not inspired with these values and is not interested in the Church's teachings and canonical law, it is unacceptable to declare Orthodox Christianity as state religion.
>
> (Interview, October 2, 2011)

Although the GOC disapproves of state interference in church affairs, it does not think that the church should similarly abstain from interfering in state affairs. As an archimandrite from the Akhaltsikhe and Tao-Klarjeti Diocese says, '[w]illingly or not, the church participates in secular life' (Interview, October 1, 2011). An archpriest from the Batumi and Lazeti Diocese gave a longer explanation:

> For the state, the church is the soul of a living body. The soul strengthens it, enlightens it, and consolidates it spiritually and morally. [. . .] The state cannot and should not interfere in church life. [. . .] Now as regards the interference of the church in state institutions: I am an ecclesiastic, a son of this country and a citizen of this state. [. . .] Thus we absolutely have the right to ask our state, our government and its institutions, what are they doing for the prosperity of our country, what laws are they creating, which political course do they choose to drive our country – is it for our wellbeing or not.
>
> (Interview, October 5, 2011)

In addition, some Georgian politicians agree with the clergy and think that the state should not interfere in church affairs. A respondent from the Georgian

Labour Party says: 'the only kind of relationship I recognize is that the state asks the church for advice' (Interview, October 10, 2011).

Religion in education

Recent surveys have uncovered a fact that distinguishes Georgia from other post-Soviet countries: the most religious group in Georgia is composed of young people with a higher education, living in the capital (CRRC Georgia, 2008, 2009, 201, 2011). This could be explained by the fact that, unlike elsewhere in the former Soviet republics, publicly funded schools in Georgia throughout the 1990s as well as in early 2000s were extensively (though informally) imbued with the Orthodox religion. It was precisely in the 1990s that teaching religion was introduced in state schools. Later, in April 1999, through the efforts of the Orthodox Parents' Union, the subject "Religion and Culture" was removed from the curriculum for the reason that 'the textbook dedicated quite a vast amount of space to the teaching of other religions, which, according to priests, might confuse the child's mind' (*Weekly Times*, 1999). Nevertheless, this act brought about the end of formal religious education only. Instead, schools continued to give religious education informally: for example, a month later, in a state school in Tbilisi, sixth grade pupils praised the fatherland and the Georgian language, and recited the prayer "Our Father," episodes from Jesus' life, the prayer "I believe in one God" and some psalms. At the end a priest blessed them (Shevardnadze, 1999). The presence of informal religious indoctrination in schools also explains the overlap existing between religious youth and the youth that supported the Rose Revolution (and, consequently, pro-Western, modern and democratic values).

On April 8, 2005, the Parliament of Georgia adopted a General Education Law, the 18th Article of which regulates freedom of faith and states that the exhibition of religious symbols within the precincts of state schools should not serve non-academic purposes (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, 2005, Article 18). This gave a monk from the Urbnisi and Ruisi Diocese grounds for an expression of indignation: 'Today there are no icons allowed. . . . And what, actually, does the devil do? He divides school and [religion]; the devil disapproves the teaching of God's [way] at school' (Interview, September 30, 2011). However, observation of state schools throughout Georgia (including Tbilisi) gives a different picture: in spite of the law, we can still encounter not only pictures of Orthodox churches but also icons and sometimes even find prayer corners in the classrooms of state schools.

The 13th Article of the law says that 'It is inadmissible to use the educational process of the state school for the purposes of religious indoctrination, proselytism or forced assimilation' (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia 2005, Article 13). A Georgian expert on education, Simon Janashia, explains that state schools have to teach pupils about world religions within the course of "history." Besides, if there is a special interest, a school can decide to introduce a course on the "history of religions," which would bring a deeper insight into the subject. The law allows school pupils to learn about a specific religion too, but such an initiative can take place only outside of the general school time (Janashia, 2010).

Although the majority of the interviewed politicians agree that ethnic and religious minorities should enjoy and benefit from equal rights, they think, at the same time, that the state should not finance schools for religious minorities. They suggest that if religious minority citizens wish to have a religious school, they should provide the necessary budget themselves. As regards the clergy, the majority is against teaching different religions in state schools. For example, an archpriest from the Batumi and Lazeti Diocese says:

> Paul the Apostle declares in one of his Epistles that the one who misinterprets and distorts the scriptures, is the one who condemns the Lord. . . . We are certainly not indifferent if somebody opens a school where [pupils] are spiritually degraded by a misinterpretation of the scriptures.'
>
> (Interview, October 5, 2011)

A monk from the Urbnisi and Ruisi Diocese says with a certain angry excitement: 'Let them pray elsewhere. Let them pray in their countries' (Interview, September 30, 2011).

However, not all of the clergy is against teaching the history of religions in state schools, and an archpriest from the Zugdidi and Tsaishi Diocese even says that '[c]hildren of all faiths should have the opportunity to learn the basis of their religion as early as primary school' (Interview, October 2, 2011). He thinks that this subject should not be compulsory, but banning the teaching of the Orthodox religion with the aim of defending the rights of religious minorities is not right.

Conclusion

The first wave of Georgian national ideology, which was initiated in the second half of the nineteenth century, paved the way for modern nation and statehood, which might have been fully realized, but was interrupted by the Soviet takeover. The work undertaken by the Georgian Enlighteners remains mostly unfinished today, which results in a severe clash between the religious and civic ideals of the nation. Religion plays a far more important role in building of Georgian identity at the turn of the twenty-first century than it did on the threshold of nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and thus we are actually witnessing the birth of religious nationalism in Georgia.

During the Soviet period, the GOC had acquired unprecedented strength and influence, with obvious advantages over other social institutions. Even a superficial observation suffices to see that it tends to keep a monopoly on the truth and the power to influence the political scene. Obviously, this fact was also encouraged by the independent Georgian state after the end of the Soviet Union, and this encouragement reached its peak with the signing of the 2002 Concordat.

Not surprisingly, the GOC is able to and actually does impact on the formation of Georgian national identity. Under this impact, identity is reduced to an ethnic (Georgian) and religious (Orthodox Christian) content. According to the prevailing view of the church, to be considered Georgian one has to be both ethnically Georgian and Orthodox. Being a citizen of Georgia is not enough to be considered as a

full-fledged Georgian. To substantiate this formula for nationhood, the GOC refers to great Georgian kings and saints and claims that it was Orthodoxy that ultimately preserved this small nation across the centuries as an independent entity, in spite of multiple threats from many powerful neighbours. Zedania notes this too (2011, p. 125). Linking Georgian identity to the distant and obscure past indicates that the GOC assesses itself as the sole guardian of national heritage and national identity; it also means, however, that the church has no strong motivation to develop responses to contemporary challenges. Even in the twenty-first century, modern values are only acknowledged nominally among people in Georgia, which gives the GOC, one of the most powerful institutions defining values in the society, full freedom in being an anti-modern and anti-Western force, which perceives globalization and cultural exchange as threats. The church's involvement in the public sphere proves problematic for the process of democratization, to the extent that its active resistance to liberal and modern values amounts to an opposition to democracy.

It is true that the mistrust of "the West" is not unique to the GOC: 'From the Orthodox point of view, it is the EU, if anything, which should be adjusting its standards to those of the Orthodox Church!' (Ramet, 2006, p. 150). However, what is specific for the GOC is, on the one hand, its unique level of trust and power of influence over society; unlike anywhere else in Europe, the greatest proportion of its followers are the young, well-educated, city-dwelling people of Georgia (CRRC, 2008–2011). On the other hand, the GOC is a powerful adversary of the state, at the same time as being constitutionally linked with it. The 2002 Concordat contradicts the model of the secular state and provides the church with undeniable primacy. The ideological opposition between the GOC and the state of Georgia became apparent after the Rose Revolution of 2003. The reforms initiated by the new government at that time can be characterized as an attempt to modernize state and society. Along with this process, the GOC has expressed more and more explicitly its negative attitude towards modern values and has nevertheless been the highest-ranking institution in Georgia. It was clear that the project of modernizing the country contradicted the church-approved traditional values. Until today, the government has not been really ready to break the social taboo according to which ecclesiastical figures and their supporters are untouchable (because they fight to save traditional values and the purity of the faith).

Based on these findings, we can state that Georgia is affected by a general desecularisation at all three of the levels of secularization outlined in Casanova's theory: there is no clear differentiation of secular and religious spheres; religion is definitely on the rise; and far from being marginalized, it is active in the public sphere. We can describe the citizens of Georgia (of the twenty-first century) as standing at a crossroads between a dominant religious nationalism and a civic nationalism which has its roots in the nineteenth century Georgian Enlighteners' movement. The GOC is an independent player on the Georgian chessboard whose interference in public life and the political sphere of Georgia not only has not stopped after the defeat of the UNM in the parliamentary elections of 2012 but has been growing steadily. Some observers even think that the process has intensified with the advent of the new government (Despic-Popovic, 2013). This may hinder the

modernizing reforms, the success of which will enhance similar processes in neighbouring countries, and vice versa.

Notes

1 An Ilia State University project, run with the support of the Academic Swiss Caucasus Network (ASCN) programme, where I was a researcher.
2 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Georgian sources are the authors.'
3 "Saidumlo Siroba" by Erekle Deisadze. In Georgian the title has an obscene meaning and implies a kind of word play from "Saidumlo Seroba," which means "the Last Supper."

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8 Challenges for women's education in independent Azerbaijan

Nigar Gozalova

This chapter addresses the issues concerning women's education in the Republic of Azerbaijan since independence in 1991, within the general context of an intensive "search for identity." The current search for a democratic civic identity in Azerbaijan is not the first such instance in the history of this country. The issue of equal access to education for women came on to the public arena first in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Azerbaijani enlighteners of that time were concerned about women's education, regarding it as an important and constitutive part of the process of national identity formation. One century later, Azerbaijan is an independent country and again in search of its own national identity. Its democratic mould brings to the fore questions about women's education as a sphere in which the equal rights of men and women must be ensured.

The chapter starts with an analysis of the reformed educational system for Azerbaijani women following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The main focus is to understand the state's efforts in this field as part of the nation-building process. Nevertheless, there are also religious ideas about women's education and the increasing significance of religion has become an influential factor in new searches for identity – as is the case in other post-Soviet societies. Therefore, the research also addresses the impact of growing Islamic aspirations on education challenges, particularly on women's education.

Primary sources and methodology

The attitude towards women, as one of the inherent attributes of society, has made women's access to education an important indicator of social and identity developments. Consequently, statistics on women's education enable one to articulate the changes and dynamics of the response of society and the government in Azerbaijan to the challenges of gender equality and how the role of women in the public sphere is perceived by them. These statistical data, interpreted against the background of the historical context and in comparison with the expressed government policy in the area of women's education, will reveal trends in the policy on education and gender equality and measure actual progress towards the policy's goals and objectives.

The primary sources used for this research include, first of all, laws, regulatory legislation and by-laws*:* documents that reflect effective governmental policy with regard to women's access to education (for instance, the laws on education in

the Republic of Azerbaijan which came into effect in 1992 and 2009) and orders, resolutions and decrees of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Analysis of these sources allows for an assessment of processes and changes in the sphere of official policy on the issues surrounding women's education.

Secondly, I have used statistical data*:* the most valuable sources of statistical material include annual reports on "Gender aspects of admission examination results to higher education in Azerbaijan Republic" by the State Committee on Students' Admission (SCSA) (Gender Aspects of admission. . . , 2004–2011); Azerbaijan's demographic and health survey (2006), and the current stance of science and technology in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) countries. These sources contain a range of statistical information, including levels of education, admission to examinations across the country, regional data, press releases and data disclosure for the media. The relevant data include gender-balance statistics in higher education and percentages of girls' school attendances throughout the country, as well as in a selection of other institutions of education; it also facilitates the documentation of academic performance from a gender perspective.

Along with collecting and analysing statistical data, I also conducted interviews with individuals and focus groups. I carried out 12 interviews during the period July–November 2012. These individual interviews were conducted among academics: I have interviewed not only historians of religion and social thought, Islamic theologians and experts in the field of strategic studies but also specialists in the hard sciences. The focus groups were taken from refugees from Karabakh – parents of children attending the elementary school No. 1 for Agdam refugees located in Baku; these people are victims of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. In total, these focus group interviews, involving ordinary people, comprised 43 participants. The interviews were conducted in two cities: Baku and Sumgait. Respondents for individual interviews ("face-to-face") belonged to two different age groups: 30–39 and 40–49. The questionnaire included 15 questions and covered almost all areas related to the problems of women's education and religious education in general.[1]

The answers to the questions which were addressed to the respondents in these two groups allow us to analyse the significance of women's education in the formation of the new Azerbaijani identity and its relationship to religion. This serves to gain a deeper insight into the practical implementation of existing regulations and to articulate emerging challenges for women's education in the light of the growing significance of religion in Azerbaijani society. In the following, I will first outline the historical milestones and emerging trends in addressing women's education in Azerbaijan. Second, I will present two analyses. The first puts the focus on the access to secondary and higher education and gender-specific preferences. The second analysis describes the impact of religion in the field of women's education.

Historical milestones in addressing women's education in Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is a country with a complex historical development which is reflected in the culture of its people and influenced by many global and regional religious

trends which have combined to create an environment which is particularly tolerant and adaptable in relation to other religions and cultures. Despite the prevalence of Islam, the imposition of Islamic religious limitations on Azerbaijani women's lives has been softer than in any other Muslim society. Rapid industrial development in northern Azerbaijan, which was part of the Russian Empire, expedited the process of urbanization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first half of the twentieth century also witnessed an activation of the political consciousness of Azerbaijanis living in southern (Iranian) Azerbaijan.[2] As Baku became the major source of oil for Russia, tens of thousands of Iranian workers streamed into the Absheron Peninsula in search of employment, and Russian economic and political influence could be felt in both regions of Azerbaijan. As the source of employment and the home of the nascent Azerbaijani intelligentsia and revolutionary movement, Baku extended its influence both in the south and the north of the Araks (Araz) River.

In this period, the educational system also emerged as an area in which there were opportunities to liberate the nation from colonial dependence. The general struggle towards a liberalization of public life extended to women's education, as well as the struggle for granting them civil rights. Consequently, these ideas motivated Azerbaijani educationalists of the late nineteenth century to carry out an ideological campaign for the rights and liberties of women and the freedom and progress of the Azerbaijani people as a whole. The issue of women's rights can be seen as a major indicator of the changes that the nation underwent during this period.

The modernization process inevitably entailed changes in the social position of women and consequently was in line with a demand for women's education. Secular Russian schools appeared in 1860; only in 1901, however, was the first Muslim girls' school in the Caucasus opened by the well-known philanthropist and oil millionaire Haji Zeynalabedin Taghiyev. His wife, Sona Taghiyeva, created the Committee of Muslim Women, which ran a charitable programme for women. The first ever Azeri-Turkish bilingual journal for and by women, founded by Khadija Alibeyova and her husband, started to appear in 1911 in Baku. It was the first-ever women's organization to be operating not only in Azerbaijan but in the entire Middle East (Huseynova, 1993, p. 28) The cover page of the journal, entitled "*Ishiq*" (Light), depicted a woman in the symbolic black *chador* holding a child by the hand and showing him the rising sun. The aim of the journal was to enlighten women about their rights to education and employment by emphasizing certain egalitarian passages from the Qur'an and the *hadith* and by cautiously and indirectly criticizing conservative Islamic authorities (Tohidi, 1998 [online]).

The early twentieth century was the period when modern national identities emerged in the Russian Empire, which, of course, affected the world outlook of the Azerbaijani youth who were studying abroad – constituting a whole galaxy of prominent Azerbaijani thinkers, writers and educators. A special role in promoting national ideas was performed by the press. Rationalism, liberalism and humanism, advocated by A. Bakikhanov, M. Ahundzade, I. Gutkashinly and G. Zardabi, as a way out of the crisis for the Muslim East had a great influence on the thinking of late nineteenth century intellectuals (Hadji-zade, 2013 [online]) Those

ideas were advocated by A. Topchubashev and others who gave impetus to Azerbaijani nationalism and helped to transform the previously religion-based Muslim (*umma*) identity into a nation-based Azerbaijani identity. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Azerbaijani thinker Ali bey Huseynzade posited a new identity formula: "Turkism, Modernism, and Islam," embodied later on the three-coloured banner of the short-lived independent republic of 1918–1920, as well as on the national flag of the current independent republic (Tohidi, 2000, p. 253).

The Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan, which emerged after the collapse of the Russian Empire, was the first democratic, constitutional state in the entire Muslim world that provided universal suffrage and guaranteed all its citizens full civil and political rights, regardless of their nationality, religion, social status or gender. Among other freedoms and rights, the Constitution of the Republic (1918) proclaimed women to be equal to men as citizens of the country, and hence women were given the right to active participation in public life, as well as equal access to education. This period in the cultural history of Azerbaijan is distinguished by the emergence of the sense of national identity, modernist and reformist Islamic and secular elites, intensive discourses on the "woman question" and a range of activities in support of women's emancipation (Tohidi, 1998 [online]).

The Soviet government (1920–1991) subordinated aspirations for women's education in Soviet Azerbaijan to its ambitious policy towards the external Muslim world. This was well reflected by the declarative slogans calling for the "liberation of women of the East." The women's movement in the early periods of Soviet rule in Azerbaijan was characterized by the pathos of a socialist renewal of women's lives for both internal and export needs. It was presented as a powerful and visible incentive for modernization: a woman took off her veil, was actively and demonstratively involved in public life, her right to vote was not disputed – on the contrary, in the field of policy on women's rights, the Soviet government exercised special care and dedication. On the one hand, women instantly became "equal" to men in terms of legal rights; on the other hand, it was a process initiated and driven by the state authorities, rather than a bottom-up process.

Meanwhile, it became one of the key aspects of the development of the educational system and resulted in the establishment of secular primary and secondary schools. The established network of secular comprehensive schools played a prominent role in the future economic, political and cultural development of the region. The development of educational resources and the promotion of professional skills increased the self-awareness of the Azerbaijani people and expanded the stratum of the secular national intelligentsia, thus generating conditions for the further development and improvement of the entire educational system.

In addition to these positive aspects of the Soviet education system, including the introduction of universal primary education in Azerbaijan in 1928, a compulsory seven years of education was introduced at the beginning of the 1930s, which was initially implemented in the large cities, and then, after 1935, throughout the country. Mass illiteracy was eliminated in the second half of the 1930s: by 1939 the literacy rate had reached 73.8 per cent (Ismailov, 2010, p. 237) Nevertheless, continuing the policy of the Tsarist Empire, the Soviet regime pursued the dissolution

of national identities by means of a policy of Russification in the school system. The Soviet authorities also promoted atheism and prosecuted people for their religious beliefs. Additionally, the transition of Azeri literature from the Arabic to the Latin (1928), and later to the Cyrillic alphabets (1939), resulted in the separation of people from traditional education opportunities and their cultural heritage.

In post-Soviet Azerbaijan, as in any other post-Soviet environment, people have to go through a process of building a new and independent national identity. Being a borderland – geopolitically and geo-culturally situated between Asia and Europe – Azerbaijan has a multifaceted national and cultural identity. It continues to be among the most secularized and modernized Islamic cultures, according to a recent poll (The World's Muslims, 2013 [online]).

The interplay between regional and non-domestic factors has shaped gender dynamics and the social status of women in Azerbaijan. The position of women has constantly been improved with the help of heterogeneous societal forces: secular enlighteners, nationalists, reform-oriented Muslims and Soviet modernization. During the last two decades of independence, the political elite did not leave it in any doubt that women's education is an essential aspect of nation-building. Nevertheless, the achievements in the last 20 years occur in completely different historical circumstances; namely the transition to a market economy and the ongoing military conflict with Armenia, with at least 750,000 internally displaced persons (de Waal, 2010, p. 123).

The gender dimension of education

The analysis of education statistics enables us to track the challenges of women's education and to measure the actual outcomes of the declared policy in the areas of education and gender equality. Processing all the available official statistical data makes it possible to identify the major trends in women's education at this stage. First of all, there is a huge increase in the number of girls applying for the national exams necessary for enrolment into institutions of higher education.[3] Between 1993 and 2012, the overall number of girls applying for a university education was higher than that of male applicants. The largest gap in this regard was registered in 1993 and 1994, when this difference in percentage was 1.7 times greater for girls. Later on, this was explained by the fact that admissions to universities and colleges were combined in those years, and usually, the majority of young people applying for secondary special schools (colleges) were female applicants (Reports of SCSA, 2004–2011 [online]).

Statistical analyses by the SCSA testify that after the establishment of the National Admissions Examination, the number of female applicants exceeded that of males. However, when it comes to the results of the exams for admission into the institutions of higher education, the statistics show reverse percentages. As mentioned above, in 1993 and 1994, the number of girls admitted to higher education institutions exceeded the number of boys, but this situation changed from 1995 to 2010, and the number of men admitted to the universities increased.[4] As some researchers suggest, this gap does not demonstrate that boys get better

training than girls, although in some cases this might be true. A more reasonable explanation comes from the comparative study of the number of boys and girls admitted to private universities, where the score required for admission is lower than in the case of state (public) universities. SCSA figures show that the total number of boys admitted to the private universities exceeds the number of girls by about 25 per cent. This gender disparity indicates that parents are more eager to cover the education of their sons, who are expected to play a role as future breadwinners for their families (Gureyeva, 2005 [online]), and there are other factors such as obtaining deferment from military service and so on.

Figures for boys and girls in different regions of the country vary widely, which can also be explained by a comparison of the data concerning their applications. Analysis shows that the percentage varies from region to region; for instance, the average annual number of female applicants from the southern regions bordering Iran (Yardimli, Lerik, Jalilabad and Masalli) ranges from between nine to 33 per cent, while the number among the applicants from the north western regions such as Zagatala, Balakan and Gakh is between 59 and 66 per cent.

In general, the main challenges for women's education can be found in the country's southern regions, where the problem of girls' attendance in schools persists. As M. Abbaszadeh, head of Azerbaijan's State Commission on Student Admissions, emphasized, equality in the overall gender balance is maintained with respect to the total number of applicants: 'But if we carry out studies in the regions [as opposed to the capital] then we can easily see that the number of girls who have submitted documents to study at institutions of higher education is lower.'[5] She said that 70 per cent of entrants from the Lerik, Yardimli and Jalilabad areas are boys, whilst in areas such as Qakh, Balakan and Zagatala, the majority are girls: 'We must get serious about this issue. Once a girl is educated, it means that generation coming after her is educated too' (In the southern region of Azerbaijan. . . , 2011 [online]).

At the same time, there is a concern about the growing number of teenage girls who are forced to leave school and marry and are thus fated to remain uneducated. In early 2009, the Azerbaijani Parliament adopted a new Education Act aiming to compel all citizens of the country to undergo nine years of education, although experts claim that this is just half of the battle. In Azerbaijan, there are rural regions where girls are not allowed to go to school just because they were married at an early age. The most distinct signals of suicide are from the girls whose parents have taken them out of schools or have forcibly married them (Azerbaijan, June 25, 2011 [online]). Early marriage is one of the main hindrances preventing girls from receiving a proper education. Another problem is the use of female labour for household work. According to the head of the Azerbaijani office of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), Mark Gerevard, the organization's studies found that one-third of today's young mothers (20–24 years old) gave birth to their first children before they were 18. Such alarming data were confirmed by the vice chairman of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children, Sadagat Gahramanova:

> Statistics show that the number of informal, early marriages is growing every year . . . [t]hat means that a huge number of young girls married at an early

> age are forever deprived of education. . . . The main responsibility lies with the parents. Girls of 14, 15 and 16 years are not yet ripe for marriage. They are just kids.
>
> (Orudjev, Feb. 11, 2012 [online])

The largest proportion of university-educated women live in Baku (25.1 per cent with a university education and 16.1 per cent with a special college education, out of the total female population) and in Absheron (15 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively), whereas the smallest proportion is found in Lankaran (2.7 per cent and 5.7 per cent, respectively (Azerbaijan Demographic and Health Survey, 2006, p. 33). Meanwhile, in other regions and cities this percentage is nearly half the size; as for example, in the Ganja-Gazakh region, where the figures are 12.1 per cent and 13.3 per cent, respectively, compared with Baku-Absheron.

According to the data of the State Statistics Committee, when making a choice with regard to profession, most applicants are driven by social stereotypes about what are distinctively "male" and "female" professions. For example, girls comprise nearly 94.95 per cent of applicants to the fields of psychology and pedagogy, while nearly 70 per cent of boys give preference to the technical professions (mathematics, physics, engineering, etc.) and to economic specializations (economics, management and geography). The number of female applicants to the humanities and medical disciplines is also higher than that of males, and add up to nearly 65 and 60 per cent, respectively (Reports of SCSA, 2004–2011 [online]).

Attitudes towards education policy and gender equality

One of the more important questions I asked during my interviews was whether respondents found the level of female education in Azerbaijan satisfactory. The majority of respondents from amongst the academics' group found women's education to be satisfactory, as they believed that there was no legal restriction on education for women. All the parents from the refugees' group and a portion of the respondents from the academics' group found that in spite of a general satisfactory level of women's education, some districts and villages fall behind because they are affected by historical traditions of the patriarchal family structure, where women are considered to be the homemakers.

Further, respondents were asked what they perceived to be the major problems in women's education. One of the opinions of the respondents from the academics' group was that problems are of a local character and are encountered only in some of the southern regions, being mostly related to social and economic factors. The rest of the academics' group and some of the respondents from the refugees' group saw the main problem as being the ban on religious clothing (i.e. the headscarf).

Some of the questions were aimed at finding out details about the respondents' views of the laws on education and the impact of their implementation on the population. Opinions were equally divided here: some saying that they did not see or did not know of any problem at all, while the rest of the respondents mentioned ongoing ideological conflicts, stressing that the laws were not always

implemented as prescribed. Respondents from the academics' group emphasized the low level of education which, according to them, derives from the low wages for teachers.

I asked the respondents to explain why spheres such as education, healthcare and culture were feminized in Azerbaijan, which almost all respondents explained in terms of social and economic factors (for example, the existence of low wages in these spheres; the fact that this type of activity did not require much physical strength, and so on). Moreover, almost all respondents emphasized that they did not consider the feminization of certain jobs to be a huge problem. Additionally, most individual respondents explained it in terms of the patriarchal nature of Azerbaijani society, according to which women are expected to work in these spheres.

The interviewees know about the possibilities of studying abroad. When asked to evaluate this opportunity, especially for their own daughters, the respondents revealed a traditional and nationalistic understanding of education. Some of the respondents from the academics' group mentioned that they themselves had attended educational programmes abroad and knew all about the difficulties this entailed. They would not like to send their daughters abroad because the influence of Western culture may have a negative impact. This detrimental influence has not only a personal but also a societal implication: it threatens the structure of the national and moral values of Azerbaijani society. Other respondents were positive about the impact of studying abroad, while others seemed to have a mixed view and would agree to send their daughters for short-term training or for experiential exchange trips only.

Only a small proportion of interviewed parents from the refugees' group were positive about their daughters studying abroad, while the vast majority made clear that they would not allow it. Their main argument was "how one can be apart from one's child, especially if it is a girl?" It is worth mentioning that Azerbaijani national norms of family life (the so-called *adat* and *anene*[6]) played an important role in the content of the answers to this question. Interestingly, the respondents of this group assumed that the woman in question already had a child.

I continued with the question: what were the factors in the social environment that limited the achievement of the desired results of equal opportunities in the Azerbaijani society for women? Generally, most respondents agreed that policies implemented without due consideration of Azerbaijani values, especially the traditional family structure, would lead to problems.

The majority of respondents from the academics' group said that young Azerbaijanis are not quite ready to live in a society which is based on the concept of gender equality, because according to them, gender equality was a "product" of Western society. Respondents who answered affirmatively to this question (almost half of the respondents) at the same time added that they were supportive only if this policy were to be implemented through a leadership guided by traditional religious and national values.

Islam and the problems of religious education

Based on research conducted by the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations, its former chairman E. Iskandarov stated that the absolute majority

of the population of Azerbaijan rejected religious radicalism, despite the increase of interest in Islam and national-moral values in recent years. At the same time, my interviews revealed a need to increase religious awareness. Thus, one-third of citizens get their information about Islam from the mass media; one third from people they know or meet; and another third acquire knowledge while attending religious ceremonies ("Azerbaijan has no religious radicalism" poll, Nov. 13, 2012 [online]). Discourses on religious education, especially of youth, have been among the most discussed issues in Azerbaijan. They also were among the topics addressed in the surveys. That is why respondents from the academics' group were asked whether they accepted the education provided by the existing religious institutions and faculties and whether they (religious institutions and faculties) provided for all levels of the population. The majority of respondents were negative about this as they thought that religious education mainly provided for the poorer elements, and to some extent the middle class, and its influence on society was not detected. There were also proponents of closing down these institutions due to a prevalence of corruption within them. In general, the majority of respondents concluded that in Azerbaijan, with the help of knowledgeable specialists, there was a need for serious systematic work in this area and that such a project should realistically apply educational tools that combine secular and religious principles. In other words, they expressed the opinion that religious education in schools must be conducted in an academic-scientific way. The teaching of religion could aim to present the basics of Islam along with those of other religions.

Another topic of the interviews was the necessity or otherwise of introducing compulsory religious (Islamic) education in schools. This question polarised the respondents: the majority from the academics' group mentioned that it was necessary to provide religious education in school, while three of them (out of 12) made it clear that they were against it. In addition, almost all respondents were positive about other religions' histories being taught along with that of Islam. The majority of respondents, among whom there were schoolteachers, thought it would be best to start religious education classes in the fifth and sixth grades, while two of them found it necessary to start later (such as in the ninth, tenth or eleventh grades).

Answers to the same questions in the refugees' group were different. They were predominantly of the opinion that religion in schools is an urgent necessity. The second question, whether it was logical to teach other religions than Islam, yielded the unanimous answer that "since we live in Azerbaijan, it would be better to teach Islam only."

According to Fazil Mustafa, MP and a member of the Human Rights Committee of the *Milli Majlis* (National Assembly), it is impossible to establish religious schools in Azerbaijan, but religious education can be organized in a different way. He believes that the issue can be resolved through the organization of religious education in schools: 'There is no other way but to hold religious education classes at secondary schools' ("It is impossible to open religious schools in Azerbaijan," 2012 [online]). Introducing a course of spiritual and moral education in schools would not lead to the growth of clericalism and, by contrast, would promote the socialization of the individual, making her/him more aware not only of matters of history and language, but also of religious issues.

Another question concerned what were the respondents' views on a decree issued by the Minister of Education[7] which introduces a single school uniform – which effectively implies a ban on wearing headscarves.[8] The overall views of both groups of respondents were split almost equally. The common perception was that although they supported the idea of a single uniform at the schools, they were against the ban, and they agreed that the schools must adhere to the law on wearing a school uniform. However, it was felt that the introduction of the decree was an unnecessary catalyst of social tension. Almost all the respondents in both groups agreed that apart from the issue with headscarves, generally it was a positive idea to introduce a school uniform policy in schools, and they felt that it ensured a level of social equity for all children. Nevertheless, they believed that before taking the decision to ban headscarves, the views of those who were wearing headscarves should have been taken into account. Opponents of this decree indicated that it was against the law on religious freedoms and a violation of people's rights.

Exactly half of respondents from the refugees' group were against the decision, while the other half supported the introduction of a single uniform. As a solution, some respondents suggested that special schools could be established where the girls would be allowed to wear headscarves and in that case their rights would be observed and they would not feel isolated.

This survey admits the conclusion that there are no major restrictions on women's education in Azerbaijan. However, there is a growing chance of increased problems due to a rise in religious radicalism. I noticed that the most affected portion of the population, the refugees, were the greatest supporters of introducing compulsory religious (Islamic) education in schools. At the same time, the academics' group, especially those of the group aged between 30–39 years, who grew up and were educated in an independent Azerbaijan, also expressed a need to strengthen the role and influence of Islam in society.

However, there are some factors that require considerable attention. Recent debates on multiculturalism and the cultural rights of minorities in Western Europe have brought up the question as to whether the wearing of religious symbols (including the headscarf) in public spaces is to be viewed as an individual's right to freedom of expression of cultural and religious identity or a violation of the principle of equality amongst all people and an instance of negative discrimination against women. This issue is quite sensitive, and there is no common agreement on it among European democracies. It is heavily contested in Azerbaijan as well, and this topic is used by the conservatives in the country to polarise the political situation.

It is important to note that in contrast with existing stereotypes, a woman in a headscarf is not always an uneducated woman or vice versa. Depending on the region, distance from the centre, and economic status, parents make decisions to marry their daughters earlier rather than give them an opportunity to study. It is clear that poor economic conditions and, consequently, early marriages, hinder access to education for women in some regions of the country (Orudjev, Feb. 11, 2012 [online]). A proportion of the experts believe that public pressure and

governmental control are necessary to ensure the girls' rights to access education, while others argue that any intervention in these matters is a violation of human rights and disrespectful of individual beliefs.

Speaking specifically about the role of religion in public education, almost all researchers refer to the lack of "proper" religious education in schools as one of the potential threats to modern Azerbaijani society, considering that the "wrong" kind of religious education might evoke a radical response from those social strata which have a relatively strong religious orientation. Many intellectuals, prominent scholars and distinguished clerics of Azerbaijan try to strengthen educational work in the field of religious education at schools "to curb extremist religious phenomena" among students. In fact, such problems are typical for many Muslim countries. Besides, there are currently very few ready-made models of state policy and there is a lack of understanding of what religious education means for a secular state in a predominantly Muslim country. The government attempts to deal with the "Islamic threat" by adopting laws and establishing control over Islam but such a strategy cannot yield complete success. There should be a broad dialogue, involving religious communities, as well as educational efforts in the provinces. The survey has shown that Azerbaijani society is a positive one regarding the issue of women's education, although some problems exist in the regions. Apparently, the problems of women's education in Azerbaijan have been not so much a legal problem as an issue of mind-set, and both intellectuals and the public authorities should make serious and sustained efforts to explain to residents of some regions the necessity and importance of women's education.

Conclusions

Before the Soviet era, Azerbaijan had witnessed the rise of secular intelligentsia, which had little interest in religion aside from as a marker of cultural identity. This trend has continued after the establishment of Azerbaijan's independence and considerably affects its external relations. Azerbaijan generally has been considered one of the most secular-minded places in the entire Muslim world. It was at the forefront in many of the significant advances in the Muslim world: establishing the first school for girls, staging the first Western-style theatrical dramas and the first opera, and having the status of being the first secular democratic republic in the Muslim world are all developments which can be claimed by this small country. In the post-Soviet period, Azerbaijan again acquired distinction for possessing a consensus on secularism that has dominated the country's political life, as well as an absence of strong political movements advocating a dominant role for religion in politics (Cornell, 2006 [online]). In contrast with a tendency to turn Shi'ism into a national idea and bringing Shi'a rules into the system of government (as in Iran, Iraq and to some extent Lebanon), the Azerbaijani ruling elites have opted in favour of a "national Islam," a concept that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, which sees Islam as an integral part of its national identity regardless of the degree of religiosity of individuals (Swietochowski, 2004, p. 26).

The process of the formation of a publicly funded school system which originated in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries within the framework of a national enlightenment policy, with all its specific features, has eventually led to relatively high standards of women's education. Today, one can rightly argue that the deep socioeconomic and political changes that have occurred in Azerbaijan have led to a change in the social status of women. In the current transitional period, with already a rather lengthy experience of independence, with transformations of value systems and social structures, the social position of women continues to evolve.

As we have seen, one of the major changes affecting all developments in value systems has been the rising importance of Islam. Islam has become a key factor in the socio-cultural and socio-political life of Azerbaijan. At the same time, in the last few years, numerous humanitarian forums held in Baku have been pushing the idea of a "national Islam" within Azerbaijan as a secular nation, representing a model of a multicultural society with a Muslim majority and with both religious and social tolerance.

The universal quality of Islamic dogma does place certain limitations on the role of Islam as a framework of national identity, and this is why the emerging Islamic sentiments of the population are limited when it comes to the public sphere and especially the arena of politics. The term "national Islam" which might occur in some scholarly research studies concerning Azerbaijan is simply an acknowledgement of the cultural heritage and history of the country; it is not a system of Islamic values asserted as core element of nation-building. Challenges of social disparity and changeable political and economic conditions affect traditional family values and consequently gender relationships, which spurs the religious segment of society to appeal to Islamic justifications of their views about the role of women and their basic rights in society, while the majority of those groups are often not very well-versed in Islamic teachings on gender.

The secular government and gender equality proponents, when they are raising the issue of women's rights, have to take into account the historical, cultural, religious traditions and mentality of Azerbaijani society, as well as the preferences of the Azerbaijani women. The defence of "tradition" might sometimes be used merely as a pretext for suppressing human rights. Overall, in spite of some problems still existing in the southern regions of the country and ongoing debates about Muslim gender attitudes, the Azerbaijani society is as a whole optimistic regarding the issue of women's rights in general and women's access to education in particular.

Notes

1 Most of these questions were asked to all respondents, except one that required professional analysis and was only addressed to academics.
2 The Russian-Iranian wars (1804–1813, 1826–1828) resulted in the signing of the Gulistan (1813) and Turkmenchay (1828) peace treaties, under which the Azerbaijani lands were divided into two parts, between Iran and the Russian Empire; the border followed the Araks River.

3 From 2003 to 2010, the increase was 60.6 per cent of all applicants.
4 2002 was an exception since the organization of exams in that year was at a lower level. Girls gained more than average scores, which presumably indicated certain irregularities in exam arrangements. A similar situation might have been detected in 2010.
5 All translations from the Azerbaijan and Russian language have been made by the author.
6 Norms of customs and mores existing in Azerbaijan society, based on the traditional, religious and national values.
7 Decree of the Minister of Education at the № 953 "On the introduction of a single school uniforms" (Aug. 7, 2007).
8 On December 9, 2010, referring to the country's secular character, the Minister of Education made a verbal order to the schools' leaderships to ban wearing headscarves at elementary and secondary schools. The case sparked some discussion in Azerbaijani society.

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9 Constructing national identities through general education

Religion in Armenian schools

Satenik Mkrtchyan

Introduction and theoretical frame

In a classic work, Eugene Weber (1979) demonstrated the important role played by the school curriculum and visual educational materials in the formation of citizenship and nationality consciousness in nineteenth century France. Weber attaches an important role to the organisation of the educational process and a centralised educational policy. In the book we read about the report by a school teacher proving the effectiveness of the school as a socializing agent, as 'it had to teach children national and patriotic sentiments, explain what the state did for them and why it exacted taxes and military service, and showed them true interest in their fatherland' (Weber, 1979, p. 332). Weber also notes that 'the symbolism of images learned at school [have] created a whole new language and provided common points of reference that straddled regional boundaries exactly as national patriotism was meant to do' (1979, p. 337).

To place the main issue dealt with in this chapter in a broader framework, we agree with Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1991, p. 15) when they make the assumption that all human knowledge is developed, transformed and maintained in social situation, and that one should try to understand the processes through which this "knowledge" becomes a taken-for-granted "reality" for ordinary people. As Berger and Luckmann suggest (1991, p. 13) the taken-for-granted, common sense knowledge of everyday reality is actually socially negotiated. Institutions become part of what is perceived to be an objective reality, particularly by future generations who are not involved in the original processes of negotiation. Education and, of course, the school as one of its significant features, can be viewed as just such an institution. The school is where children experience a significant portion of their secondary socialization – a period defined by the authors as 'any subsequent process that inducts an already socialized individual into new sectors of the objective world of his society' (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, p. 150). Further, Berger and Luckmann define secondary socialization as the 'internalization of institutional or institutionally reasoned "sub-worlds"' (1991, p. 158). This internalisation, which stands in need of a legitimating apparatus, is usually accompanied by ritual and material symbols. We view school as an important space in which social constructs are being formulated and developed, also feeding children's identities,

including their ethnic (national) identities; a space where the institutionally reasoned "sub-world" is being internalised by pupils. Anthony Smith considers the system of state education as one of the 'agencies of popular socialization,' ensuring a common, public, mass culture (1991, p. 11). Louis Althusser (1971) lists educational institutions (different systems of public and private schools) as being included in the "ideological state apparatus" which functions through the implication of ideology in contrast with that other apparatus of state, the repressive one, which functions through violence.

In a publication discussing post-Soviet systems of education, Voronkov et al. mention school as one of the institutions of secondary socialization where students spend a significant part of their time and acquire "legitimate" knowledge and concepts, the parameters of which are defined by the state through educational policy and national educational standards developed by professionals and/or special agencies: 'Through school, the state indoctrinates ideological schemes, brings up civic values, and prepares the student to play roles in the adult life of the future' (2008, p. 6). This approach, again, highlights the "ideological" role of the state and the school as a means of spreading ideology. The question, though, remains: *how* exactly is it going on? One other question emerges at this point: What other institutions and agencies play a decisive role in defining and imposing identities, roles and perceptions?

These and other related questions will comprise the core of this chapter, which discusses the general education system in Armenia and is based on field research carried out in the schools of Yerevan.

In what follows, we will connect issues of socialization in schools with the notion of identity formation. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper argue that the term '"identity" . . . tends to mean too much (when understood in a strong sense), too little (when understood in a weak sense), or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity),' and they suggest replacing the category of '"identity as [an] analytical tool" with other, less ambiguous terms (verbs) each showing separate meanings of the term, such as categorization, identification, connectedness, etc.' (2000, p. 1). Therefore, not focusing on the theoretical debate concerning the term "(ethno-national) identities," I decided to refer to the notions, meanings and representations of those identifications (group-connectedness, categorization) related to "Armenianness," "religion," "Christianity," "our nation/ethnos/religion," and so on through the discourse we would have managed to uncover as a result of the research. In our research, it seems quite relevant to apply Anthony Smith's theory (or concept) of *ethnie* (1991). Smith's approach offers the opportunity to take into consideration the extensive historical traditions of different forms of statehood and national elements, which go back a long way before the modernist era. Additionally, the preoccupation of ethno-symbolic analyses with symbolic elements and subjective dimensions, as well as its attempt to look into the "inner world" goes along well with our research aim to address religion as a component of an (ethno) national identity, represented, constructed and negotiated through the general education system. Smith specifies history, territory, the legal-political equality of members and common civic culture and ideology as 'components of the

standard Western model of the nation' (1991, p. 11). By contrast, the ethnic model of a nation emphasizes a descent, or rather, a presumed descent, a genealogy, a presumed common origin, as well as popular mobilization, vernacular languages, customs and traditions, though admitting that there is a certain degree of dualism in nationalisms (Smith, 1991, p. 12). 'In fact, every nationalism contains civic and ethnic elements in varying degrees and different forms,' says Smith (1991, p. 13).

Another theoretical obstacle to this study has to do with the current role of religion. José Casanova assumes that the 'old theory of secularization can no longer be maintained' and brings the hypothesis of a 'deprivatisation' of religion in the contemporary world (1994, p. 19). Inspired by this work, I also would challenge the hypothesis which says that societies are becoming secular while becoming modern, and I take the initial point that the separation of church from the state would not necessarily ensure the decline of religiosity in a society and of religious representations in schools, in particular. In line with Casanova's assumptions, I will try to show the presence of religiosity and religious representations in public spaces, like schools, notwithstanding the fact that the country is secular according to its constitution. Moreover, I will try to trace how a certain *perception* of religious belief (or the church), rather than the belief itself (or the church itself), could be the key element defining the educational and socialization process.

The historical frame: church and state in Armenia

The Armenian Constitution declares the separation of the Armenian Apostolic Church (hereafter, the AAC) from the state, while recognizing its exclusive mission as a national church in the spiritual life of the Armenian people, in the development of their national culture and preservation of their national identity.[1] A special law regulating the relationship between the government of Armenia and the AAC, adopted in 2007, reinforces this mission, though Article 8 of that law includes specific regulations regarding the educational sphere.

The notion of a "national church," however, can be viewed within the theoretical discussion on the relationship between institutional religion and nationality. In this regard, Bociurkiw distinguishes seven 'principal patterns linking institutional religion to nationality' in the Soviet Union (1985, p. 183). According to Bociurkiw's classification, national churches 'represent a unique symbiosis of religious and national identities which sustain and reinforce each other. A national church, unlike an imperial church, claims its faithful members belonging to a given nationality and usually excluding other nationalities. This religious-ethnic symbiosis expresses itself institutionally in terms of an independent or autonomous ecclesiastical structure based in the nation's territorial homeland and integrating members of that nationality at home and in dispersion' (1985, p. 187). Bociurkiw identifies a group of churches which fit this model of a "national church," including 'the ancient Armenian-Gregorian Church, the Georgian Orthodox church, the Lithuanian Catholic Church and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic (Uniate) Church' (1985, pp. 186–190).

The AAC has adherents not only in the Republic of Armenia but also in the Armenian diaspora abroad, which is also reflected in the structure of the church

with its two patriarchal sees (the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Patriarchate of Constantinople) and the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia. The Republic of Armenia is a typical example of a nation-state with a state boundary which broadly corresponds to the distribution of a single ethnic group – the Armenian people, to whom a particular denomination is attached as an aspect of their ethnic identity.[2]

Abrahamian (2006) and Panossian (2006) elaborate on the components and "building blocks" of Armenian identity and discuss the importance and the place of religion. Panossian in particular analyses how Armenian identity has been shaped over the centuries, how nationalism arose and was manifested, with the emphasis on the modern period, from the seventeenth century onward. According to Panossian, the '[p]illars of the distinguishing features of Armenian identity – the building blocks – were laid in ancient times: religion, language, territorial basis, myths and symbols' (2006, p. 23). In saying so, he refers to the official adoption of Christianity as a state religion in the Middle Ages as the 'most important event in terms of maintaining a separate identity' (Panossian, 2006, p. 42).

Methodology and data

In this chapter, I will try to illustrate the overall mosaic of the school space which has been constructed for schoolchildren in Armenia with a focus on an analysis of the process of the construction of religious identity and its connection to national identity. Additionally, I will review an intermingling and interaction of these identities at two levels: one imposed by the state and the other created on an everyday basis and how they create and negotiate meanings in schools.

The classroom which is currently considered to be the most significant organizational space in the provision of education in schools includes three main elements: a teacher, students and the textbook. The teachers use textbooks, which in turn have been created by authors who have based their work on the national curriculum requirements. The state in its turn defines the policy-setting framework for schools and the curricular standards for textbook development. School administrative officers and teachers create a learning space for students in the school; maintaining, furnishing, and decorating the classrooms, corridors and assembly halls as well as the foyer of the school, filling it with iconographic content. In this research, ritual, ceremonial and celebratory dimensions are understood as the ways in which religions, or religion-related elements, are being articulated during various events. They happen to take the forms of anniversaries, memorial days, holidays and rituals related to the school's annual cycle (starting from September 1st, when the academic year begins in Armenia, and ending in May/June, with the graduation event called the "Last Bell" [*verjin zang*] and other farewell events/parties for graduates). I observed devotional practices and other religious phenomena in the Yerevan school rituals, on-stage events and celebrations. I also looked at the iconographic dimension, which includes decorations inside the classrooms, pictures, posters and bulletin boards on the walls of school lobbies and the visual materials used by teachers during the lessons.

The empirical material was gathered through a strategically focused ethnographical research project conducted in the academic year 2010–2012 in schools of Yerevan (both in the city centre and the outskirts). The field material was combined with narrative analyses of textbooks and interviews with the authors of the textbooks, as well as with officials from education management institutions. Textbooks (for the academic years 2010–2011 and 2011–2012) on the native language (Armenian), national history and integrated courses in the social sciences were analysed. I also consulted education policy documents, national standards and criteria for the school subjects, the national curriculum and other relevant documents. In addition, I used the content and some of the material found on the web sites of the schools.

After a brief account of the general impact of the AAC on education, I will elaborate on the following points of inquiry: a) schools as an arena of state and church relations; b) key narratives regarding Christianity as a component of the notion of 'Armenianness' and how and in what practices and visual forms they are manifest in the school discourses; and c) the agents who took part in creating and negotiating these representations.

General education and the Armenian Apostolic Church

The design and composition of textbooks in Armenia should comply with a specific national curriculum document, which is defined by the government (specifically, the Ministry of Education and Sciences, with certain relevant agencies which are attached to it). The publishing houses, in cooperation with the authors, develop textbook proposals and compete to partake of a reserve of state funding which has been allocated for the publication of textbooks. For the year 2011–2012, most of the school subjects in basic and high school have had one version which is used for teaching in the public schools across Armenia.[3]

The current system of general education in the Republic of Armenia was developed on the basis of the previous Soviet education system; an Armenian version of the broader Soviet policy of keeping religion out of schools. The schools in Armenia during the Soviet era were not merely religion-blind; an atheist education was being developed through the official bodies (by means of programmes, decrees, training courses, and textbooks). From the late 1980s and early 1990s onwards, we observe a religious revival in society, including the educational sphere. After the declaration of independence in 1991, the curriculum in schools was modified, with the addition of plenty of themes relating to Armenia and its culture, nationhood, history and identity. The introduction of religion into the curriculum was part of this process. At first, it occurred in a hit-and-miss fashion, without any central control. Gradually religion (religion-related content) started to come into the schools, entering by means of trial-and-error for several years, until about 13 years after independence a discrete subject, called the "History of the Armenian Church," with a historical rather than religious focus, was introduced into the school curriculum (Mkrtchyan, 2013, p. 159).

The model of current relations between the church and the state in the area of general education in Armenia reveals a pattern of a separation of the two.

Simultaneously, the findings also show that the elements of the institutionally initiated religion display a cooperation between the 'national church with an exclusive mission in preserving national identity' and the state (Mkrtchyan, 2013, p. 160). This pattern of cooperation can be viewed on the example of the afore-named special school subject on Armenian Church history. Another example illustrating the state-church cooperation in the educational sphere can be found in the ritual/ceremonial activities of the schools, where again we can observe elements of the institutionally initiated religious input. The official website of the AAC describes the aim of the project entitled the 'Divine Liturgy from Student Voices' as ensuring schoolchildren's participation in holy mass and chanting. This was a joint project of the AAC and the Armenian Ministry of Education and Science in 2009. The contest proceeded on three levels: local, regional and national. The concluding presentation and official awards ceremony was held in Etchmiadzin (Information Service, 2009). This example of a joint project shows a model of cooperation between the government (the Ministry of Education and Science) and the church (in the form of the Christian Education Centre of the AAC), which can be summarized as having *been initiated by the Church and assisted by the Ministry.* Another example illustrating this cooperation is the national competition "Teacher of the Year," a joint programme managed by the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia, taking place for the ninth time. The award is sponsored by Silva Ter-Stepanian, a philanthropist from the US. The award ceremony for the competition was held at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. 'The role of the Armenian church is of great importance in the formation of the Armenian way of thinking; that is why the Ministry pays much attention to this kind of initiative,' said Karineh Harutyunyan, the deputy minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia (Shoghakat TV Company, 2012 [online]).

Key religious narratives in the Armenian schools

The main school subject within which schoolchildren encounter religious issues is the history of the Armenian Church, taught from the fifth to the eleventh grades. The subject's title itself indicates the "historical" focus relating to the church as an institution; however, a more detailed review of the subject structure and content reveals that the scope is actually wider than history. The first two years of study are dedicated to the Bible, the organisational structure of the Armenian Church, sacraments and holidays, while the section of the textbook which outlines the third year of the course includes chapters on the ancient beliefs of the Armenians and neighbouring countries, the adoption of Christianity as a state religion and the historical events concerning the subsequent history of the AAC. The next two grades cover the history of the AAC up to the modern day. The chapters for the tenth grade textbook are headed as follows: "Ethics," "Christian ethics" and "Ceremonies and religious customs of the Armenian Church." The eleventh grade textbook themes are "Worldview," the "Christian–national value system," and "Fundamental values".[4]

However, religion-related narratives are not limited to the textbooks of this special subject. They are represented in other subjects of the school curriculum as well; the alphabet book (first grade); native language textbooks – "*Mayreni*" (first to sixth grades); the fourth grade text book "Me and the Surrounding World" (*Yes ev shrjaka ashkharhy*); "Homeland Studies" (a literal translation of the Armenian title *Hayrenagitutyun* – fourth grade); and "Armenian History" (sixth to twelfth grades). The analyses of all these textbooks revealed several key narratives about religion, the faith of the Armenian people and the national church which are summarized below.

One major narrative encapsulates the idea of Armenia as the first Christian nation. Panossian posits the conversion to Christianity as being one of the initial building blocks of Armenian identity. As he writes: '[t]he notion of being the first Christian people who originally received the word of God directly from the apostles has remained with the Armenians across the centuries; it became a core element of their national identity. As such Christianity became a rigid distinguishing marker, a cultural and symbolic boundary. Once a person crossed this boundary by converting to another faith – especially to Islam – he or she was no longer considered to be Armenian. This has remained the case, even if the idea of being a chosen people is no longer widely believed by contemporary Armenians' (2006, p. 44).

Analysis of the school textbooks also revealed several themes reflecting the notion of "pioneers in official Christianity," as set out by Abrahamian (2006). The *Hayrenagitutyun* textbook reads: 'Refuting paganism (*hethanosutyun*), Trdat III by a royal order declares Christianity as the state religion. Thus, Armenia becomes the first Christian state in the world' (Danielyan et al., 2007, p. 43).[5] Thus, as far as textbook content is concerned, schoolchildren first come across this idea in the fifth grade.[6] However they hear about it earlier through teachers' narratives, as well as in the elementary grades; the teachers usually mention it to the students one way or another. Here is one example from an elementary grade teacher's interview: 'Now my students know by heart the dates of the creation of the Armenian alphabet and the adoption of Christianity' (interview with teacher in Yerevan, 2011). There are other opportunities for teachers to make mention of the church and its significant role in the development of the Armenian nation on the very common field trips to Matenadaran, an ancient manuscript repository located in the centre of Yerevan. This is how the connection has been described by one of the teachers interviewed: 'The Armenian alphabet was created with the support of the church and the manuscripts by means of which we can now divulge our ancient nation and culture have also been created in the churches and not in people's houses, for example' (interview with teacher in Yerevan, 2011). Furthermore, the sixth and seventh grade history textbooks (Harutyunyan et al., 2007, pp. 123–124) give information about the apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew who started to spread Christianity in the region of Greater Armenia and created several communities to prepare for the adoption of Christianity as a state religion in the fourth century. In the seventh grade textbook students once more read and learn the following statement: 'More than 1,700 years ago, in the year 301, our people were the first to adopt Christianity as an official religion' (Harutyunyan

et al., 2008, p. 3). The textbook analyses the political significance of the adoption of Christianity as a state religion by King Trdat (of the Armenian branch of the Arshakids of Persia) for Armenia at that time so that the country would have been politically separated from Sassanid Persia and more successfully achieve the aim of in-state mobilization (Harutyunyan et al., 2008, p. 39).

Elementary school textbooks, as mentioned above, do not contain such references. However, students find several Christianity-related topics: pictures of and references to churches and monasteries (Qyurqchyan and Ter-Grigoryan, 2009, pp. 63, 101; Sargsyan, 2006, pp. 86, 89); pictures of and references to cross-stones (*khachkars*) (Qyurqchyan and Ter-Grigoryan, 2009, p. 101; Sargsyan, 2006, pp. 116, 123); a whole passage about the *khachkar* as a 'cultural value' (Gyurjinyan and Heqeqyan, 2010, p. 53; Hovsepyan et al., 2010, p. 102); and references to church holidays, mostly Christmas and Easter (Hovsepyan et al., 2010, p. 93).

Christianity is seen as a key component of the concept of "Armenianness." The textbook *Hayrenagitutyun* includes the following chapters: "My country," "My language, my faith and my church," "Talks from the history of our homeland," "The culture of our country." If we look at this structure in terms of constructing a special formula of Armenian national identity, religion is represented through two components: faith and the church.

Even though the greater proportion of the religion-related content of the textbooks is constituted of Christianity, particularly as it is related to the AAC, there are references to other religions, as well as to the gods and goddesses of the Armenian pre-Christian, "pagan" (*hethanosakan*) pantheon. For example, the sixth grade textbook on the history of the Armenian Church starts with a presentation of the "Ancient beliefs of the Armenians." The chapter describes in particular the worship of natural phenomena among the Armenians: "Like other peoples of the world, ancient Armenians were pagan. They also worshipped various natural phenomena" (Harutyunyan et al., 2003, p. 5). The textbook refers also to totemism, the Armenian creation myth, other archaic myths and the Armenian pantheon, as well as that of the Kingdom of Van, illustrated with artefacts from archaeological excavations now exhibited in museums. The following chapter concerns the 'pre-Christian religion of the neighbouring countries.' Specifically, the textbook speaks of 'the religion of ancient India' (Harutyunyan et al., 2003, pp. 11–13), the 'Zoroastrian religion' (Harutyunyan et al., 2003, pp. 14–16), 'the Greco-Roman Pantheon, and religion in the period of Hellenism.' In the later chapters, when approaching the period covering the seventh century, the same textbook also presents a chapter about Islam (Harutyunyan et al., 2003, pp. 120–126).

Christian symbols in the school space

Another strand of representations of Christianity (and the church) can be observed in the so-called "state corners" (*petakan ankyun*) in the schools of Armenia, a small area in every school reserved for the exhibition of state symbols. These "corners" are usually hung either on one of the walls of the school entrance or in another place which would be visible from many angles, thus becoming one

of the first, if not the first, visual manifestation of religion-related content that we encounter in the school interior. They have the following minimum obligatory components: the national flag, the coat of arms, and the anthem, as well as pictures of the president and the Catholicos, the head of the AAC. Very often the corner also includes the Lord's Prayer next to the portrait of the Catholicos. The presence of the church among the key national attributes points at the crucial role the religion (more specifically, the AAC) is ascribed in the schools, making it a *de facto* national religion.

The school interior also includes several indirect manifestations of religion in the form of pictures of various churches, as well as of medieval writers and artists who were then mostly linked to churches and monasteries; also pictures of the popular Catholicos Vazgen I (who was in office from 1955 to 1994). The 100th anniversary of the birth of Vazgen I in 2008 was another occasion for creating various iconographic materials with which to decorate the walls and shelves in schools. The governmental programme for the anniversary further included an instruction that a variety of open classes in schools should be organized on the 100th anniversary of Vazgen I (Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 2008).

The study rooms allocated for the classes on the history of the Armenian Church (though not in all schools), could be considered to be another iconographic manifestation of religion-related content; a collection of symbols of religion (predominantly Christianity) are gathered here. These rooms usually serve also for courses in history or social science (*hasarakagitutyun*), having been set up and decorated on the initiative of teachers; many artefacts there are made by the students as set, practical tasks. Usually there are pictures, paintings and miniature models of monasteries (very often taking the form of Etchmiadzin Cathedral). One can always find the pre-Christian Garni Temple amongst these, as well as models of buildings of worship of other religions (and photos).

Religion in school ceremonies

Another manifestation of religion-related content in schools can be observed in the rituals, organized ceremonies and staged events. Among such events and ceremonies are anniversaries, memorial days, celebrations of the start of the academic year and graduation. These manifestations of religion can be categorized into several groups: a) Christian elements incorporated into various secular events; b) religious holidays and festivals celebrated in schools; and c) events attended by clergy. Below several examples for each of these categories are provided.

The first group can be illustrated by a staged performance dedicated to the creation of the Armenian alphabet, one section of which was named "Sacred Christian Values." In this event, Christianity is valued not only as religious faith but as the "saviour" of the Armenian mother tongue. A passage from the script for the performance says: 'It was the sword converted into a Cross that could fight for the preservation of the Armenian Treasure [its language] and thanks to which the triumph of the nation became possible' (field observation, 2011). Another example is a special school event dedicated to grandparents. At the very end, students from

the elementary school performed a prayer. In the information on the school web site we could also read the "interpretation" of the practice, which says: 'Our little Christians whispered a prayer to God to be sure that God will make their wishes come true. That is to say, God will grant their grandmothers and grandfathers long and healthy life' (List of Events, www.chekhov.am, 2009).

The third example from these series is a staged performance dedicated to a celebration of March 8th (International Women's Day), an official holiday in Armenia. This performance began with a "confession of love to mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and teachers." The first part of the confession of love consisted of biblical verses about love (field observation, 2010).

The texts and scenarios for most of the staged events in schools are commonly written by the teachers, who also initiate and organize most of them; thus, the ideas encapsulated in the above-mentioned school events can be viewed as representations of the teachers' perceptions of and discourse about religion rather than those of the schoolchildren.

The second group of events – actual religious holidays – began to be celebrated from the early 1990s. The most popular holidays I have encountered during the course of fieldwork or on school web sites seem to be Christmas, Easter, and the Presentation of the Lord.[7] In the lower grades, though, Christmas and Easter have been seen to be the two main holidays which are celebrated at class level. Particularly, one of the third grade textbooks, *Mayreni* (Gyurjinyan and Heqequan, 2008, p. 64) and the fourth grade textbook "Me and the Surrounding World" (Hovsepyan et al., 2010, p. 94) contain short texts explaining the meaning of Christmas. It is commonly the teachers who are taking the most active role in initiating, organizing and conducting these holiday rites and staged performances. The teachers are in charge of creating the scripts for the performances and ceremonies, while students usually learn the script the teacher has prepared and follow her/his instructions. Some of them are performed as in-class events, while others may for example take the form of a school event with the participation of the school administrators, representatives from the local government bodies, officials from the Ministry of Education, parents and other guests as audience.

It is also common for schools in Yerevan to invite a clergyman as a guest for the event, holiday, or celebration of an anniversary. Clergymen are invited also to be present on the dates significant in the life of school, for example, the start of the academic year (September 1st) and graduation (the "Last Bell") as specific kinds of rites of passage. One such tradition for Armenian (Yerevan) schools is the "Alphabet Fair," usually a staged performance which is a celebration that takes place on the completion of learning the alphabet. Sometimes it is organized near the church in Oshakan and the tomb of Mesrop Mashtots. The whole visit is ritualized: it is often called a pilgrimage; there is a special common service involving pledging an oath to Mesrop Mashtots to preserve the Armenian language and keep it pure, while the priest of the church during some part of the event joins them with his blessing and leads prayers. A representative of the church is commonly present at Yerevan schools on September 1st, the first day of the new academic year, which is also recognized officially as the "Day of Knowledge." School staff

(the director and one or two teachers) give congratulatory speeches, also welcoming the first graders to the school. Songs, poems and short speeches of welcome follow, accompanied by the schoolchildren performing dances and plays. The local self-government representative may also give a short speech or may simply advertise the mayor's special appeal for the day. In many schools at the end of the ceremony a representative of the church comes to give his blessing and make a short congratulatory speech, as well as giving word of advice addressed to the children, parents and the school staff. A visit to church, lighting candles, praying and getting a blessing from the clergy is one of the elements of the "Last Bell" celebrations, another rite of passage, this time to mark passing out of school, which takes place on the occasion of graduating from the ninth grade (basic level) and twelfth grade (high school level) (field notes, 2010–2012).

Conclusion

In this chapter, the school space as a whole is perceived as a mosaic in relation to the ways in which religious identity and its connection to national identity within schools is represented, as well as how the construction of this connection takes place. This mosaic comprises the following main elements,

First, key narratives reflected in the textbooks: a) Armenia as the first Christian nation (state) and b) Christianity as a component of the notion of 'Armenianness,' iconographic representations (the AAC as one of the 'building blocks' of Armenian identity, as symbolised in the "state corners"); churches, monasteries, cross-stones (*khachkar*) and other items of material culture related to Christianity; collections of religious, mostly Christian, symbols which are exhibited in the schools*;* references to the pre-Christian faith of the Armenians; and second, a variety of representations of religiosity and/or manifestations of religion-related content within the school ritual and ceremonial spaces.

We argue that the mosaic of representations (including its respective content), as illustrated in this chapter, reveals to us an environment for the schoolchildren which can be depicted as creating in schools a distinctively religious, 'taken-for–granted, common sense knowledge of everyday reality' (Berger and Luckmann, 1991).

Additionally, based on the structure of the mosaic and on an analysis of the process of its construction, we observed a certain intermingling of two levels of representation: one imposed by the state and the other created locally, in everyday school practice, where local actors create and negotiate received meanings.

Officially in Armenia the Church is separated from the state by the constitution. Nevertheless, the constitution also recognizes the "exclusive mission" of the AAC as a national church in the spiritual life of the Armenian people and in the development of the national culture and preservation of national identity. The model of cooperation between the government (the Ministry of Education and Science) and the church (Christian Education Center [CEC] of the AAC) can be explained as initiated by the church and assisted by the Ministry.

In Armenia, there are no religious schools providing general education services; neither is there a dedicated place for a purely religious, confessional instruction in

the school curriculum. However, the official curriculum includes a course on the history of the Armenian Church for which members of the clergy are among the invited guests during various associated in-school events and holidays; the school interior and its walls contain various items related to Christianity, most often symbolizing various aspects of the AAC; and a variety of staged events and celebrations include elements of religious festivals and ceremonies. This illustrates the fact that schools are one arena where a plurality of forms of representing religion are revealed as part of a general trend in which religion does not function simply in terms of a yes/no distinction (Jödicke, 2013, p. 109). Having introduced a mandatory subject (namely, the history of the Armenian Church) onto the official curriculum, to be taught across seven of the altogether 12 school years in Armenia and with a content which has a wider scope rather than that of merely a history, the church in Armenia becomes a significant element in the educational content of school curricula. Thus, the church becomes a part of the national system of standards and is involved in the creation of common points of reference (as mentioned by Weber, 1979), or viewed as a part of the state ideological apparatus (as mentioned by Althusser, 1971).

The perception that being Christian is one of the key elements of Armenianness (Armenian identity), with an overall focus on the nation being the first to adopt Christianity as a state religion, which is a leading theme within the textbook narratives concerning the "religious" component of national identity.

We have seen a variety of representations of religiosity and/or manifestations of religion-related content within the school ritual and ceremonial spaces. The sources for these initiatives are representatives of the state (who have instituted official holidays related to the church calendar and local self-government representatives who attend school events), the church (the clergy also being present at many school ceremonies or rituals) and the teachers. The teachers are main initiators and organisers of many of the ceremonies, holiday celebrations and various events at schools, thus revealing themselves to be participants in and agents of identity construction alongside the government and the church. Another feature of the teachers' participation in the construction process is in the way in which they bring a "folk" flavour to the schools' religious content by including in the celebrations of religious holidays an added ingredient of folk signifiers and practices. In addition to the narratives within the textbooks, the teachers "create" meanings, as well as engaging with certain "discourses" which challenge or negotiate them.

These diverse manifestations of religion-related activity in Armenian schools brings us back to the application of Casanova's thesis and shows that the separation of church and state would not necessarily ensure the absence of religious elements in the spaces of state schools. The analysis of the Armenian case proves that, as Abrahamian puts it, the 'confessional identity has become a kind of tradition for Armenians' (Abrahamian, 2006, p. 114).[8]

In this chapter, the mosaic of religious identity as part of the national identity is discussed in terms of how it is constructed in the schools, as well as looking at the state, the church and the teachers' roles in this process. One important aspect, however, remains for future research and discussion; it is related to schoolchildren

for whom all these are done. How do they take in and respond to the practices and discourses mentioned in this article? Are they equal agents in the process of identity construction?

Notes

1 Article 8.1 of the Republic of Armenia Constitution says, 'The church shall be separate from the state in the Republic of Armenia. The Republic of Armenia recognizes the exclusive historical mission of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church as a national church, in the spiritual life, development of the national culture and preservation of the national identity of the people of Armenia. Freedom of activities for all religious organizations in accordance with the law shall be guaranteed in the Republic of Armenia. The relations of the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church may be regulated by the law.'

2 According to the recent census of Republic of Armenia (2001), 97.9 per cent of the population considered themselves as ethnically Armenians. According to the CRRC Caucasus Barometre survey data, as of the year 2011, 97 per cent of the respondents regarded themselves as believers in the Armenian Apostolic Church, 37 per cent said religion is rather important, and 56 per cent very important in their daily lives. (Source: http://www.crrccenters.org/caucasusbarometer/)

3 Most of the textbooks for elementary classes are published in two versions from which the schools can make a choice.

4 The exact original terms in the tenth grade textbook are, respectively: *Բարոյագիտություն, Քրիստոնեական բարոյագիտություն, Հայոց եկեղեցու ծեսերը և բարեպաշտական սովորույթները*; the original terms for eleventh grade textbook are: *Աշխարհայացք, Քրիստոնեական-ազգային արժեքների համակարգ, Հիմնարար արժեքներ:*

5 All translations from Armenian, including the textbook titles, are mine.

6 Only one indirect reference is made in the second grade textbook *Mayreni* (by Sargsyan et al.), within a broader topic (Our Homeland) right after the text entitled 'Saint Etchmiadzin,' as a small note. The text says, 'Thousands of churches have been built in Armenia. Recently, a new church was built in the centre of Yerevan, the St. Grigor Lusavorich, on the occasion of the 1700th anniversary of adoption of Christianity as a state religion in Armenia' (Sargsyan et al., 2010, p. 128).

7 The holiday is celebrated by the Armenian Church on February 14. The holiday is famous for its folk name, *trndez,* and a special ritual of circumambulating and jumping over the fire as a part of the celebration. This aspect of the holiday was preserved as a popular and common practice in Armenia during the Soviet period as well.

8 The passage from the book, quoted in full is as follows: 'the confessional identity became a kind of tradition for Armenians and not a question of faith in the strict sense of the word. Hay-k'ristonya ('Armenian-Christian') is understood by the Armenians as a single whole, the two characteristics being linked certainly by a hyphen' (Abrahamian, 2006, p. 114)

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Part IV

Cultural values, ideology and democracy

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Introduction

Tigran Matosyan

In this section, culture is referred to as the set of 'values, attitudes, beliefs, orientations, and underlying assumptions prevalent among people in a society' (Harrison, 2000, p. xv). Culture is always collective in nature, because it is shared with other people living in the same social environment (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005, p. 4).

Culture also serves as a powerful internal compass for individual and collective action. As such, culture appears to be indispensible for understanding how people behave in various settings, which may include performing tasks in everyday life or dealing with crisis situations.

Culture is decisive in understanding the response of societies to the processes of democratization. The latter can be described as a transition from an authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regime to a democratic political system. Such a transition always connotes a crisis for an old system and the advent of a new one, along with the introduction of new institutions, new ideologies, new values, new rituals and new symbols. Hence the nature of the extant values, attitudes, beliefs and other mental dispositions in the societies undergoing a transition to democracy are an essential factor in determining how efficient the localization of the incoming realities will be.

An essential principle of democracy is an obligation on members of the society to participate in the game of "democracy" (for example, by voting in elections for their representatives to political institutions or signing petitions). Most notably, they are required to accept the rules, and the underlying values, of the new game in order to participate in it and observe the rules consistently. Research has shown that certain values are more favourable for an efficient interplay between democratic institutions and the broader society. For example, Feldman (1988) argued that support for equal opportunities, economic individualism, and the free enterprise system are the core beliefs of Americans which contribute to the formation of their political attitudes. The latter, in turn, are determinant factors in maintaining the political system of the United States. Putnam (1993) suggests that the quality of democratic institutions in various regions of Italy correlate positively with social capital, a set of shared values (such as interpersonal trust) which make it possible for individuals to cooperate outside their close-knit in-groups. Fukuyama (1995, 2000) too has argued that a culture rich in social capital is essential for creating a healthy civil society. Schwarz and Sagie (2000) have demonstrated

that democratization correlates positively with the values of autonomy, openness to change and self-transcendence (concern for others), while Inglehart (2000) has shown that societies emphasizing "self-expression values" are much more likely to be democratic than are societies which emphasize "survival values."

The functioning of a democracy is also dependent on an effective underpinning of its political institutions by cultural formations. It should be borne in mind that political institutions called to pursue the agenda of democratization are not mere mechanical entities; they comprise individuals with fixed cultural mindsets. The values, worldviews, attitudes and other guiding beliefs that these individuals hold are decisive in determining how these political institutions will perform their duties. It may be the case that the cultural mindsets of the individuals running a political institution simply may not be congruent with the officially stated goals of that institution. For example, the efficiency of an institution created to ensure gender equality in a society will be questionable if the key decision-makers in this institution endorse masculine values (which may or may not be the dominant value orientation in that particular society). As another possibility, key figures in a political institution may hold values congruent with the officially stated goals of their institution; however, they may refrain from a wholehearted implementation of these goals, or they may even opt for a different set of goals in view of diverging societal expectations. In other words, abdication of the institutional goals may take place when the key figures perceive the broader societal values to be in opposition to their personal values as well as to the ones reflected in the official goals and policies of their institutions. For example, leaders of a political party following the values of pacifism and regional integration may refrain from campaigning for cross-border initiatives with representatives of a neighbouring country in an atmosphere of widespread enmity in their own society towards this particular neighbour. Scenarios such as these are well encapsulated in Daniel Etounga-Manguelle's often cited idea that 'culture is the mother and that institutions are the children' (2000, p. 75).

After the fall of the Communist system in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, a pervasive conventional wisdom accompanied the process of democratization in the newly formed nation states. It was thought that the establishment of an appropriate political institution (e.g. parliament, a constitution, or an ombudsman's office) in itself ensures the efficient functioning of democratic norms in a society. As a rule, these institutions were (and still are) borrowed from Western democracies, where they have operated with relative success. As the argument would go, if an institution works well in the West, it will work well also in a post-Communist context. Notably, a "one-size-fits-all" mentality has been dominant among the political elites, both in the recipient societies and in the Western countries and international organizations (such as, for example, the Council of Europe) which have been pushing democratization eastward. For example, an unquestioning attitude towards the universality of democratic institutions can be detected in the conditions that international organizations put before the countries aspiring to become members of these organizations.

Nor is the case of democratization in the South Caucasus countries an exception to this general tendency. The issue as to whether the logic of local cultures corresponds to the logic of the introduced Western democratic institutions and

norms appears to have been taboo among local decision-makers and in public discourse. Moreover, some of the supporters of democratization, at least in Armenia and Georgia, have claimed that their countries possess an innate cultural predisposition towards the values of democracy. In particular, reference has been made to Christianity in terms of the following reductionist logic: Western democracy is a product of Christianity; Georgia and Armenia historically have extensive Christian traditions; therefore, the Western democratic institutions should be easily applicable to the Christian environments of these countries.

However, a little more than two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the state of democratization in the South Caucasus is still perplexing. International organizations have been rating Azerbaijan as an authoritarian state. Armenia and Georgia have been seen to be semi-authoritarian. In September 2013, the Armenian authorities unexpectedly declared their strong preference for economic and political union with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan (countries constantly criticized for their lack of democracy), obviously to the detriment of closer cooperation with the European Union. Georgia, in its turn, appears to be suffering setbacks after some democratic progress made following the Rose Revolution of 2003. The defeat of Saakashvili during the 2012 parliamentary elections can be viewed as symptomatic of a widespread popular disillusionment with the way in which his democratic reforms have developed.

Persistent failures in establishing democratic governance in the South Caucasus are the reason why culture should not be overlooked as an explanatory variable. It seems realistic that culture itself can be shaped and reshaped under the systematic influence of democratic institutions, as has been the case with Singapore or even with Georgia during the short period of semi-authoritarian rule under Saakashvili; however, the evidence of the reverse impact (that is to say, culture influencing democratic institutions and norms) seems to be stronger in the context of the South Caucasus. Persisting attitudes toward sexual minorities in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia constitute only one example of how culture may hinder the establishment of liberal democratic practices in these countries. According to the Caucasus Research Resource Centers' (2011) Caucasus Barometer, the overwhelming majority of respondents in the South Caucasus (96 per cent in Armenia, 84 per cent in Azerbaijan, and 87 per cent in Georgia) thought that homosexuality could never be justified. These levels of negativity on the issue are striking, especially given the fact that all three countries, following their entry into the Council of Europe in the late 1990s and early 2000s, apparently made a break from a lingering Soviet anti-gay mentality by reforming their legislations so as to ensure the rights of sexual minorities, whilst the violent protest in Tbilisi against LGBT activists on May 17, 2013, is just one manifestation of the persistence of such negative attitudes and a reminder of the role culture plays in establishing one of the essential principles of democracy – tolerance towards minorities.

The essays included in this section are dealing with various aspects of the complex relationships between democratization and culture in the South Caucasus. In his chapter entitled 'An Analysis of Counter-Hegemony: Challenges for Political Opposition in Azerbaijan,' Rashad Shirinov connects the failure of the Azerbaijani opposition to bring sustainable political changes to the country with cultural factors; that is

to say, the values, beliefs, ideas, and perceptions both of the oppositional players and the broader society. In particular, building on the Gramscian notion of "hegemony," the author speculates that the opposition parties in Azerbaijan have not been successful in creating their effective "counter-hegemony" partly because the discourse on democratization, as reflected in the classical political ideologies borrowed from the West, would not find receptive ears among the population of the country. Sona Hovhannisyan's chapter 'Myths and Politics: Old "Beliefs" and "New" Aspirations in Independent Armenia' is an attempt to look at socio-political developments (specifically, democratization) in Armenia through the lens of the presidential inaugurations that took place in the country in the period between 1991 and 2013. The author views the newly elected presidents, their inauguration speeches and the inauguration rituals as complex sign systems and demonstrates how cultural elements, in the form of ideologemes and mythologemes, find their way into the democratic rite of presidential inauguration. Finally, Tigran Matosyan's chapter 'Collectivism/Individualism in the South Caucasus: Implications for Democracy' uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses to show the link between culture and democratization. In particular, the author compares the orientations of Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian societies towards the values of collectivism/individualism, as well as attempts to link these orientations to various socio-political phenomena such as membership of civic organizations or the rule of law.

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10 An analysis of counter-hegemony

Challenges of political opposition in Azerbaijan

Rashad Shirinov

For almost 20 years following the independence of Azerbaijan, the concept of an opposition, as a new phenomenon, has emerged and gained political and civil significance. The very term "opposition" itself (*muxalifət*) did not exist during the Soviet era as a political category and, therefore, it has taken (and still continues to take) some time to be fully or partially accepted or understood. According to the philosopher Rahman Badalov, the concept of opposition is "ontologically contradictory" in the context of Azerbaijani society. 'In the Soviet period, we were not trained to think critically; hence our opposition is more about protesting than opposing' (interview with Rahman Badalov, Baku, Jan. 14, 2013). He believes that the Azerbaijanis adopted the Russian meaning of the word "criticism" – *razoblachenie* in Russian, *ifsha* in Azerbaijani[1] – which can be rendered in English as "disclosure" or "unmasking." He adds: 'When we react to something, for instance to non-combat deaths in the military, we protest against violence, rather than oppose the practice of ill-treatment and propose to change it somehow' (interview with Badalov, 2013).

The long years of Soviet rule and of the existence of a single party which recognized no rivals to political power and no dissent to the regime have resulted in a population which has not thought of "opposition" as a separate category and even less as a means and a tool for acquiring political power. Hence, a variety of perceptions emerge as to what the "opposition" is and what it represents. In a narrow sense, the opposition is understood as a term designating those political forces who stand against the government. In a broader sense, to be "in opposition" connotes that you are someone (or an organization, or group) who does not agree with the government and tends to voice this dissent or criticism.

In 1993, former communists overthrew the government of the Azerbaijani Popular Front. Since that time, the opposition in Azerbaijan, despite tremendous efforts and sacrifices, has largely failed to change the political status quo. Azerbaijan can be considered, in this sense, to be in line with the Central Asian countries (with the probable exception of Kyrgyzstan), where opposition movements have been largely suppressed and have become marginalized (Kilner, 2012). Although in the 1990s there were greater differences between Azerbaijan and countries such as Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, in the 2000s and subsequently this gap started gradually to close (Guliyev, 2005).

The aim of this paper is to understand how the institutions of opposition (primarily political parties) have been trying to establish themselves following independence and why this opposition is failing to generate greater political change in Azerbaijan. Certainly, we are aware of the structural factors preventing change at the present moment (namely, abundant oil resources and the ongoing conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh). We also realize that regime change is not only dependent on the strength of the opposition but also on the relative strengths of various groups inside the ruling elite who are also engaged in a power struggle. At various times the nature of the relationships among these groups also may vary.

Keeping all this in mind, we will be trying to assess how the institutions of opposition in Azerbaijan have been attempting to establish power, influence and reputation for themselves using various tools as ideas, values, beliefs and knowledge.

The concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony

For the purpose of my analysis in this chapter, I will draw upon the Gramscian concept of hegemony. Antonio Gramsci uses the term "hegemony" in two ways. The first concerns the 'leadership the proletariat must seek to exert over potentially allied classes, such as the peasants, by getting them to identify with its interests through political and ideological means and not by pursuing a narrowly self interested policy' (Gramsci, 1994, p. xxxvii). The second refers broadly to the 'organization of a cultural, moral and ideological consent of the population to the prevailing political and economic system through the institutions of civil society, such as schools, churches, parties, etc.' (Gramsci, 1994, ibid).

According to Gramsci, the ruling elite (in Gramsci's terminology "the capitalists or the bourgeoisie") bases itself not only upon political and economic means but also by means of more 'subtle but pervasive forms of ideological control and manipulation that serve to perpetuate all repressive structures' (Burke, 2005). Gramsci identifies two quite distinct forms of political control: "domination," which refers to direct physical coercion by police and armed forces, and "hegemony," which refers to both ideological control and, even more crucially, consent from below. He assumes that no regime, regardless of how authoritarian it might be, could sustain itself *primarily* through organized state power and armed force. In the long run, it must have popular support and legitimacy in order to maintain stability.

By hegemony, Gramsci also means the permeation throughout society of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality which has the effect of supporting the status quo in power relations. Hegemony in this sense might be defined as an "organizing principle" that is diffused by the process of socialization into every area of daily life. To the extent that this prevailing consciousness is internalized by the population, it becomes an inherent part of what is generally called "common sense," so that the philosophy, culture and morality of the [ruling] elite comes to appear as the natural order of things. One of the functions of hegemony, according to Gramsci, is a 'spontaneous consent given by the great

masses of population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant group' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 57). One important element of this consent tends to be the prestige (and later confidence) enjoyed by the dominant group.

Louis Althusser develops a similar concept of "ideological state apparatuses," which he divides into the religious, educational, family, legal, political, cultural and so on. Ideological state apparatuses can be multiple and operate in public as well as private realms. According to him ideological state apparatuses are different from the "repressive state apparatus," which is singular, limited to the public domain and functions through violent (physical and administrative) means (Althusser, 1971).

Applying this conception to the Azerbaijani opposition, it is important to look into several dimensions and particularly into how the opposition has been attempting to build its own hegemony through a discourse on morality by developing and sharing its ideology and by promoting and advancing its cultural prevalence *vis-à-vis* the government or ruling elite. We deliberately use the term hegemony and not "domination," because in order to wield the latter one needs to be in power.

In fact, it would rather be appropriate to call it "counter-hegemony" in order to distinguish it from the hegemony imposed by the ruling elite (class). The concept of counter-hegemony is a so-called "neo-Gramscian" concept and Nicola Pratt describes it as the establishment of an alternative hegemony on the terrain of civil society. Pratt argues that civil society by means of this alternative hegemony intends to make a political change (Pratt, 2004). In this context, it is important to refer to Gramsci, who also stresses that 'a social group can, indeed must, exercise "leadership" before winning governmental power' (1971, p. 57). This is particularly important considering the Gramscian understanding of power and authority as it is based on two concepts of "leadership" and "consent" (and achieved by the promotion of the ideas of the dominant group in the society).

In what follows we will apply the Gramscian concept of hegemony, along with the additional concept of counter-hegemony, to the Azerbaijani opposition.

Mapping the major forms of opposition in Azerbaijan

As mentioned in the introduction, the notion of an opposition and all discourse related to it is a new phenomenon in Azerbaijan, as it may be in any other former Soviet country. The opposition movements could be seen as the continuation of so-called "national liberation movements" which emerged at the verge of the break-up of the Soviet Union. The latter were large social movements involving almost entire societies.

Today we can probably divide the opposition in Azerbaijan into three major categories (or perhaps we could say there are three main types of opposition): political parties, civil society groups and individuals. Certainly, we can also refer to intra-governmental opposition but, for the purposes of this study, we will skip that category.

The first category, the political parties, may themselves be divided into "real opposition" and "constructive opposition." The former refers to the parties which

have opposed the government of Heydar Aliyev since 1993 and have been quite consistent in their struggle – they are also labelled as the "traditional" opposition by general commentators and the "radical" opposition by the government and the ruling New Azerbaijan Party (*Yeni Azərbaycan Partiyası*). The term "radical" denotes their irreconcilable attitude towards the legitimacy of the government. "Constructive" opposition is a term used for those political parties and politicians who declare themselves to be in opposition but do not have any noticeably critical views regarding the government and the ruling elite (and sometimes no criticisms at all). Some of them may be slightly more critical than others, but generally there is recognition in society that their role is to be puppets manipulated by the authorities.

The "traditional" political opposition in Azerbaijan consists largely of two political parties: the Azerbaijani Popular Front Party (*Azərbaycan Xalq Cəbhəsi Partiyası*) and the Musavat Party (*Müsavat Partiyası*). These two parties ruled together for a short period between 1992 and 1993; their government subsequently was ousted by Heydar Aliyev and his supporters. A number of other parties also shared the political arena during the 1990s (specifically the Azerbaijani National Independence Party and the Azerbaijani Democratic Party) but they have either vanished completely or became marginalized during the 2000s. The "constructive" opposition (they also call themselves "loyal" or "realistic") is mainly made up of small parties such as Big Creation Party (*Böyük Quruluş Partiyası*), the Democratic Reforms Party (*Democratik İslahatlar Partiyası*) and the Greater Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (*Bütöv Azərbaycan Xalq Cəbhəsi Partiyası*).

Another group which might be included into the opposition (in the broader sense of the word) may be tagged "civil society." Indeed, here we mean to refer to those organizations which do genuinely function as independent civil society organizations and not the so-called "GONGOs" (government-sponsored nongovernmental organizations [NGOs]). A fundamental divergence between Gramsci's concept of civil society and post-Soviet practice can be detected here. Gramsci draws a line between "civil society" and "political society," where the latter is concerned with political power (retaining or attaining to it) and the former is about those institutions and organizations (including churches, schools, trade unions and so on) which form the field of the development and reproduction of consent and submission to the political sphere (Maglaras, 2013). What we observe in the former Soviet Union area is a tendency to apply the term "civil society" only to non-profit organizations (or NGOs) that work as semi-professional organizations and unions to resolve various issues related to democratization, the economy, healthcare, social issues, education and so on. However, this is the sort of process driven by an elite rather than a "grassroots" movement.

The third category might be summarized as a loosely connected group of individuals comprising intelligentsia or intellectuals, opinion-makers, journalists, bloggers, youth activists and other persons engaged in critical deliberations in the political realm.

These three categories can fuse from time to time into large societal blocks – for instance prior to elections – and challenge the government. During "peacetime" they can function separately and may be even critical of each other.

A discourse of moral superiority

One of the slogans of the opposition always has been concerned with achieving a "moral prevalence" or "moral power" over the ruling elite in the country. Either it is direct political statements of the political party leaders or more subtle, indirect hints in the form of actions on the part of media and civil society organizations to ensure transparency, accountability and good governance – it has always been about emphasizing the immorality of the current state power, which must be rendered more humane, honest and transparent. This emphasis was particularly visible during elections, when the opposition parties stressed the importance of the fairness of elections which in practice have been marred by widespread irregularities and interference on the part of the electoral executives.

Corrupt practices in the state always have been the major point of oppositional criticism and presented by the opposition as a manifestation of state immorality. At the same time, the ruling elite, which has understood corruption as being an aspect of public administration and something that it is not able (or willing) to eradicate, has attempted to justify corrupt behaviour. The late President Heydar Aliyev on one occasion acknowledged that corruption was an intractable problem (interview with Heydar Aliyev, 1999).

Certainly, the opposition had chances to gain a foothold in the area of morality. In the eyes of some of the population, the opposition was figured in terms of a hero fighting a brutal authoritarian regime. Indeed, after 1993 the country had numerous political prisoners – opposition politicians as well as journalists and members of their families – who were being harassed, beaten up and imprisoned (on mostly fabricated charges such as hooliganism, possession of drugs, resistance to the police and so on).[2] This has elevated opposition politicians and activists in the eyes of those who have complained about the government's bad policies but have not been politically active themselves.

However, the authorities played the "stability" card – using arguments articulating the idea that the current government had restored order after the initial turmoil of the 1990s – in order to undermine the opposition's leverages (Filetti, 2012). One of the challenging points for the opposition to face was the memory of 1992–3, when it actually was in power. The situation in the country was chaotic and unstable, and the government of the Popular Front (which won the country's first free and fair elections, held in 1992) under Abulfaz Elchibey, because of its inability to handle the concomitant challenges, invited Heydar Aliyev to take control of the government. Aliyev, who had been a long-time Communist Party leader, came from Nakhchivan to Baku and within a short time deprived the Popular Front government of all its power. In 1993, Aliyev won the elections and continued to rule till his death in 2003, followed by his son Ilham Aliyev, who has been in power ever since.

This short period (1992–3) of Azerbaijan's modern history is, therefore, remembered as the story of an idealistic, honest leader Abulfaz Elchibey, who failed to manage instability, and, therefore, passed authority on to a strongman. In terms of moral character, even his rivals respected Elchibey for his integrity.

Almost everyone would accept that he was a "clean man" but "not a politician." For many years after he was defeated in 1993 and until his death in 2000, people remembered him in such terms.

After 1993, the ruling regime soon turned Heydar Aliyev into the "grandfather" of the nation, and later he managed to bring some order to the chaos with the use of his outstanding political experience. Following these events and throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the first government of Elchibey (and particularly Elchibey himself) was blamed by some people for "generously" handing over his power to Aliyev, who later installed the corrupt system into Azerbaijan. Elchibey's actions have raised suspicions, therefore, about his links to the KGB and to Aliyev. Some have even accused him of tribalism, since both Aliyev and Elchibey were originally from the Nakhchivan region (Nasirov, 2013). These suspicions were strengthened by the fact that Elchibey himself acknowledged that he had had sympathy for Aliyev during the Soviet period. In a TV interview, Elchibey recognized that he had become sympathetic to Aliyev after the latter was appointed a member of Soviet Politburo: 'It was important that we, the Azerbaijanis, have our own person at the Politburo and I stopped speaking out against him after that' (Aciq Sohbet, 1998).

The opposition did not want to accept Aliyev's legitimacy. Nor has it subsequently accepted the legitimacy of Ilham Aliyev. However, critics claim that by participating in the elections, in fact, the opposition parties have effectively recognized that the government is legitimate. In this regard, those politicians and other activists who are critical of the opposition (who were in opposition to the government themselves) have been constantly repeating that it was neither rational nor moral to join the elections because the government wanted to create a veneer of democracy, and, as the behaviour of the opposition helps the authorities to achieve their goals, it should be considered as collaboration (Milli, 2012).

However, despite the opposition's failure, there have been arguments to support the achievements of the Popular Front government. First of all, Russian troops (and their military bases) were withdrawn from Azerbaijani territory in 1992, when the present opposition parties were in power. It seems that it took significant courage on behalf of the leaders of the Popular Front government to enforce this decision. Second, the government introduced a new centralized university admission system and standardized university admission exams. This was a complete breakthrough, as the Soviet admission system was absolutely corrupt and based on nepotism. Now "poor people" could go to university, since the elitist barriers, a legacy of the previous Soviet system, had disappeared at the admission level (although they still existed in other academic practices). The narratives related to this educational reform have been deployed in one of the strongest arguments in support of the opposition parties during the late 1990s and the 2000s. Sometimes there were rumours that the authorities wanted to restore the previous system, but they did not prove to be true. The abolition of the "test system" was believed to have been a trigger for public demonstrations (Is the government preparing to abolish. . . , AzPolitika, 2012).

On the other hand, ordinary citizens also have challenged the morality of the opposition because of attempts on the part of opposition political parties to regain

power. There is a common impression that the opposition would not be much different, morally speaking, from the present government. One of the popular beliefs could be formulated as "we know that this government has stolen plenty and, therefore, they have had their fill, but we also know that opposition is hungry and when they come to power they will be even worse in terms of stealing public funds." However, according to the actual results of the elections in 2003 and 2005, the opposition succeeded significantly to dismantle that stereotype and to create a counter-narrative, which argued that change is more important than maintenance of the status quo. Both in 2003 and 2005, the country witnessed large demonstrations which were attended sometimes by hundreds of thousands of members of the public. In 2003, even following electoral fraud and illegalities, opposition candidates managed to gather around 25 per cent of the total vote (OSCE ODIHR Report, 2003).

Nevertheless, changing the status quo was not as easy as it might have appeared. Some attribute this to incapacity on the part of opposition leaders, including Isa Gambar – who has led the Musavat Party for a long time – to organize people to take to the streets in larger numbers when on October 16, 2003, some of the opposition leaders decided to stage unrest in Baku. A prominent youth leader and dissident blogger Emin Milli criticized the opposition leaders for their lack of courage and vision. According to Milli, October 16, 2003, was an extremely decisive moment when the opposition forces could really have changed the balance of power in Azerbaijan. Gambar has also been criticized for not giving up the chairmanship of the Musavat Party. Gambar has been chairing the party since 1992, when it was re-established.[3] Milli says:

> I have to say it again. Without the purity of the democratic struggle, without questioning the leaders of political opposition and not just the government, we will not be able to win hearts and minds of people not now, not in the future.
>
> (Milli, 2012)

There have been two major causes for changes in the attitudes of the people to the opposition. The first is generational. The emergence of a large youth movement in Azerbaijan since 2005 has started to challenge the traditional status of political opposition in the country. Students and representatives of youth organizations started to think differently and believed it was time to tell the "old guys" about their mistakes. Second, unexpected and spontaneous occupations of the "public sphere" by citizen groups (including, but not limited to youth organizations) became a new tendency. Sometimes these two factors have overlapped.

From 1993 onwards the government imposed a complete ban on opposition parties' gatherings at Freedom Square – the symbolic arena where the national-liberation movement started – and after the 2005 parliamentary elections the authorities placed an absolute informal ban on public assembly. This means that political parties were obliged to use official means to ask permission from the city authorities to hold gatherings inside Baku. Normally the Baku Executive

Power would refuse permission for the proposed place and instead would offer one much more remote and difficult to access outside the city perimeters. Outside Baku, in regional Azerbaijan, the situation with assemblies was much more difficult, as the local authorities would not allow any gatherings, including in enclosed spaces (Human Rights Watch, 2013).[4] However, on March 11, 2011, for example, inspired by the "Arab Spring," social media activists (using mostly Facebook) staged a protest in the heart of downtown Baku on Fountain Square. Subsequently, the 2011 protests at Fountain Square were to manifest new forms and a new impetus for activism within the opposition (in a broader sense).

The ideology of Azerbaijan's opposition

The ideology of the opposition parties and civil society organizations has been characterized by a rhetoric of promoting a democratic state and society. Indeed, the rhetoric of democracy and critics of the government's record in democratization (particularly with regard to human rights) has become the most powerful tool of opposition. Various statements, resolutions, reports, newspaper articles and TV and radio reports coming from abroad have frequently reinforced the opposition's standpoint. For instance, resolutions of the European Parliament regarding politically motivated arrests in the country; reports and separate calls from international NGOs such as Human Rights Watch, Freedom House, Transparency International and Amnesty International; articles in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* – all of these immediately have been interpreted as the failure of the government to meet domestic and international commitments and obligations.

This criticism of the government has brought to light a new question: whether Western notions of political ideology, democracy, human rights and associated ideas are compatible with the "East" and the mentality of the population in countries such as Azerbaijan. The prominent Azerbaijani political pundit Hikmat Hajizade believes that this is a misconception: 'Yes, countries of Muslim cultures – as well as the countries of Orthodox Christian cultures – have lagged behind in terms of democratic development. However, today only a few people would seriously claim that democracy is alien to our cultures and that it is an invention of Protestant culture, suiting only Protestants. Originally, democracy developed in Protestant cultures, then in Catholic ones and now it is our turn and the turn of Orthodox Christians. Turkey, for instance, is not less democratic than Spain or Portugal. Fair elections take place in Indonesia. Therefore, our countries cannot evade democracy' (Hajizade, 2011).

Doctrines, theories and classical ideologies have not been discussed widely and many in opposition have believed that "it is not the time" for working out ideological differences. The same Hikmat Hajizade, for example, says: 'We have prepared political programmes . . . but later we have realized that without solving major problems (relating to democracy, elections, human rights) it makes no sense to write all sorts of programmes, especially when no one is going to listen to what you say.' Then he asks: 'By the way, what was [Oliver] Cromwell's policy? We can call it "no taxation without representation," meaning that taxes should be

imposed not by the king, but by the fairly elected parliament. And what was the agenda of the French Revolution? Its slogan was "Liberty, Equality, Property and the Right to resist violence." And unless you enact these principal, major policies, it will be useless to write programmes on currency regulation' (Hajizade, 2011).

The absence of classical political ideologies in Azerbaijan (both ruling and oppositional) has been an issue constantly discussed in society and the media. In the 1990s, nationalistic sentiments dominated politics, but after this wave had passed, the political realm remained without classical ideologies. Political parties were manifesting all sorts of ideologies at the same time: liberalism, socialism, Islam, conservatism, radicalism and so on. It has become difficult to stick to a particular ideology as parties have wanted to reach as wide and diverse an audience as possible. However, sometimes this has caused tensions within the parties. For instance, after the Musavat Party – one of the biggest of the opposition parties – joined the European Liberal International Group (ALDE), an internal rebellion took place concerning the incompatibility of Musavat and liberal values. Nasib Nasibli, a member of the Musavat Party's board, expressed his dissatisfaction and resigned, stating that Musavat was a party loyal to the idea of Turkish nationalism so that joining the European Liberal Alliance was unacceptable (interview with Isa Gambar, Turan News Agency, Jan. 11, 2007).

It is extremely interesting to see that, following 70 years of so-called "socialism" among the former Soviet Union states, socialist or communist parties are almost non-existent. Along with the lack of a societal base in the form of an organized working class and peasantry, another reason for the low level of popular support for the socialist parties seems to be the fact that the ideas of socialism (and communism) had been widely discredited during the Soviet period. Therefore, currently there is a great deal of skepticism and cynicism regarding socialist ideas among the elite, although there is also significant nostalgia for Soviet times among the older generations.

For instance, the Azerbaijani Social Democratic Party is one of a countless number of small parties and has little influence on public opinion. However, Zarduşt Alizade, one of its leaders, believes that there is an important space to be occupied by the opposition, if they realize that they should actually appeal to social democratic ideals and slogans. Alizade admits that social-democratic ideas have proved to be unpopular in the contemporary Azerbaijani political environment and that this unpopularity has been due to a predominance of nationalistic, liberal-democratic and anti-communist feelings inside society. Alizade further claims that his initial social-democratic ideas, set forth in the Statute of the Azerbaijani Popular Front, were dismissed and never honoured by nationalists inside the organization. Nevertheless, he is convinced that social democracy is on the rise in Azerbaijan. 'What people need now is social justice,' says Alizade, 'and any political force that could articulate these ideas will gain popular support' (interview with Zarduşt Alizade, Jan. 23, 2013).

Gramsci wrote that in Italy, the government actually operated as a "party" and was engaged in dismantling other parties, detaching them from the broad masses. He notes that the political parties were trapped in the imbalance between agitation

and propaganda, which can be characterized as lacking in principles, opportunistic, lacking organic continuity and by an imbalance between tactics and strategy, amongst other things. A similar situation can be observed on the Azerbaijani political scene (amongst the ruling and opposition parties alike) when the government acts according to a "divide and rule" principle. Furthermore, rumours have periodically suggested that some members of the political parties (or even their leaders) have "sold out" to the authorities.[5] This has created a climate of mistrust in society (as it probably was meant to do) and has damaged in general the credibility of the opposition as well as the cohesion between the various groups inside it. Besides hidden agendas, some opposition members have openly changed sides, obtaining posts within the government and the ruling party.[6]

Fazil Mustafa, chairman of the Big Creation Party, is one of those who has changed his position from a "traditional" (or radical) opposition to a "realistic" one: he "disagrees with the government, but takes it into account." The problem with members of the "radical opposition," he believes, is that for the last 20 years they have failed to produce viable, realistic policies. This has created a situation in which the authorities and the people find themselves in an unmediated confrontation: 'Now the people are facing the authorities directly. This is the greatest danger. Political opposition is becoming disordered. In a country where problems cannot be solved around the table, people who disagree are being silenced with batons' (Mustafa, 2013).

It is interesting to note that the impression that the opposition is "in the pocket of the government" has been discussed among ordinary citizens in Azerbaijan not only regarding "loyal" forces, but also the so-called "traditional" opposition (which is a term mainly covering the Musavat and Azerbaijani Popular Front parties).

We have seen, therefore, that the opposition overall has failed to provide a clear ideological agenda, in a similar way as it could not maintain an image of moral integrity (as discussed in the previous section). There is a general sense of a lack of a clear political or social agenda. However, the most devoted of its members have remained in opposition even as opportunities for change have been constantly shrinking.

The role of intellectuals

A variety of cultural elements have influenced the formation of the opposition itself, as well as the opposition's building of a hegemony among the citizenry. For the purpose of this research, I will distinguish two groups of intellectuals within the political culture of Azerbaijan: the so-called "Azerbaijani-speaking" subcultural group, which is a more rural and traditional type, and the Russian-speaking one, which is more urban and cosmopolitan.

The Russian-speaking group was dominant during the Soviet era when the Russian language was considered indispensable to making a career in state bureaucracy, academia and Soviet politics. Many people would send their children to Russian schools, as education in Russian was considered to be more advanced.

Towards the end of 1980s, this tendency had formed a significant layer of the population (mainly in Baku, Ganja, and Sumgait and to a lesser extent in other places) who spoke Russian as their first language and referred to themselves as a "Russian-speaking" people (*russkoiazychnye* in Russian, *rusdilliler* in Azerbaijani).

Azerbaijani nationalism, in its turn, in fact also started to take shape during Soviet times, due to the fact that during the twentieth century the country had become a unified entity territorially and administratively; it acquired national status following the establishment of Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic in 1920 (Bölükbaşı, 1998). The arising of popular nationalism in the late 1980s was a reaction to among other things, Russian colonial domination as well as the reflection of a desire to create a counter-culture in relation to the Russian-speaking one. At the start of this nationalistic period, therefore, the anger of nationalists was directed not only towards the Soviet empire but also towards Azerbaijani Russian-speaking people as "fifth columnists."

Regarding the role of intellectuals in public life, Gramsci has claimed that rural intellectuals have more links with ordinary people than urban ones. He described this as being a consequence of urban intellectuals' being just a small part of a greater urban mechanism, whereas rural intellectuals are well-known in their smaller communities and also have a higher social and economic status relative to their fellow villagers. These traditional formats, therefore, produce politicians who are much more passionate about articulating the interests and feelings of their fellow countrymen and willing to adopt them as their own. They are also good at establishing links between the peasantry and the state (Gramsci, 1971).

In Azerbaijan, the ratio of Russian-speaking intellectuals in the national-liberation movement, which started in 1988 and was later incorporated into the Azerbaijani Popular Front, was in fact not high, although they were there at the very start of the movement (and they include Hikmat Hajizade, Zarduşt Alizade, Leyla Yunus and Mirbaba Babayev, as well as others). At its later stages, the movement began to be dominated more by the Azerbaijani-speaking, nationalist intelligentsia (Abulfaz Elchibey, Isa Gambar, Penah Huseyn, Ali Kerimli and others).

There has always been some sort of non-acceptance by the Russian-speaking community of the Azerbaijani-speaking national liberation movement, which was later transformed into the popular opposition movement (*herekat*).[7] For the Russian-speaking population (for the most part, those who would call themselves *bakintsy,* meaning "people of Baku"), the new developments following the collapse of the Soviet Union were not necessarily pleasing. They were displeased, among other things, by the massive influx of rural people into Baku, and they believed that the villagers were destroying the culture of the city. Also, the huge influx of internally displaced persons and refugees as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict added to these feelings. The term "*chushka*," which is a pejorative Russian term for an uncultured, uneducated villager, became widely used again.

It was, however, not only the perceived inundation of Baku by *chushkas* which irritated the *bakintsy.* People who felt themselves to be traditional Baku people as well as the intelligentsia were also deeply dissatisfied at the fact that

the composition of the ruling elite had changed. Two influential regional clans of Azerbaijan, namely the Nakhchivani and the Yeraz (Yerevan Azerbaijanis or persons who moved or were forced to flee to Azerbaijan from Armenia), have come to occupy the majority of public service positions due to the fact that Aliyev relied heavily on these politically aggressive groups. And although Aliyev himself was a political figure that Russian-speaking people were not unhappy about (also because he restored order and stability), they, nevertheless, felt disadvantaged on account of the new constellation of power inside the country in which the role of *bakintsy* had became minimal.

Perhaps this new power arrangement was also one of the reasons why the Russian-speaking community was not attracted to the opposition movement. For the majority of the Russian-speaking people (as well as for those who were against Aliyev's regime), the opposition movement was not attractive, not because of any disagreement with the movement's ideas, but because of their sense of belonging to a different "caste" (and certainly, not speaking the Azerbaijani language was a decisive barrier). In fact, many *bakintsy* did not see any difference between the government and the opposition. Therefore, to replace the group in power by the one in opposition was seen by the Russian-speaking population as a meaningless endeavour. Perhaps the only opposition politician supported by the Russian-speaking Baku elite was Lala Shovkat Hajiyeva, the chairwoman of the Azerbaijan Liberal Party (interview with Zarduşt Alizade, Jan. 23, 2013).

In this regard, the personality of Elmar Huseynov, a Russian-speaking journalist who was assassinated in 2005 in Baku, and the role of his journal, *Monitor*, have been central. *Monitor* was extremely critical of the government, and many believed that Elmar Huseynov was assassinated because of his ideas. His ideas were considered particularly dangerous for the regime because the *Monitor* was published in Russian and accordingly targeted the Russian-speaking population which had so far been politically inactive but was potentially a strong force in the electorate.[8] At the same time, *Monitor* showed no mercy to the so-called "traditional opposition" and included them in its criticisms.

Another person who started to "rock the boat" was Rustam Ibrahimbeyov, an Oscar-winning script-writer and movie director, who is also perhaps the most renowned Azerbaijani artist and intellectual of modern times. However, he was not a popular figure, being mostly known only among intellectuals and the Baku elite. A prominent member of the Russian-speaking Baku community, Ibrahimbeyov enjoyed the favour of the late President Aliyev. However, during Ilham Aliyev's presidency, he started to have problems related primarily to the seizure of his landed property by the State Oil Company. In 2008, Ibragimbeyov gave an interview where he basically said that Azerbaijan's "national elite" did not exist nowadays. He added that mechanisms for elite formation did not exist in Azerbaijan and said the current elite was based not on merits but rather on money and cronyism. Immediately following this, members of the Azerbaijani Parliament commenced a debate in which Ibragimbeyov was furiously criticized for this one statement, the level of irritation in this case indicating a fall from favour (Fuller, 2008). Ibragimbeyov did not stop criticizing the government in the years

following and became one of the central figures of the so-called Forum of Intellectuals, a major union of prominent, reform-demanding intellectuals and civil society leaders.

In 2013 the National Council of Democratic Forces, a body which united almost all of the real opposition parties, declared Rustam Ibrahimbeyov chairman and the presidential candidate for the united opposition. Nevertheless, as the presidential elections approached, Ibrahimbeyov submitted to pressures from the authorities and in October 2013 did not return to Baku from Moscow. He was later replaced as a presidential candidate by Jamil Hasanli.

Conclusion

This analysis of the political history of independence in Azerbaijan yields a few interesting findings.

First of all, a brief look at the history and substance of the political opposition in Azerbaijan reveals that becoming mobilized and building a counter-power base has not been an easy task. We have already mentioned the systemic factors that have had a tremendous impact on the opposition's opportunities and range of activities: authoritarianism, dependence on oil, and the conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh. Particularly the abundant funds emanating from oil resources has supported the powerful political regime, while civil society is still under construction.

As we have tried to analyse the internal factors of the degrees of strength or weakness of the political opposition in Azerbaijan, a number of observations can be made, as follows.

First of all, although the opposition was considered for some time as being motivated by higher moral standards than the government, at the junctures where it has failed to seize power it has been suggested that the opposition is in fact itself corrupt and has betrayed its own cause by striking a deal with the authorities. Indeed, defections from the opposition have established the impression in public opinion that "government and opposition" actually have always been connected and dependent on each other. Further, consistently rigged elections have demoralized supporters of the opposition. The decrease in numbers of supporters has resulted in fewer financial and material resources being available to the political parties of opposition. Another important point is that oppositional political parties and leaders have never really seen themselves as having failed. According to a self-justifying rhetoric, elections were lost and the opposition was defeated not because the parties were weak in themselves but because the authorities were much stronger and played an unfair game by abusing administrative resources in their own favour. The two largest and foremost opposition parties (the Azerbaijani Popular Front Party and the Musavat Party) still have, at the time of the writing this chapter, the same chairmen as they did 20 years ago, And despite criticism of these leaders, it seems unlikely that this is going to change. It is widely agreed that one of the reasons for this unchanging leadership is a tendency to build political parties around leaders rather than on the basis of ideology.

This gives us an insight as to why, probably, the development of a political ideology of opposition has not really come to the fore. The absence of real foundations for developing a strong political agenda is typical of the post-Soviet situation, and it may be seen as the most visible characteristic of Azerbaijani political culture.

Speaking of the broader cultural context of politics, it seems that the political opposition had a good connection with "the people," as most opposition leaders and activists represented the culturally predominant traditional society and in that sense "emerged from the people." However, there was at the same time very strong dissonance with the Baku Russian-speaking community, which was doubly alienated and did not see any real difference between the ruling parties and the opposition.

There have been several factors acting in favour of the development of the opposition's strength in Azerbaijan. A so-called "rural" political culture has become a significant factor in a country where half of the population lives in rural areas and hundreds of thousands migrated from provinces to Baku within last decades. The presence of widespread corruption and the existence of significant poverty in what is in fact an oil-rich state are factors which have reinforced the opposition's discourse with terms which touch a nerve for most ordinary people. This moral power of the opposition could have been a foundation for the counter-hegemony it sought to build; however, subsequently, possession of the moral high ground has become problematic due to fragmentation of the opposition and defections to the ruling party. The lack of an ideological agenda has been and still remains the biggest obstacle to the opposition's gaining wider support in Azerbaijan.

It also appears from this analysis that external, systemic and structural factors have had a much greater impact on shifting the balance of power than have attempts of the opposition in general. At the top of the list of these is the oil factor, which has a tremendous impact on all spheres of life in the country.

However, it seems that with a decrease in oil production and with youth movements becoming more influential by means of social networks, the ruling elite in Azerbaijan will face more domestic resistance and opposition. It is still a big question though as to which organizations will survive the next decade or so. The existence of such new movements as N!DA and REAL shows that there is an attempt on the part of oppositional groups to introduce themselves into politics and, as expected, both of them faced repressions in 2013. Moreover, it is also likely that popular unrest and spontaneous outbreaks of citizens' discontent will outdo organized opposition. As the events of the year 2013 (similar to events in the rest of the world) demonstrated, the citizens of Azerbaijan have started to emerge as a spontaneous and unpredictable force to challenge authorities. How (and if) the authorities are going to build relations with the opposition – and *which opposition* they will prefer to talk to – still remains a big question.

Notes

1 Here and hereafter all translations are by the author.

2 See for instance US State Department's Human Rights Reports on Azerbaijan; http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/186540.pdf or Human Rights Watch Reports on Azerbaijan http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2012/world-report-2012-azerbaijan.
3 Members of Musavat Party claim that they are heirs to the historic Musavat Party, (established in 1911) which was a founding force of Azerbaijani Democratic Republic in 1918.
4 See Azerbaijan: Unnecessary Police Force at Peaceful Protests. Human Rights Watch http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/03/12/azerbaijan-unnecessary-police-force-peaceful-protests
5 The opposition parties the Azerbaijani Popular Front Party and the Musavat Party agreed to join parliament, in 2000 and 2005 respectively, although they declared that the elections were rigged. This joining thus created grounds for suspicions about secret agreements with the authorities. Both parties denied any involvement with the authorities.
6 The ruling New Azerbaijan Party (YAP) has members in leadership positions who were in opposition previously. Among them Ali Ahmadov, Secretary General of YAP, who used to be with the opposition Azerbaijani National Independence Party.
7 When referring to persons who were with the opposition from the very beginning the term *herekatci* (movement member) is often used.
8 Composer and writer Elmir Mirzoyev says 'it is unfortunate that this segment of society is isolated from political processes, since they have great potential.' Video from an event organized by the author: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=up3E-inGUVs.

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11 Myths and politics

"Old" beliefs and "New" aspirations in independent Armenia

Sona Hovhannisyan

On April 9, 2013, two presidential inaugurations took place in the capital of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan. The inaugurations were simultaneous: in the city's biggest concert hall in downtown Yerevan, the re-elected Serzh Sargsyan was sworn in as the president of Armenia with the blessing of the Catholicos of All Armenians Garegin II and in the presence of invited guests, representatives of the ruling Republican Party and the ruling elite; at the same time, his main rival during the elections, the former foreign minister of Armenia and one of the leaders of the opposition, Raffi Hovhannisyan, held his own alternative inauguration ceremony on Freedom Square, also in downtown Yerevan, in the presence of thousands of his supporters, who had arrived from all over the country.

This is probably not the most significant event in the recent history of the Republic of Armenia, but it surely is one of the most vivid illustrations of current social-political developments there. What is striking in the description of the events is the unusual variation on a routine electoral procedure, the final phase of the electoral cycle – the presidential inauguration ceremony. On the one hand, inaugurations are an aspect of the official state ideology, guaranteeing the legitimacy of political power. On the other hand, the inauguration is a participatory activity: the fact of participation and the form and content of the participation of various actors involved (including the voters, the international community, internal political actors and so on) defines the attitudes of the respective participants to the overall process. The elections in Armenia have been consistently subjected to criticisms and there have been accusations of fraudulence. The rupture in Armenian society which these events illustrate and the societal indications that reflect it are the subject of the following analysis. In this chapter, by means of a semiotic analysis of all the presidential inaugurations that have taken place in the Republic of Armenia between 1991 and 2013, I will attempt to outline some of the basic trends and key developments of the set of social and political processes that are commonly referred to as "democratization."

Theoretical framework

A presidential inauguration ceremony is a complex sign system consisting of a ritual which includes the taking of an oath and an address given by the newly

inaugurated president. It is a key political ideological event, a pause between two phases of an electoral cycle, a resetting of the overall political system. It is a festive, recurring ritual, which celebrates a peaceful transfer of power, legitimizes the results of the elections and marks a political new beginning.

A presidential inauguration is both an ideological representation and a communicative act. By default the prescribed structure of the inauguration already conveys a message, irrespective of the ideological content of the address: the fact that the inauguration is taking place already denotes the success of the communicative act and signifies a legitimate president-elect. In other words, the form of the inauguration, irrespective of its content, in every particular case already has a specific, permanent content.

Although the abovementioned basic function of the inauguration seems sufficient in itself, the complex semiotic composition of the inauguration – and primarily its ideological component – makes possible an enquiry into many other layers of the processes that are unfolding in a given society. This primarily refers to the shared ideological trends and mythological perceptions within the society, to the extent that they are retrievable from the inauguration.

For the purposes of the current chapter, I broke the structure of the presidential inauguration down into the following segments of signification: the ritual of inauguration, the president and the president's inaugural address. All the three segments are studied both syntagmatically and paradigmatically (Chandler, 2002, pp. 79–84, 98) and should be viewed, in the final analysis, as a single text.

The connection between signs and ideologies/myths has been widely discussed by almost all theorists of semiotics as a specific meta-level in sign interpretation, in particular in the context of various levels of connotation and denotation of signs (Chandler, 2002, pp. 140–147).

Mikhail Bakhtin claims that 'where there is no sign there is no ideology' (Ivanov, 1973, p. 5).[1] He insists that ideologies can exist only through semiotic representations. At the same time, other theorists, such as Louis Hjemslev (1953), Umberto Eco (1976), and Y. Lotman (1990) have placed a specific emphasis on the process of signification itself, whereby for something to be a sign, to stand for something, it must be interpreted as such and must be viewed within the process of communication.

The concepts of ideologies/ideologemes and myths/mythologemes also have been elaborated outside the scope of semiotics. Thus, to clarify certain terms and avoid ambiguity, there is a brief outline below of the terminology applied within the current chapter and the specific perspective or scope of the subject matter.

First of all, it must be mentioned that when referring to the terms such as ideology, myth, value or smaller components such as legitimization, I do not intend either a positive or negative meaning. In a simple sense, ideologies are not limited to propaganda, myths are not lies, values are not good or bad and power legitimization is not manipulative dominance.

The concept of ideology is probably one of the most frequently used and exploited in social-political academic and non-academic discourse and as such,

of course, it has many, sometimes contradictory, definitions. In this chapter I will not reflect on those theories of ideology which are built primarily on the sense of ideology as manipulative and dominating, because this reflects only one of its aspects. Instead, I will adhere to a more cognitive approach, expressed in particular by Teun van Dijk, whereby he claims that '[i]deologies are basic frameworks of social cognition, shared by members of social groups, constituted by relevant selections of socio-cultural values, and organized by an ideological schema that represents the self-definition of a group' (995, p. 284).

Almost all of the theorists in their definitions of the generation of ideologies speak about a transition or transformation from one form or type of human activity into another. Antonio Gramsci speaks of 'a cultural movement, a "religion," a "faith," that has produced a form of practical activity or will in which the philosophy is contained as an implicit theoretical "premise"' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 248). And Terry Eagleton describes ideology 'as disembodied ideas on the one hand, and as nothing but a matter of certain behaviour patterns on the other' (Eagleton, 1991, p. 194).

One important aspect in defining ideologies is to clearly indicate which phase of the cyclical process of the ideology is being defined. If we speak about the creation of an ideology, then clearly we presuppose a process of the conceptualization and verbalization (or in semiotic terms signification) of a set of interconnected ideas which are based on a social, lived experience and are meant to organize that social experience into mechanisms. If we speak of learning about ideologies, then this process requires processing the information and mentally applying it to our own social experience or situation and consequently accepting, adapting or rejecting it. If we speak about promoting, sustaining, or advocating an ideology, then depending on the content of the ideology and goals of the "owner" of the ideology, techniques ranging from education to manipulation and deception may be applied.

However, whatever ideologies are, they do imply a conscious intellectual effort of one type or another; without such an effort, a set of beliefs shared by a social group is not ideology; it remains at a pre-conceptual phase, which, however, does not necessarily imply that conceptualization will follow. A certain percentage (a value which can increase or decrease at various times) of members of the society do not have this conceptual approach to the reality they live in, while at the same time they will also have their own toolkits, or packages, of sets of beliefs about reality. Gramsci implies the notions of "common sense" and "good sense" in describing these phases, whereby he describes "common sense" as the 'folklore of philosophy' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 101).

Myth is another term that expresses shared beliefs and perceptions of reality. A mythological system is a complex formation of images expressed in words or other symbolic representations, which are neither descriptive nor metaphorical in nature, and which function as a communicative system with the aim of rendering the inexplicable reality which presents itself as a system of undeniable facts, which are actually totally fictitious[2] but are believed to be strongly and soundly proved and justified by collective experience.

Bronislav Malinowski, in describing the role of myths in primitive cultures, in particular identified the following functions: 'it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom' (Malinowski, 1954, p. 101).

Most importantly, the construction of myths is not an individual, intellectual effort; they are not intentional and despite many attempts to consciously construct myths, their immediate, conscious construction is not possible.

The difference between ideologemes and mythologemes is epistemological and not axiological. They can emerge from amongst the same sets of values; however, the mechanisms of their formation and their purposes are different. The same presupposition can be both an ideologeme and a mythologeme, based on how and where we place it in our overall perception of reality and how we have acquired this knowledge. Another important principle is that ideologemes are based on myths. It can be said that myths are the axioms of ideologies.

The type of connection between myths and ideologies, or mythologemes and ideologemes, is direct but not simple. Their interaction itself is a cultural, societal process and the results of their interaction are cultural and societal phenomena. Hence by analysing this interconnection we are analysing cultural societal processes. From this perspective, presidential inaugurations are a unique study resource because their semiotic analysis allows us to look into these processes.

The ritual of inauguration

The following chart (Table 11.1) introduces key elements which can be found in the rituals of inauguration and which constitute them. As it shows, some of these elements are constant, while the others are constantly changing.

Thus, the consistently used symbols which appear in the ceremonial ritual are: the flag, the seventh century Gospel, the president elect, the preceding president, representatives from the international community, the Catholicos of All Armenians, the symbol of the constantly changing location and the constant symbol of Opera Theatre on Freedom Square, which, however, appears in different positions on the table.

A country's flag can be considered to be a state symbol and this would be the rationale for its appearance in a state ritual. In semiotic terminology, a flag would usually fall under the definition of an icon (Chandler, 2002, p. 32, 38–42). However in this case, taking into consideration the fact that Armenia at this time is a newly independent state and all state symbols are a matter of deliberate choice, the flag is, again in terms of semiotic classification, a symbol. The connotations of the symbol are expressed in the legislation concerning the flag of the Republic of Armenia, which was also the flag of the First Republic of 1918–1920, and is a tri-colour, where 'the red symbolizes the Armenian Highlands, the constant fight of the Armenian nation for survival, the Christian religion, independence

Table 11.1 Key elements and symbols of the Armenian presidential inaugurations (1991–2013)

	Year	*1991*	*1996*	*1998*	*2003*	*2008*	*2013*
	Elected president	*Levon Ter-Petrosyan*	*Levon Ter-Petrosyan*	*Robert Kocharyan*	*Robert Kocharyan*	*Serzh Sargsyan*	*Serzh Sargsyan*
symbols	National flag	Used					
	Seventh Century Gospel	Used					
	Original copy of the Constitution		Used				
	Symbol of presidential power[1]						Used
location	Government building	Used	Used		Used		
	Grand Hall of Yerevan State Opera and Ballet Theatre on Freedom Square			Used		Used	
	Concert Hall in downtown YerevanFreedom Square (alternative inauguration of the opposition)						Used
Participants	President	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present
	Catholicos of All Armenians	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present
	International community	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present
	Government	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present
	Preceding President	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present
	Ruling Parliamentary Party	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present
	Pro-governmental parliamentary groups	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	
	Parliamentary opposition	Present	Present	Present	Present		
	Non-parliamentary opposition	Present		Present			
	Main opponent during the elections	Present					
First President				Present			

[1] The symbol of presidential power was first introduced by a decree signed by Serzh Sargsyan on April 5, 2013, four days before his second inauguration. See more at http://armenpress.am/eng/news/714516/na-ceremonii-inauguracii-prezidenta-armenii-vperviye-biyl.html

and freedom for Armenia. The blue stands for the desire of the Armenian nation to live beneath a peaceful sky. The orange symbolizes the creative nature and the diligence of the Armenian people' (Armenian Government web site: www.gov.am, n.d.).

This is an interesting illustration of an attempt at turning mythological perceptions about national identity into an ideologeme. The ideologeme reflected in the flag defines the state according to which Armenia is a nation of fighters for survival: a creative and diligent people, Christians, who dream of freedom, independence and peace.

The seventh century Armenian Gospel is considered to be one of the oldest preserved texts of its kind and it clearly represents the ideologeme which might be formulated as "Armenians were the first nation to adopt Christianity." On the other hand, the gospel comes not from the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, but from the Matenadaran Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, one of the biggest repositories of medieval manuscripts in the world. In the first ceremony of 1991, the president performed the oath by placing his hand on this gospel. Later, having adopted the constitution, a further oath was performed by placing the hand simultaneously on the gospel and the constitution. Thus, if we interpret these signs pragmatically, we will have one of the oldest gospel manuscripts in the world, which gives an idea of ancientness being inextricably fused with Armenian-ness and statehood. The participation of the Catholicos of All Armenians can also be seen to contribute to this interpretation.

The guests (including the international community, the opposition, members of parliament and so on) symbolize the process of legitimization. The trend of this strand of the ritual as it culminates in the most recent inauguration, in 2013, can be seen to reveal an increasing absence of internal actors. The presence of the preceding president symbolizes an acceptance of the transfer of power. But the significance of this power transfer can vary. The presence of a resigned president at the inauguration of his successor (1998) is not the same as the presence of a president who was in office for two successive terms and whose successor comes from the same ruling elite (as in 2008 and 2013). At the same time, it is significant that the leaders of the opposition who lost in the elections were never present at the inauguration of the elected opponent, because none of them accepted the results of the elections as legitimate.

The final and the most resonant symbol – the location of the ceremony – is the Opera Theatre on Freedom Square, the *agora* of contemporary Armenia. All demonstrations since 1988 have taken place here; this is the space that has been closed up and barricaded – to speak at a demonstration on Freedom Square is a sign of success. To have Freedom Square filled with demonstrators is the sign of a popular uprising; the extent to which Freedom Square is filled with people is a measure of the level of discontent in the country. To "take possession of" the square means to be the in charge of the situation; to keep the people on the square means that the political opposition has not yet exhausted its protest resources – and so on. This tradition began in 1988 with the rise of the Karabakh movement when Armenia was still part of the Soviet Union.[3] The "1988 Movement," as it became known,

was unprecedented for many reasons, among which the most important were the unity of the nation, the creativity of the participants, the revival of national spirit and most importantly of all, the outcome, which was the foundation of the independent Republic of Armenia. Thus, "1988" is a myth in line with the definition of that word already outlined within this chapter and "Freedom Square" is a mythologeme which from time to time pops up in different contextual situations.

As we see from the table, the position of this symbol – Freedom Square – is constantly moving, but it is always present. In 1991 mass meetings on Freedom Square became the government; the leaders of the Pan-Armenian National Movement of 1988 were elected or appointed as officials. The inauguration took on the aspect of a euphoric celebration of independence, unity and success, rather than of a peaceful transfer of power by means of democratic elections.

In 1996, the inauguration ceremony took place in Government House, whilst Freedom Square was surrounded by the army following mass protests by the opposition. Vazgen Manoukyan and his supporters were holding the mass protests on the square, which resulted in protesters invading the government building. After clashes with the riot police, protesters were dispersed and the square was surrounded by soldiers (see details below).

In 1998, when the inauguration took place at the Opera Theatre in Freedom Square, the square itself was decorated and there were some ordinary citizens present who had come to participate in the inauguration, despite the fact that it was inside the building and not on the square. These elections were exceptional primarily because they followed the resignation of the previous president, Levon Ter-Petrossyan. The main opponents were Robert Kocharyan, the former president of Nagorno-Karabakh, and Karen Demirchyan, a former first secretary of the Armenian Communist Party during the Soviet era. After the first signs of popular uprising (on Freedom Square) a compromise was reached between the opposition and the authorities. The inauguration was a celebration of the resulting consensus. A year later, Karen Demirchyan formed a coalition with the defence minister, Vazgen Sargsyan (one of the key, most controversial and charismatic leaders of Armenia), and after winning the parliamentary elections they became respectively the prime minister and the speaker in parliament. However, this phase also ended in violence. On October 27, 1999, a group of armed people entered the parliament and killed eight people, including and mainly targeting Vazgen Sargsyan and Karen Demirchyan.

In 2003 the inauguration ceremony returned to Government House. The pattern of activity on Freedom Square was repeated, but this time protests were continuous and massive. From a certain moment onwards the authorities did not allow supporters of the opposition to gather in the square and so the demonstrations moved to the second major location of the 1988 protests, the area next to Matenadaran. After the protestors blocked one of the central streets of Yerevan and announced that they were commencing a demonstration which would continue until the resignation of Kocharyan, the police used force to disperse the demonstrators. Many of the protestors were detained, some injured.

The fifth inauguration (2008) took place at the Opera Theatre building and on Freedom Square, which was completely empty. This inauguration was marked

by an additional element: after taking the oath and delivering the address, Serzh Sargsyan went alone to Freedom Square to observe a military parade. Not only Freedom Square, but all of downtown Yerevan was cordoned off by yellow ribbons with the inscription "Danger, do not enter" to prevent the people from entering the area proximal to the square. The inauguration ceremony was taking place in the aftermath of the tragic events of March 1, when continuous post-election demonstrations on Freedom Square by oppositional groups headed by Levon Ter-Petrosyan lasted for ten days until the police and the army dispersed the demonstrators, involving clashes which resulted in the deaths of ten demonstrators and one policeman. After these events, Freedom Square was closed for construction work for a month and reopened in time for the inauguration. The opposition was banned from Freedom Square for a year after the inauguration, and the day when they finally entered it was celebrated as "liberating Freedom Square day." Outside the ribboned area, people were demonstrating and lighting candles for those killed on March 1. The whole physical space was divided into two parallel worlds, separated by yellow ribbons. In terms of protest, this inauguration can be considered a culmination.

The sixth, double inauguration was described in the introduction: the president-elect was sworn in at another concert hall, while the Freedom Square saw a second, unofficial ceremony for his rival.

The president

This section significantly differs from the other two in terms of its methods of analysis. If both the inaugural ritual and the inaugural address are "texts" with syntactic, pragmatic and semantic aspects, to analyse this section as a text, we should first retrieve it. Given that in this particular case we are looking at the president in the context of inauguration, the following criteria were selected to limit the scale of that text: a) the biographies of the presidents as introduced on the official website of the President of the Republic of Armenia (RA);[4] and b) the characteristics of their main competition during elections (see Table 11.2).

On standing for his second election, Ter-Petrosyan's main rival was Vazgen Manoukyan, another intellectual and another prominent member of the Karabakh Committee. His main characteristics are very much the same as Levon Ter-Petrosyan's, which signifies that to some extent what was required was not to change the political system; the people still believed in what Ter-Petrosyan stood for, but they accused him of having betrayed of those very ideals. Another feature of Vazgen Manoukyan is connected to the mythologization of 1988, which now stood as a collective memory of a united national uprising with a successful outcome; Vazgen Manoukyan was one of the personifications of that moment.

In 1998, Ter-Petrosyan was followed by Robert Kocharyan, whose profile incorporated only one part of what the public demanded: no compromise on the Karabakh issue. As said before, the main rival of Robert Kocharyan was Karen Demirchyan, the former Communist Party leader. This shift already had a different connotation. Demirchyan himself was a mythologeme who stood on the one hand

Table 11.2 Details of the presidents of the Republic of Armenia (1991–2013)

	Levon Ter-Petrosyan	*Robert Kocharyan*	*Serzh Sargsyan*
Origin	Descendant of repatriated Diaspora Armenians, born in Aleppo, Syria, repatriated in 1946	Born in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK)	Born in NK
Soviet era	Academic, researcher was convicted in Soviet era (1960s) for active participation in commemoration of the victims of Armenian Genocide	Mechanical engineer Communist party functionary in NK	Communist party functionary in NK
1988–1991	One of the leaders of Karabakh movement in Armenia, chairmen of the board of the Armenian National Movement	One of the founding members of "Miatsum" (Unity) organization in NK	In 1989 led security and self defence structure of NK
1991–present	President, resigned president, leader of opposition in 2008 elections (presidential candidate) Leader of the Armenian National Congress Movement "Armenian National Congress" party	Prime minster of NK President of NK Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia (RA) President of the RA	Minister of Defence of the RA, Chief of Staff of Kocharyan administration Prime minister of RA President of RA

for the "safe and secure" life of the Soviet era; on the other hand, even when he was First Secretary of Communist Party, he was always known and perceived of as a statesman standing for the national cause. The mythologeme of "Demirchyan" stood for 'we want the Armenian national version of the "safe and secure" life.'

After the assassination of Karen Demirchyan and Vazgen Sargsyan in 1999, the opposition was led by their heirs – Demirchyan's son and Sargsyan's brother; Kocharyan's main rival during the 2003 presidential elections was Demirchyan, the only relevant aspect of whose personality was his assassinated father. An electoral issue that took shape at this point and was preserved from that time onwards was that of "justice."

After two terms of presidency, in 2008 the successor of Kocharyan was Serzh Sargsyan. Serzh Sargsyan was always perceived as the closest ally and partner of Robert Kocharyan. He always held key positions but none of these positions required him to appear in public. Serzh Sargsyan rarely, if ever, delivered speeches prior to his presidential campaign and during the campaign he was mainly reading well-composed speeches that contrasted in quality with his extemporary speeches. If we speak of Serzh Sargsyan as a sign then it could be said that one of that sign's most dominant connotations was Kocharyan. Because of a lack of public information which would characterize him individually as a personality, as a

political actor, as a bearer of a specific ideology or a leader, this vacuum was filled with existing pieces of information that were mainly linked with Kocharyan. The positions that he held (defence minister, head of national security council) and also his stable, continuous and most importantly, successful, career were associated with secrecy, power and resources. Due to all the abovementioned factors, the candidacy of Sargsyan was perceived as no more than a following-on of R. Kocharyan's post and up until the first appearances of Sargsyan in the capacity of the new president, his election was perceived of as a re-election of Kocharyan.

His main opponent was Levon Ter-Petrosyan, who after ten years of absolute silence and the endurance of a robust campaign against him carried out by government-controlled media, returned as the leader of the opposition. Here the "devilish" intellect of Ter-Petrosyan (as it was perceived by those who still blamed him for failures during his presidency, but nevertheless followed him as the opposition leader), combined with a curiosity about his ten years of silence, acted as a trigger. In terms of the myth of 1988 this was the closest that the myth came to a realization for a number of reasons. Firstly, the generation that were in their twenties in 2008 did not have any individual personal memories either about the 1988 Movement, or about the early years of independence or, especially, about the Soviet era. Secondly, Levon Ter-Petrosyan was a complete personification of that myth, and, finally, Serzh Sargsyan was not a re-elected president but a new candidate.

In the following elections of 2013, Serzh Sargsyan's main rival was Raffi Hovhannisyan, a western, repatriated Armenian, born in the US and for a short period (1991–1992) the first foreign minister of Armenia. Although he was always a public figure in politics he was never perceived as a key actor. His only characteristic was his western Armenian identity, one of the connotations of which for Armenian voters is that of not being corrupt. The ritual of 1988 was repeated: Freedom Square activity largely was led by demonstrators and the alternative inauguration was a response to a demand that came from there.

For the purpose of this chapter, we will focus in more detail on some of the signs and the dynamics that can be extracted from Table 11.2. In the period 1998–2013 there is a continuity of power, both horizontally and vertically.

One of the most constant and at the same time dynamic significators all over the chart is Karabakh. It pops up in different positions: in Ter-Petrosyan's area of the table it is linked with the Armenian National Movement which led to independence, whilst in the cases of two other presidents it is to be found everywhere until the time they assume their posts in the government of the Republic of Armenia. The symbol of the "Armenian Genocide" appears twice in Ter-Petrosyan's biography. Here it is important to emphasize that although the symbols "Karabakh" and "Armenian Genocide" seem to be all over the table, from the perspective of the overall inauguration as a single act these symbols are implicit and belong to the second level of retrievability. In other words, for an uninformed viewer of the inauguration, for someone who is not familiar with the biographies of the presidents, these signs would not emerge and would not become a factor in interpreting their messages. Another factor contributing to this is that other than in the biographies and in the context of the key factor that the ultimate emergence

of an independent Armenia started with the Karabakh movement, in the inaugurations, which as mentioned above are a key ideological event in the social political life of a country, there are no other substantial references to these issues.[5]

The further interpretation of these signs will be discussed in the conclusion, in combination with an analysis of the two other sections.

The inaugural address

The first speech of Levon Ter-Petrossyan was also the first text to articulate the Armenian dream of having a free and independent state combined with liberal democracy, and it was characterized by an absolute lack of practical knowledge of how a liberal democratic system or any other independent state political system works. In the speech this lack is filled with the mythologeme of "Sardarapat" which is associated with September 21, the Day of Independence. For Armenians the victory of Sardarapat, a battle which took place on May 21–28, 1918, during the World War I, is the culmination of their best qualities: unity, courage and the ability to survive in critical situations. It is a symbol of the current Armenian state.

The first of Ter-Petrossyan's addresses was marked by the entire spectrum of ideologemes referring to the rule of law, human rights, democracy and the free market economy. Another idea that stands out in the address is that Armenia should immediately start the active work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and be open for partnership and cooperation with every country. He set a bottom line – no baggage from the past: Armenia is to be a liberal democratic country willing to become a normal, developed country and to take its place in the world family of nations. There was no explicit mention of the genocide or Karabakh; however, although ideologically these key factors were not reflected in the text, the mythologeme of Sardarapat might be seen as a covert reference to both.

The second inaugural address of Ter-Petrosyan, delivered in 1996, was the most interesting of all. The finest example of a performative act, it was a short but very heavily loaded pledge, which was divided into two sections, in which he spoke respectively as the president and at a personal level. Every utterance or line of the pledge described a specific situation with a corresponding solution. For instance: 'I swear always to give priority to the state over any national or political ideology,' or 'To keep away from adventurism; to preserve the faculties of listening and consulting; to respect the opinions of others but also to reserve the right to fight for my own opinion,' and so on (Second Inaugural Address 1996). In a way this speech was a self-reflexive account of the previous five years and it mainly reiterated an adherence to liberal democratic values whilst abjuring fatalism and nihilism, extremism, nationalism and the like. Two years later Ter-Petrosyan resigned. In his resignation TV address he said: 'Nothing tragic happened. Simply the party of peace lost to the party of war.'

Turning now to Robert Kocharyan's address of 1998, the two main ideologemes that recur throughout the text are state/statehood and the economic well-being of the people. The text is built around the key aspects of a strong state and its president. Ideologemes of human rights and fundamental freedoms appear once in the

context of creating mechanisms for their realization. Kocharyan also introduces the idea that Armenia must become a home not only for Armenians but also ethnic minorities. In terms of foreign relations, he reiterates the position expressed by his predecessor with regard to improving relations with neighbours, partners and with those countries that for centuries have had interests in our region (for example, Russia), as well as cooperation with all international organizations and structures. Another central ideologeme/mythologeme – the diaspora – was for the first time explicitly included in the speech, thus putting into circulation the idea of Armenia as a networking nation. Why networking? Because repatriation was not a constituent of this ideologeme.[6]

There is a huge difference between Kocharyan's first and second speeches. If the first one contained some reference to an ideological project and was saturated with the modality of willingness and readiness to work day and night, the second one lacks these altogether. It is difficult to judge what happened with the project described in his first speech, and this is partly due to the fact that two key participants in the state-building process – the prime minister and the parliamentary speaker – were assassinated in 1999. The central ideologeme in this speech is security/stability/statehood and economic development. And although the central ideologemes are repeated in the speeches, their placement and the overall modality is different. Security and stability are opposed to adventurism and the lack of a sense of responsibility of the opposition, and economic development is reflected in the form of an observation regarding a two-digit rise in the economic development index. In both of Kocharyan's speeches, the main problems of the country are linked with economic factors and the impact of a strong government.

The first address of Serzh Sargsyan, in 2008, was constructed as an attempt to show sincere concern and a desire for change. The structures of the sentences in certain parts take the form of a prayer to God, asking for the strength and wisdom not to disappoint his supporters and to find a way of regaining the trust of those that did not support him. He announces the time for change. As a text the speech resembles a template for an inaugural address of a president of a democratic country. However, in terms of analysis this text must be interpreted in combination with the other two sections. The inauguration followed the events of March 1 and the imposition of a state of emergency, with all the corresponding circumstances (limited access to information, limited media coverage, detained opposition leaders and mourning for those killed on March 1). The ribboned downtown area and the announcement of the time for change made a big contrast, especially given that Serzh Sargsyan was always a key actor in the ruling elite, including during the events of March 1.

The second inaugural address of Sargsyan in 2013 was very short. An important component that appeared in this address was the notion of "sincerity." Some of the problems that the society was facing were not addressed indirectly, as in the references to the priority of economic development in Kocharyan's speeches, but emigration, poverty and unemployment were directly cited as the main problems. In contrast with the seeming denial of the real state of affairs in Kocharyan's speeches, Sargsyan seemed to openly acknowledge them. Instead of stating an

adherence to a peaceful resolution of the Karabakh conflict, or a more general statement about a 'normalization of relations with neighbours,' he said: '[w]e have never terrorized our own people with war. Moreover, we have never used this issue as an excuse to gag the opposition. However, we deemed it our duty to earnestly and realistically state that such a threat does exist' (Sargsyan, 2013). Most interestingly, in this speech democratization acquires a central role. Sargsyan stressed democratization as a top priority: 'The word "Armenia" must be associated with the rule of law, democratization and economic development' (Sargsyan, 2013). Another significant part of the speech is the comparison of the human rights situation in Armenia in 2013 with the situation five years previously (that is to say, 2008 as opposed to 2013) spoken of as an achievement; this is the first, and unprecedented, public indication of an attempt to create a distance between himself and Robert Kocharyan.

At the very same time, as has already been mentioned, in Freedom Square the supporters of the opposition, together with their leader, swore that they would not recognize the illegitimate president. As a ritual of course it lacked attributes of legitimization, but it was festive and inclusive. Another parallel is that if in 1991 the location on Freedom Square was changed to Government House and the leaders of the Pan-Armenian Movement were elected or appointed as officials, the year 2013 saw an attempt to bring the government back into the square: public hearings and debates were being held on Freedom Square, with speakers discussing possible alternative forms of governance, and a list of candidates for different positions in the future government was being drawn up by people gathered there. But with the lack of major components, the Freedom Square inauguration was a symbolic imitation of legitimization, while the official ceremony might be seen as also an imitation of a "peaceful transfer of power by means of elections." Both these imitations, taken together, could be seen as a democratic split between the two ceremonies: the gathering on Freedom Square standing for the *demos*, with the official ceremony symbolizing the *kratia.*

Conclusion

The various developments and the playing out of dynamics throughout the inaugurations reveal a lack of stability and repetition in the ceremonial tradition of the presidential inaugurations. Despite recurring elements and signs used, the quantity of changing elements makes every inauguration exceptional. Most importantly, there is no tendency to repeat constituent elements of the ritual.

Meanwhile, the parallel practices on Freedom Square do show an increasing tendency to repeat and establish a distinctive, stable tradition. Here we observe the reverse phenomenon: all of the Freedom Square rituals are preserved and new components are continuously being added in an attempt to reproduce the myth of 1988. Despite the fact that in 2008 ten people were killed, this ritual is the most successful as it has incorporated all the major mythologemes of 1988: the location, the heroes, the rituals inside the square, as well as being peaceful, festive and using the same slogans.

The signs can be classified as: signs that were consistently present and static (including the flag, Gospel, the presence of the international community, the government, the absence of the opposition); signs that were constant, dynamic and present in all segments (e.g Opera Theatre/Freedom Square); signs that were present implicitly or explicitly but only in one segment (e.g. Karabakh, the genocide); signs that were always present but split between two parallel processes (e.g. those indicating festivity).

As this classification shows, the most static and permanent signs refer to national identity, comprising three main constituents – Christianity, Armenianness and creativity. The other block of permanent signs refers to the legitimization of the president by the international community and internally by all those who represent the state. Karabakh and the genocide are present in the "President as text" segment, both implicitly and explicitly. In the inaugural addresses, the references to the Karabakh conflict are mostly declarative and indirect. These types of references do not add new meanings to the interpretation, they simply indicate an acknowledgment of the fact of the existence of the conflict and its being part of the political agenda. Thus, in the overall picture their role can be characterized as a silent omnipresence.

The most dominant dynamic sign is the Opera Theatre building/Freedom Square. Besides the aspects that have been discussed above, one of the key aspects of this sign is that it is a link; it is a border signifier between two different spaces. All the main constituent components of the presidential inauguration that were described in the theoretical section exist, but they are split between these two spaces. If a component (be it festivity or absent/present participants/symbols) cannot be found in one part, then it will surely pop up in the other.

The 1988 Movement was a Pan-Armenian National Movement; it was the myth of the Armenians wanting to have a free and independent state which they had not had for a long time (centuries) but which they once did have. The Pan-Armenian Movement, which started off as a Karabakh movement, then evolved into the idea of an Armenian independent state. The driving force of this movement was the idea of having a definitively Armenian state, rather than a socialist, or liberal or any other type of state.

The individual was substituted by the collective identity and this movement was successful as Armenia did become an independent state. However, the myth of the Armenian state did not provide mechanisms of organizing and establishing a functioning statehood. The leadership of the time adopted and introduced a liberal democratic ideology, with its basic value being individual freedom as the only possible alternative. Whether it was a conscious, surgical method to substitute a collective Armenian identity with individual ones (and thus itself an ideologeme) or simply a choice depending on individual preferences of the leadership, it was too far from the mythological perceptions of Armenian society, especially given the pending national issues that were keeping the collective national identity alive and intact.

Probably it was viewed as a shortcut to substituting a collective, ethnic-national identity with an individual civic-state identity. The later attempt to shift to a milder, socially egalitarian version of democracy was not effective because the

key presupposition of that ideologeme was that the main problem of the society is economic, whereas in fact the situation is much more complicated – identity-related issues and the other component of that ideology being the strong, authoritarian state complicated the search for a civic identity even further. However, this attempt was short-lived and was the last explicitly traceable ideological trend.

From that moment on, the main process boiled down to restoring the basic mechanism of democracy through practices that were already created by the society in its most recent history on the one hand and keeping and legitimizing the power of the authorities on the other, with static symbols of national identity and silent reminders of Karabakh and the Armenian Genocide in the background.

However, despite this rupture and the interesting developments to be found within the history of inaugurations in Armenia, the most important function of the inauguration – the legitimization of the president-elect – has always been successful and although Western political discourse uses the euphemism "democratization" to refer to processes described in the current chapter, neither the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia nor any other laws provide for or stipulate the process of democratization. Hence, the contradiction in the description, which, if the conditions remain the same, makes a peaceful transfer to democracy almost impossible.

Notes

1 The same idea is expressed in Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1973). It should be mentioned here that Voloshinov and Bakhtin were both members of the "Bakhtin circle," and there is an opinion that most of writings of Voloshinov were in fact written by Bakhtin.
2 The word fictitious can bring in a certain ambiguity here, as it seemingly refers us to the second definition of the word myth, i.e. myth as an "invented story, fable." However, by use of the term "fictitious" here we refer rather to its being personalised and in an attempt to distinguish it from the idea that myths are a depiction of historical facts.
3 The events of 1988 and their significance will be discussed below.
4 We used the information about the presidents available at the official web site of the presidential office, at: http://www.president.am/en/levon-ter-petrosyan/, http://www.president.am/en/robert-kocharyan/ and http://www.president.am/en/serzhsargsyan/.
5 There are brief, declarative and mainly indirect references to the settlement of the Karabakh conflict in the addresses of the incumbent presidents, which are discussed in the corresponding section.
6 Previously Ter-Petrosyan applied this through the establishment of a pan-Armenian Foundation, the aim of which was to consolidate the resources of Armenians all over the world for the development of Armenia. However, he did not explicitly declare it as a policy. Serzh Sargsyan later transformed the idea into the Ministry of the Diaspora, which is led by a former *Komsomol* activist and which introduced the programme "Come Back Home."

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12 Collectivism/individualism in the South Caucasus

Implications for democracy

Tigran Matosyan

The purpose of the present study of collectivism/individualism in the South Caucasus is twofold. On the one hand, collectivism/individualism has a cultural dimension (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005), and a comparative analysis across the three countries contributes to understanding whether Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia belong to the same cultural zone. This issue of cultural (dis)similarities in the South Caucasus has practical dimensions. For example, over the past two decades, the idea of a cultural affinity between the countries has been one of the main arguments for those politicians and public figures who have aspired to create various political unions (e.g. Gamsakhurdia's "Caucasian House" or Erdoğan's "Caucasus Platform") within the South Caucasus. However, promoters of the idea have failed so far to operationalize the assumed cultural similarities and prove them empirically. On the other hand, the cultural dimension of collectivism/individualism has implications for democratization. For example, Inglehart (2000) demonstrates that the values of self-expression (which are closely associated with individualism) are positively correlated with levels of democratic development. As the countries of the South Caucasus have taken the route of democratization since the breakdown of the Soviet Union, it would be useful to know how much the cultural standing of the three countries is favourable for the political transformations they are undergoing.

The first part of this chapter compares the orientations of people in the three South Caucasus countries towards individualism/collectivism. It uses descriptive statistics related to Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia available from two nationwide surveys, namely, the European Values Study (EVS, 2010) (2008 wave) and the World Values Survey (WVS, 2009) (1994–1999 wave). In particular, the source of the comparison is the data from a set of 11 variables tapping into the construct of individualism/collectivism. These variables are classified into two thematic categories: "family" and "concern for in-groups beyond the family." Some of the variables are present both in the WVS (1994–1999 wave) and EVS (2008 wave), which makes it possible to follow the tendencies regarding certain aspects of individualism/collectivism orientations in the three countries over a period of one decade. The study also uses the data related to the Netherlands from the EVS (2008 wave) as a benchmark for comparison with the South Caucasus (the Netherlands scores as one of the most individualist

countries in the world according to an IBM database analysis by Hofstede and Hofstede [2005, p. 78]).

The second part of the chapter explores the possible relationships between individualism/collectivism and democratization in the South Caucasus. With the help of the data available in the EVS (2008 wave) and in the CRRC Caucasus Barometer (2007), it first examines the rates of participation in voluntary activities in the South Caucasus and tries to explain the regional variations through the factor of individualism/collectivism. Second, drawing on some qualitative data and secondary sources relating to Armenia, it points to the possible implications of a dominant collectivist culture on some spheres of public governance in transition societies.

Hofstede and Hofstede (2005, p. 76) suggest that individualism is typical for societies where 'ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family.' By contrast, societies in which 'people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetimes continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty' are collectivist (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005, p. 76). According to an analogous formulation by Vandelo and Cohen, collectivism is 'a social pattern of closely linked individuals who define themselves as interdependent members of a collective, whereas individualism as a cultural pattern stresses individual autonomy and independence of the self' (1999, p. 279).

Triandis et al. (1988, p. 329) give a more detailed definition of the construct linking collectivism to the 'subordination of personal to in-group goals; in-group regulation of behaviour,' 'extension of self to in-group,' as well as '"concern" for in-group'; whereas individualism is linked to 'doing what is satisfying in terms of personal goals,' 'self as distinct entity from in-group,' and 'self-reliance and emotional distance from the in-group.'

Meanwhile, despite the fact that Hofstede and Hofstede (2005, p. 82) argue that '[a]t the society (country) level, individualism and collectivism appear as opposite poles of one dimension,' Triandis et al. hold that each in-group (for example, family, work collective, nation) and each domain of social behaviour (for example, political life, formal education, entrepreneurship) should be considered separately as 'collectivism defined as subordination to the in-group's norms, needs, views, and emotional closeness to in-groups is very specific to in-group and to domain' (1988, p. 334),

Collectivism/individualism in family

The EVS (2008 wave) contains indicators that reveal respondents' orientations towards individualism and collectivism within the context of family. Though the clear majority of respondents in Armenia (94 per cent), Azerbaijan (86 per cent), and Georgia (91 per cent) claimed that family was "very important" in their lives (EVS 2010), these data *per se* do not demonstrate a collectivist or individualist orientation yet, because the survey posed the concept of the family in general terms only, making no distinction for respondents between nuclear and extended families.

The former is associated with individualist societies while the latter, with collectivist ones. As Hofstede and Hofstede write, 'The child who grows up among a number of elders, peers, and juniors learns naturally to conceive of him- or herself as part of a "we," much more so than does the nuclear family child' (2005, p. 86).

One can make inferences about the inclinations towards collectivist/individualist values within the context of family from the nature of relations between parents and children. Triandis et al. argue that in cultures with collectivist preferences, '[i]nterdependence is maximized between parent and child by frequent guidance, consultation, socializing in which the children are included, and penetration into the child's private life. In individualist cultures, there is emotional detachment, independence, and privacy for the child' (1988, p. 325).

The EVS (2008 wave) asked respondents to agree with one of the two opposing statements concerning children's obligations towards parents. At one pole, the statements were typical of a society where extended families (and hence interdependence between children and parents) are more likely to exist, whilst at the other, statements typical of the realities of a society where the nuclear family (hence individualist values) is predominant.

For example, when offered the opportunity to express their agreement with one of the following two statements: "Regardless of what the qualities and faults of one's parents are, one must always love and respect them," and "One does not have the duty to respect and love parents who have not earned it through their behaviour and attitudes," 96 per cent of respondents in Georgia, 92 per cent in Armenia and 82 per cent in Azerbaijan chose the first statement. Orientation towards collectivism in the three countries is more evident compared with the Netherlands, where the preference for the first statement was given by 39 per cent of respondents (Table 12.1).

Further, when asked to choose one of the following two statements: "Adult children have the duty to provide long-term care for their parents even at the expense of their own well-being," and "Adult children have a life of their own and should not be asked to sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of their parents," 87 per cent of respondents in Georgia, 84 per cent in Armenia, and 79 per cent in Azerbaijan chose the first statement. By comparison, only 30 per cent of respondents in the Netherlands thought in a similar way, with the majority of 62 per cent giving preference to the second option (Table 12.2).

Table 12.1 Love and respect towards parents

Country	*Regardless of what the qualities and faults of one's parents are, one must always love and respect them*	*One does not have the duty to respect and love parents who have not earned it by their behaviour and attitudes*
Armenia	92	8
Azerbaijan	82	18
Georgia	96	4
Netherlands	39	61

Source: EVS (2008 wave)

Table 12.2 Care for parents

Country	*St. 1: Adult children have the duty to provide long-term care for their parents even at the expense of their own well-being*	*St. 2: Adult children have a life of their own and should not be asked to sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of their parents*	*Neither*
Armenia	84	13	3
Azerbaijan	79	16	5
Georgia	87	9	4
Netherlands	30	62	8

Source: EVS (2008 wave)

Another indicator of collectivism/individualism in terms of parent/child relations is a set of qualities that parents deem necessary for their children to learn at an early age. The more the parent's predisposition towards the child's future autonomy, the more individualist, one can assume, the society where such children grow up will be. For example, Hofstede and Hofstede (2005, p. 87) write that '[i]n individualist cultures, parents will be proud if children at an early age take small jobs in order to earn pocket money of their own, which they alone can decide how to spend.' One of the family-related EVS (2008 wave) questions asked respondents in the South Caucasus to choose up to five qualities from the list of 11[1] which children can be encouraged to learn at home.

One of these qualities, "independence," is indicative of an individualist culture, as it prepares the child for a life autonomous from the family or a group. Both Azerbaijan and Georgia score quite strongly on the individualist indicator, with respectively, 58 and 54 per cent of respondents considering independence as an important quality to be nurtured in a child. The number of Armenians with the same opinion is over twice as low, at 24 per cent. Azerbaijan and Georgia unexpectedly outscore the Netherlands (at 49 per cent) on this issue (Table 12.3).[2]

The EVS (2008 wave) also included marriage-related questions, some of which mirror the respondents' orientations towards individualist/collectivist values. The following two individualism-related indicators measure the value attributed to free time, personal preferences, personal friends, and personal space in the

Table 12.3 Independence as an aim of education

Q.: Here is a list of qualities which children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important?	
Country	*Independence*
Armenia	24
Azerbaijan	58
Georgia	54
Netherlands	49

Source: EVS (2008 wave)

context of the marital life. Here, all three countries score considerably low on both indicators.

For example, 39, 38, and 37 per cent of respondents in Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, respectively, said that time allocated to friends and personal hobbies is "very important" in marriage. In the Netherlands, 64 per cent of respondents were of the same opinion (Table 4). Further, "living apart from in-laws" (which also denotes preference for a nuclear family) was very important for 30 per cent of Georgians, 27 per cent of Armenians, and 11 per cent of Azerbaijanis polled. Over more than half, 54 per cent, of respondents in the Netherlands found it very important to live separately from in-laws (Table 12.4).

Two of the said family-related questions had been asked by World Values Survey (1994–1999 wave) in Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1997 and in Georgia in 1996. This allows us to follow some dynamics in value orientations in the South Caucasus. For example, while the attitude towards parents has hardly changed in Armenia and Georgia over a decade, a ten per cent shift towards individualism can be observed in Azerbaijan (Table 12.5). Meanwhile, the number of respondents valuing independence in children has decreased slightly in Armenia over the course of ten years (Table 12.6)

It is notable that the answers of the South Caucasus respondents to the statement "One of my main goals in life has been to make my parents proud," asked by the WVS (1994–1999 wave), are indirectly accentuating a shift towards individualism in parent-child relations in Azerbaijan. At that time, all three countries had scored equally on the intensity of respondents' emotional attachment to parents; this may connote equal starting conditions in the three countries before the changes took place (Table 12.7)

Table 12.4 Conditions for a successful marriage

Q.: Here is a list of things which some people think make for a successful marriage. Please tell me, for each one, whether you think it is very important, rather important or not very important for a successful marriage?

Having some time for one's own friends and for personal hobbies/activities

Country	*Very important*	*Rather important*	*Not very important*
Armenia	39	48	13
Azerbaijan	38	41	21
Georgia	37	45	18
Netherlands	64	33	3

Living apart from in-laws

Country	*Very important*	*Rather important*	*Not very important*
Armenia	27	27	46
Azerbaijan	11	28	60
Georgia	30	34	36
Netherlands	54	22	24

Source: EVS (2008 wave)

Table 12.5 Love and respect towards parents

Country	*St. 1: Regardless of what the qualities and faults of one's parents are, one must always love and respect them*			*St. 2: One does not have the duty to respect and love parents who have not earned it by their behaviour and attitudes*		
Country	*1996–97*	*2008*	*Change*	*1996–97*	*2008*	*Change*
Armenia	93	92	–1	7	8	+1
Azerbaijan	91	82	–9	8	18	+8
Georgia	91	96	+5	9	4	–5

Source: EVS (2008 wave); WVS (1994-1999 wave)

Table 12.6 Independence as an aim of education

Q.: Here is a list of qualities which children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important?			
Country	*Independence*		
Year	*1996/97*	*2008*	*Change*
Armenia	32	24	–8
Azerbaijan	60	58	–2
Georgia	52	54	+2

Source: EVS (2008 wave); WVS (1994–1999 wave)

Table 12.7 Making parents proud as a main goal

St.: One of main goals in life has been to make my parents proud				
Country	*Agree strongly*	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly disagree*
Armenia	41	43	14	2
Azerbaijan	39	47	12	1
Georgia	42	45	11	2

Source: WVS (1994–1999 wave)

Concern for in-groups beyond the family

The EVS (2008 wave) includes indicators revealing the attitudes of South Caucasus respondents towards societal groups other than family. More specifically, a cluster of questions in the survey asked how concerned respondents felt about the living conditions of their immediate family, people in the neighbourhood, people living in the same region and fellow countrymen. The data is indicative of a higher level of individualization in Azerbaijan, as the level of concern for the mentioned entities is lowest among the Azerbaijani respondents. For example, while 97 and 96 per cent of respondents in Armenia and Georgia, respectively, felt "much" and "very much concerned" about their immediate family, the percentage of Azerbaijanis with the same feelings was 80 (Table 12.8). Georgian respondents

Table 12.8 Concern for immediate family

Q.: To what extent do you feel concerned about the living conditions of your immediate family?

Country	*Armenia*	*Azerbaijan*	*Georgia*	*Netherlands*
Very much	84	54	79	77
Much	13	27	17	20
To a certain extent	2	4	3	2.4
Not so much	1	13	1	0.3
Not at all	0	2	0	0.3

Source: EVS (2008 wave)

seemed most concerned about their neighbours (76 per cent), people living in the same region (61 per cent) and fellow countrymen (60 per cent), followed by their Armenian counterparts (at 74, 55, and 48 per cent, respectively). A little over half, namely, 56 per cent, 33, and 11 per cent of Azerbaijani respondents expressed the highest degrees of concern about people living in the neighbourhood, in the same region and fellow countrymen, respectively (Tables 12.9–12.11)

Table 12.9 Concern for people in the neighbourhood

Q.: To what extent do you feel concerned about the living conditions of people in your neighbourhood?

Country	*Armenia*	*Azerbaijan*	*Georgia*	*Netherlands*
Very much	31	39	26	7
Much	43	18	50	40
To a certain extent	17	9	21	43
Not so much	6	12	2	9
Not at all	3	22	1	1

Source: EVS (2008 wave)

Table 12.10 Concern for people in the region

Q.: To what extent do you feel concerned about the living conditions of people of the region you live in?

Country	*Armenia*	*Azerbaijan*	*Georgia*	*Netherlands*
Very much	13	8	20	2
Much	42	25	42	12
To a certain extent	30	45	33	51
Not so much	11	15	3	31
Not at all	4	7	2	4

Source: EVS (2008 wave)

Table 12.11 Concern for fellow countrymen

Q.: To what extent do you feel concerned about the living conditions of your fellow countrymen?				
Country	*Armenia*	*Azerbaijan*	*Georgia*	*Netherlands*
Very much	13	4	20	2
Much	35	17	40	9
To a certain extent	35	50	35	56
Not so much	13	23	3	29
Not at all	4	6	2	4

Source: EVS (2008 wave)

Table 12.12 Scarcity of jobs and employment

Q.: When jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to [NATIONALITY] people over immigrants			
Country	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Neither*
Armenia	75	21	4
Azerbaijan	48	41	11
Georgia	93	4	3
Netherlands	37	59	4

Source: EVS (2008 wave)

Apart from more or less narrowly defined societal groups such as family and neighbours, one of the indicators in the EVS (2008 wave) demonstrates the intensity of individualization in terms of an individual's emotional attachment/detachment with respect to a more abstract concept of nationality. Compared with Armenia and Georgia, here, the level of detachment in Azerbaijan again seems higher. In particular, respondents were asked if they would agree or disagree if employers, at a time when jobs are scarce, gave priority to people of their own nationality over immigrants. While 93 per cent of Georgian and 74 per cent of Armenian respondents answered positively, the number of like-minded Azerbaijanis was 48 per cent (Table 12.12).

Implications of collectivism/individualism for organizational membership

Organizational membership – most notably participation in voluntary organizations – is an important indicator of how efficiently a civic society is operating. Some scholars have argued that higher levels of collectivism in a society might account for low levels of organizational membership, thus implying that a rise in individualism could result in higher degrees of participation in organizations. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005, p. 94) write that, 'It is precisely when relationships between people are not prescribed by the culture that the conscious decision to

get together becomes more important.' Similarly, Granovetter (1973, p. 1373) argues that if a person is tied to the members of his closely-knit clique and to none outside, '[c]ommunity organization would be severely inhibited.' As to concrete examples of the existence of such a relationship, Triandis et al. (1988, p. 324) refer to the example of Japan, stating that the rise of individualism in this country during 1970s and '80s resulted in an increase in voluntary organizations. In the meantime, Allik and Realo (2004, pp. 40–42) demonstrated in their study that social capital (membership of associations and interpersonal trust) and individualism are positively correlated across 42 countries and within one country (United States).

In his study of post-Communist civil societies in Europe, Marc Howard (2002) concludes that the existence of networks of close friends and family (along with mistrust towards communist organizations and post-communist disappointment with political and economic developments) is one of the main impediments to organizational membership or participation in voluntary organizations. As he put it:

> Unlike in many Western societies – where voluntary organizations have become a central part of the social and political culture, and where people join organizations in order to meet new people and to expand their horizons through public activities – in post-communist societies, many people are still invested in their own private circles, and they simply feel no need, much less desire, to join and participate in civil society organizations.
>
> (Howard, 2002, p. 163)

The case of the South Caucasus countries seems to fit into the proposed model of relationships between collectivism-individualism and organizational membership. In particular, compared with Armenia and Georgia, Azerbaijan, which appears to retain higher scores on individualism in terms of a person's detachment from his various in-groups, also appears to retain larger numbers of respondents participating in voluntary organizations. The levels of interpersonal trust (outside in-groups) in Azerbaijan are higher too.

For example, the data from the CRRC Caucasus Barometer of 2007 indicates that the number of respondents in Azerbaijan who had done "voluntary work" within six months prior to the survey was, at 23 per cent, almost four times as high as that in Armenia (6 per cent) and Georgia (5 per cent) (CRRC 2007). In addition, the EVS (2008 wave) asked a battery of questions on participation in voluntary organizations and activities.[3] The participation index (aggregate percentage of participation divided by the number [that is to say, 11] of organizations on the list) of Azerbaijani respondents is three times as high as that of Armenian and six times as high as that of Georgian respondents (3.0, 1.1, and 0.5, respectively). In comparison, the participation index in the Netherlands is 18.0 (Table 12.13).

Notably, the level of interpersonal trust (as judged by the EVS [2008 wave] question, "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?" in Azerbaijan is more than

Table 12.13 Participation in voluntary organizations and activities

Country	*Participation index*
Armenia	1.1
Azerbaijan	3
Georgia	0.5
Netherlands	18

Source: EVS (2008 wave)

Table 12.14 Level of interpersonal trust

Country	*Interpersonal trust*
Armenia	20
Azerbaijan	45
Georgia	22
Netherlands	62

Source: EVS (2008 wave)

twice as high as in Armenia and Georgia (at 45, 20, and 22 per cent, respectively) (Table 12.14).

Implications of collectivism/individualism in Armenia

This section of the chapter briefly discusses several cases related to various public issues in post-Soviet Armenia. The purpose is to demonstrate how culture in general and collectivist values in particular have an impact on various domains of social life; most notably, on issues of public relevance by guiding the collective behaviour. The section is concluded by two more cases which demonstrate how collectivist value orientations impact on decision-making at the top of institutional hierarchies.

Although collectivism is functional in ensuring the cohesion and well-being of closely-knit and relatively smaller groups, most of the cases discussed here also imply that modern state-building requires a mode of thinking and behaviour that leans towards individualism. For example, the establishment of the rule of law or the provision of public health services require that society members slacken their in-group bonds, go out of their in-group boundaries and act for the common good, even to the detriment of narrowly defined in-group interests. A study conducted in 2009 on reasons of near-total non-use of seatbelts among Armenian drivers found that collectivism was an important factor for the male drivers' reluctance to wear seatbelts. The study revealed masculinity-related negative perceptions regarding the practice of wearing seatbelts and a high level of collective pressure (for example, by people in neighbourhood) against the deviant behaviour of seatbelt use (Matosyan, 2011).

Conformity to in-group values also seems to be contributing to a perpetuation of corrupt practices in the country. A nationwide survey which has been conducted in Armenia by Caucasus Research Resource Centers since 2008 has shown that instances of reporting corruption in the country are rare (for example, 91 per cent of respondents in 2009 and 99 per cent in 2010 had not reported any act of corruption within the 12 months preceding the survey). As to the reasons for not reporting, 71 per cent of respondents in 2009 and 72 per cent in 2010 said that society did not reward those who reported corruption[4] (Caucasus Research Resource Centers Armenia, 2010, p. 21).

The fear of being stigmatized also applies to reporting acts of gender-based domestic violence. In collectivist societies, the concept of shame is functional, and victims themselves run the risk of being alienated from society once the case of domestic violence becomes public. For example, a nationwide survey conducted by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Armenia in 2008–2009 demonstrates that only 7.7 per cent of interviewed women in the country think that family issues (including domestic violence) can be discussed with people outside of the family (UNFPA, 2010, p. 12). As one of the final conclusions of the UNFPA report reads:

> In many cultures, including in the South Caucasus, victims of violence, especially of intimate partner violence and of sexual violence or harassment, seldom come forward, if at all, because if they do, they have to face numerous negative social, economic, psychological and other consequences. Many experts emphasize that the fear of being socially stigmatized and, in extreme cases, ostracized and of ending up in an economically and socially vulnerable and precarious situation is not infrequently a powerful deterrent against women's coming out, reporting and/or ending a violent relationship.
>
> (UNFPA, 2010, p. 16)

Finally, as in the case of domestic violence, mental health belongs to the category of issues that are not supposed to be taken out of the immediate family, again because of the shame factor. In a televised interview at the end of 2010, Harutyun Minasyan, a recognized expert in the field of mental health in Armenia, said that on average two people committed suicide in Armenia per day, a very high rate taking into account the size of the country's population. According to Minasyan, the reasons for the suicides in Armenia often lie in the mental health problems of the individuals who commit suicide, as well as in the attitudes of their families. In particular, instead of seeking professional treatment, the family usually hides the illness of its member, thereby preventing the latter from "losing face in society" (The Hour, 2010).

Apart from having a bottom-up influence, collectivism may take on a top-down function. This refers to the cases when a decision-maker with a collectivist mindset shapes the policies of an entire state institution or private organization in line with collectivist principles and expectations. The following two examples demonstrate how a key individual's stated preference for collectivist equality is projected onto an organization or an entire social institution.

On October 27, 2010, the Armenian Parliament adopted a law on "Temporary Disability Allowance" enacted by the president on November 23 of the same year. The law produced a strong current of discontent among expectant and future mothers, as it reduced the length of paid prenatal and postnatal leaves and set a ceiling on compensation at 150,000 Armenian drams monthly (approximately $370), even though the mother's salary was higher than that amount (Gevorgyan, 2011).

As a series of protests has finally borne fruit, and the government has revoked and returned the law to parliament for amendments, officials who had authored the law made public apologies and tried to justify their previous actions. Explanations from the chairman of the Standing Committee on Social Issues in the Armenian Parliament as to the reasons for equalizing maternity allowances clearly reflect a collectivist mindset:

> We thought there would be very few people disadvantaged by the changes, thus we assumed the moral right to set up a ceiling in the law. . . . At the expense of the women – whose mean salary exceeded 150,000 drams – we justified our actions by the following social logic: let there be equality even if it slightly harms the justice.
>
> (Regnum Information Agency, 2010)

Viewing employees as members of a large family and feeling the moral obligation to patronize them and treat them equally is a collectivist attitude that can be inferred from these words from Gagik Tzarukyan, a rich businessman and leader of the second largest political party ("Prosperous Armenia") in the Armenian Parliament. In a televised interview on the eve of 2011, when asked about the impacts of the world financial crisis on his enterprises, Tsarulyan answered that even though his businesses suffered setbacks, he had instructed the heads of his business units 'to carry the burden of the crisis on their own shoulders' so that no person who had worked in an enterprise for 10 or 15 years and hence become 'a member of the family' would be laid off (Urvagitz, 2010).

Concluding remarks

The scarce quantitative data on the South Caucasus used in this chapter indicates that Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are predominantly collectivist in the sphere of family relations, with Azerbaijan scoring more highly on the individualist scale than Armenia and Georgia (on most of the family-related indicators). The data also allows a cautious assumption that in the latter part of the 1990s all three republics had similar levels of family collectivism. In terms of an individual's concern about various in-groups, ranging from neighbours to fellow countrymen and to the abstract notion of the nation, Azerbaijani respondents demonstrate, on almost all indicators, a considerably higher degree of detachment or individualization compared with their Georgian and Armenian counterparts.

These findings might be viewed as consistent with the thesis suggesting that levels of collectivism/individualism are related to economic development: the more developed a society is economically, the more its members will value individualist ideas and lifestyle. Inglehart and Baker (2000), for example, have argued that following the economic, social, and political collapse of the Soviet Union, all of the ex-Soviet states (except for the Baltic republics) became low-income societies and began to place an increasing emphasis on "survival" and "traditional" values. Conversely, "self-expression" values became even more widespread in industrially developed countries.

Compared with Armenia and Georgia, the lower levels of collectivism in Azerbaijan might be explained by the country's recent economic development. In particular, following the completion of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline in 2005 and the concomitant influx of petrodollars, Azerbaijan, as the World Bank ratings show, rapidly became a country with an upper middle range income, whereas Armenia and Georgia remained as countries of a lower middle range income. Notably, differences in economic development might be responsible also for variability in levels of organizational membership in the South Caucasus: affluence not only contributes to the rise of individualist worldviews and lifestyles leading to participation in various organizations and activities, but it also conveys to individuals a feeling of economic confidence with which they feel able to invest their time and efforts for civic causes. Thus, as an unintended consequence of rapid economic growth, Azerbaijan seems to have developed a more favourable cultural springboard (higher levels of individualism) for grassroots forms of democracy (e.g. civic participation) to fledge, although paradoxically retaining the worst democracy ratings in the South Caucasus as measured by various international organizations.

Notes

1 Good manners; independence; hard work; a sense of responsibility; imagination; tolerance and respect for other people; thrift, saving money and things; determination, perseverance; religious faith; unselfishness; obedience.
2 The scores of Azerbaijan and Georgia on this indicator appear counter-intuitive and should be treated with caution (unfortunately, we cannot know in what sense respondents in all of the four countries use the word "independence"). In the meantime, Azerbaijan's high score in terms of valuing "independence" in children might be indirectly supported by another nationally representative survey, "Social Capital, Media and Gender Survey in Azerbaijan," conducted by the CRRC in 2012 (Caucasus Research Resource Centers Armenia, 2012). According to its results, 33 per cent of respondents in Azerbaijan said they teach their children the skill to form and express their own opinions.
3 1. Social welfare services for elderly, handicapped or deprived people; 2. Education, arts, music or cultural activities; 3. Local community action on issues such as poverty, employment, housing, racial equality; 4. Third world development or human rights; 5. Conservation, the environment, ecology, the animal rights; 6. Youth work (e.g. scouts, guides, youth clubs, etc.); 7. Professional associations; 8. The peace movement; 9. Voluntary organizations concerned with health; 10. Women's groups; 11. To other groups.
4 There is a wide range of derogatory terms used in Armenia to refer to those who report instances of crime or misconduct to authorities.

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Part V

International context and external impacts

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Introduction

Hovhannes Hovhannisyan

Historically, the South Caucasus is known for its complex political, economic, social, religious-cultural and ethnic structure, as well as its geographically and politically important position. It is not a coincidence that during both world wars the South Caucasus was at the centre of a hub of interests and caught the attention of the parties involved; the peoples living in this region greatly suffered as a result of these international conflicts. The complexity of the South Caucasus is conditioned not only by international conflicts and interests but also by the frequent conflicts between, and contrasting interests of, the states – or state units – within the region, as well as the various ethnic groups contained there.

On the one hand, the South Caucasus region can be considered a single territory, but, on the other hand, it cannot be discussed and analysed as a coherent political, cultural, religious and economic space since the countries of the region have divergent internal and external political orientations and different levels of economic growth, as well as various cultural and religious backgrounds and ethnic compositions. In that sense, the South Caucasus is simply a geographical term describing one of the hottest points on the globe from geopolitical, energetic substructural, communicative and other perspectives.

Each of the South Caucasian countries attempts to develop its identity as a putative "bridge between East and West". The concept of a "civilizational bridge" between East and West, Islam and Christianity, in a cultural and political sense is widely discussed in the scholarly and public arenas of all three countries. For example, in all three countries there are different interpretations of the "Silk Road" which represents the crossroads between the various cultures, religions and other aspects of the area (Abrahamian, 2005, pp. 345–349; Cornell and Starr, 2006, pp. 25–80). As T. de Waal writes, 'the region has been a crossroads and meeting place between Christianity and Islam, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Persians, and Russians' (de Waal, 2010, p. 187).

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the situation in the South Caucasus became even more complicated, because the three states emerged as international players and started to form their own political agendas. Additionally, each state had its own approach to establishing its particular international role. The post-Soviet crisis gave the lie to the mistaken thesis of a "peoples' brotherhood" and unleashed a number of inter-ethnic conflicts, specifically between Azerbaijan and

the ethnic Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh region and between Georgia and the ethnic Abkhazians and Ossetians in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These ethnic conflicts exceeded the regional boundaries and involved great powers and other international agents. The South Caucasus is a focal point for many of these conflicts due to a number of issues, including energy resources and the transportation infrastructure, the so-called "frozen conflicts," as well as the involvement of neighbouring powers in these issues. Turkey has its own strategic interests in this region; the European Union for its part tries to maintain its influence in the region by means of the implementation of the Eastern Partnership (though only Georgia signed the Association Agreement with the EU); Russia claims a special role in security matters; Iran is trying to use the South Caucasus to increase its international credibility and detach itself from the image of being an "evil state"; and China regards this region basically as a potential market.

The three states of the South Caucasus have been members of the Council of Europe since 2001, and for more than a decade they have been trying to become integrated into the European normative order, which is a hard task from the point of view of establishing human rights and democratic institutions. The incompleteness of democratic reforms is conditioned by the fact that territorial issues, including borders, remain the primary problem in the region (Cornell, 2002).

Georgia is the most multi-ethnic state of the region (Mateeva, 2004). The direction of foreign policy in Georgia was subject to distinct changes following the "Rose Revolution" and Mikhail Saakashvili's rise to power, which was mainly based on adopting the values of the democratic West and on an accentuation of the image of Russia as an enemy of the state (Welt, 2009). Russian-Georgian hostilities reached a climax during the short Russian-Georgian August War of 2008. Shortly after this, Russia recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in fact putting an end to their further cooperation with Georgia. Subsequently, a considerable growth of nationalist feeling was observed in Georgia, based on the idea of restoring the territorial integrity of the country and eradicating Russia's influence. In spite of the common Orthodox heritage of Russia and Georgia and the attempts of the two national churches to maintain a dialogue, it was not until the parliamentary elections of October 2012 that Moscow and Tbilisi started to improve their damaged relations politically (Forest, 2008). For their parts, both the US and the EU have increased their levels of cooperation with Georgia after 2008, thus demonstrating their interest in encouraging domestic reforms and elevating Tbilisi's international profile.

Unlike Georgia, Armenia stays mainly under the political influence of Russia. The unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the closed border with Turkey, the issue of the recognition of the 1915 massacres as genocide, the Russian military bases and economic penetration render Russia's position as dominant. In the meantime, Armenia seeks to redress the impact of Russia's presence by developing relations with the US and the EU.

The Azerbaijani political agenda is different. For Baku, regaining Nagorno-Karabakh is the key issue. Economically, Azerbaijan relies heavily upon its energy resources, as exemplified by the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which allows it to

increase its military budget and boost its military rhetoric against neighbouring Armenia (Collection of war threat statements. . . , 2010–2012). Despite having problems with the development of democratic institutions and in the safeguarding of human rights, Azerbaijan is able successfully to manoeuvre between Russia and the West because of its economic resources. China, interested in finding new energy suppliers, has also joined in this game.

Other regional actors cannot be ignorant of the developments in the South Caucasus. Iran and Turkey have established special relationships with each of the South Caucasus countries separately. Iran has complicated relations with Azerbaijan (on the issues of the Caspian Sea, Northern Iran, relationships with West and Israel and so on) and much smoother cooperation with Armenia and Georgia. Iran's role in the region is sometimes invisible but rather strong. Turkey, by contrast, maintains a high political profile in the South Caucasus. Armenian-Turkish relations, frozen due to different approaches to the 1915 Armenian Genocide and the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, are the most strained, and negotiations around the settlement of these issues have already failed on several occasions (the last attempt was in 2009, when signed protocols between two countries were not ratified due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict). Periodically Turkey comes up with different regional initiatives, among which the "Caucasian Platform" proffered by the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan attracted the greatest attention yet which remains inoperative. However, the position of Turkey in the region remains strong due to its NATO membership, and its almost "fraternal" relations with Georgia and Azerbaijan make Turkish aspirations in the South Caucasus even more visible (Nichol, 2012).

Tatevik Mkrtchyan's chapter attempts to explain the role that *Ithnāʿasharī* Islam plays in the Islamic Republic of Iran and in its foreign policy decision-making. The author attempts to discuss Iran's relations with the three South Caucasus states within the theoretical framework of strategic culture, which in her opinion enables a spanning of the boundaries between the internal and external environments of foreign policy and also includes the opportunity to discuss Iran's foreign policy towards the three South Caucasus republics, taking into consideration all the factors, including that of the Islamic/*Ithnāʿasharī* in Iran's foreign policy-making. While developing an understanding of the strategic cultural profiles of Iran and the three South Caucasus republics, the author reveals lines of contention and contradiction, as well as dimensions of cooperation. She concludes that in cases where the three republics' strategic cultural components are in line with those of Iran, bilateral models of good relations can be traced, and, conversely, when the components are in contradiction, relations are characterized by slowdowns or tensions.

In their chapter, Andrey Makarychev and Alexander Kornilov examine the regional implications of the intensively debated concept of soft power as a relatively new and highly contested instrument in Russia's foreign policy toolkit. The authors critically assess the interpretations of soft power in the Kremlin's discourse, which differs from Western experiences and practices. The nodal points of other key actors' soft power capabilities, mainly seen from the perspective of their

communicative and agenda-setting resources, are discussed. This yields a framework for placing the analysis of Russian soft-power strategies and instruments in a wider context of power relations in the South Caucasus, a region with a plurality of both local and international actors.

Bayram Balci examines the impact of Turkey on the region. The end of the Soviet Union, with the independence of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, has marked a turning point in Turkish foreign policy in this region, initiating a new phase. However, the differences and the tense relations among the new countries have not made it easy for Turkey to develop a global policy and approach in the region. The main aim of this chapter is to give a global analysis of Turkish interests and policy in this region, demonstrating the contrast between Turkey's ambitions for the new Caucasus and the constraints Turkish policymakers face in each country. Because of their differences, and sometimes because of antagonisms between the three countries, added to the competition between regional and global powers in the region, Turkey's attempt to play a leading role in the South Caucasus has not been successful. However, the chapter also brings out the contrast between Turkey's weak political influence and its cultural and economic successes in the region as a whole.

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13 Shi‘a politics, “strategic culture” and Iran’s relations with the South Caucasus

Tatevik Mkrtchyan

After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran became an Islamic Republic based on the politico-religious theory of *vilāyat-i faqīh* (in Arabic *wilāyat al-faqīh*) – governance of the jurist (also defined as authority/guardianship/mandate/rule by the jurisconsult/guardian of Islamic jurists) and regulated by the Islamic Constitution. This created a perception of Iran as “crazy,” “unstoppable,” ruled by “mad mullahs,” or as a “Mullah regime,” especially within mainstream American academic circles. Many studies have shown that the perception of the Iranian political system as irrational is erroneous. Moreover, the 34-year existence of the Islamic Republic of Iran shows that it is driven by the pragmatic concerns of statehood, conditioned by a religious doctrine which plays a central role in the official ideology of Iran.

With respect to the country’s foreign policy, these misunderstandings and miscalculations have become more obvious and unpredictable, as many Western leaders do not see Iran as a “rational actor”. Savory noted that, ‘after the Islamic Revolution it became apparent . . . that the seizure of political power by the *Ithnā‘asharī* (Twelver Shi‘a) religious leaders for the first time in 1,400 years of Islamic history would not only affect the internal governance of Iran, but would also have an impact on the relations of the Islamic Republic of Iran with other countries’ (1986, p. 409).

The confusion with respect to the driving ideology behind the political decisions being made in Islamic Iran is further deepened by a consideration of its policies towards the South Caucasus countries following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. For example, how could Armenia, with its predominantly Christian population, emerge as the country with the greatest level of cooperation with Iran? For Armenia, Iran is an important neighbour and an even more important strategic partner; as with Georgia, it offers the landlocked Armenia an important means by which to overcome a trade blockade imposed by the country’s two other neighbouring countries, Azerbaijan and Turkey. Iran, in its turn, values close relations with Christian Armenia, which boasts a successful policy in preserving and renovating the Armenian Christian heritage.[1] Iran has started to “develop” and deepen relations with Georgia, another predominantly Christian country, since 2010. Moreover, Iran also has a “strategic” alliance – with its ups and downs – with Russia. In contrast with these close relations to two neighbours endowed

with a predominantly Christian population, Iran has strained relations with Azerbaijan, however, they are declared to be friendly. Note that Azerbaijan is the second country, after Iran, with a majority population composed of the *Ithnā'asharī* branch of Shi'a Islam.

This chapter will analyse the relations between Iran and each of the three South Caucasian states since official diplomatic relations have been established.[2]

Theoretical framework and methodology: strategic culture and foreign policy

It is the assertion of this chapter that no single theory of international theories – be it realist, constructivist or neorealist – can satisfactorily explain the behaviour of Iran and less so the intricacies of its foreign policy. Any theory is based on various propositions and assumptions which underscore distinctive variables or processes. Therefore, applying any theoretical approach requires adjustments and modifications.

I argue that a more comprehensive understanding of Iran's foreign policy can be achieved by viewing it as being shaped by three distinct contexts that often pull against one another or intermingle: the national, the regional and the international. As Lantis argued, 'the evolution of countries' security policies are better understood as a product of domestic political adjustments (rooted in culture, traditions and common historical narratives) to changing international circumstances' (2002, p. 113). Thus, I propose that the concept of strategic culture offers a flexible instrument for the study of interwoven foreign policies. In this sense, the revolutionary character of Iran and the *Ithnā'asharī* characteristic of the transformative ideology of the Islamic governmental system with their relevant influence on foreign policy should be taken into account. In view of these considerations, we can apply the theoretical framework of strategic culture; it is a very complex theory with various components which help us to analyse the complex and multidimensional relations of Iran and the three South Caucasus countries from each side. This concept allows us to bridge and overcome the boundaries between internal and external linkages of foreign policy and includes the possibility of discussing the relations between Iran and the three republics. We argue that *Ithnā'asharī* governance, though being one of the most important policy-determining factors, is interwoven with and interdependent on other factors in Iran's foreign policy.

Strategic culture, as an emerging research field, has been conceptualized by a number of scholars since the 1970s. In 1977, Jack Snyder brought the political culture argument into modern security studies by developing a theory of strategic culture to interpret Soviet military strategy (Johnston, 1995, Lantis, 2002). Strategic culture theorists and analysts contend that culture conditions how states conceive of and respond to their strategic environment, bearing in mind that there is no universal model of rationality. In this view, what is rational for one state can be irrational for another, given the different cultural/historical backgrounds of the countries. According to Johnson et al., 'the strategic culture approach focuses on how decision-makers understand and interpret the main attributes of the international system in which they operate and how these assessments influence their

views on security policy, as well as on their foreign policy agendas' (2009, p. 9). Within the framework of the strategic culture concept, it is argued that the decision-making cannot be understood independently of cultural context, since past experience shapes strategic behaviour.

For this analysis, I have combined elements from previous definitions of strategic culture, most notably from Colin S. Gray (1981, 1999). I understand strategic culture as consisting of more or less stable modes of thought and action which are derived from several cultural patterns: the perception of national historical experience, aspirations for self-characterization and a state's distinctive experiences. In this chapter, I offer summary "profiles" of the strategic cultures of the four relevant states within a context of bilateral relations, with a brief discussion of the components in the narratives of these states that appear to be of particular influence. The potential sources of a strategic cultural profile, according to Lantis (2006), have three dimensions, each with several components: physical (geography, natural resources, technology, generational changes); political (historical experience, political system, elite beliefs, military organizations and so on); and social-cultural (myths and symbols, defining texts). For this chapter, I have added the religious factor (*Ithnā'asharī* in Iran's case, Christianity for Armenia and Georgia, and the secular Shi'a dimension for Azerbaijan) as one of the core components which has an influence on all other dimensions of the countries' internal and foreign policy decision-making.

The chapter is based on the analyses of web site materials of the four relevant ministries of foreign affairs and the content of the Iranian supreme leader's speeches during the visits of the presidents of the three Southern Caucasus countries after 1991, as well as other speeches by the presidents, foreign ministers, and other officials of the four countries. In addition, I have analysed the various documents on bilateral economic ties, trade turnovers, bilateral and multilateral projects and the obstacles which can obstruct economic relations. The various national security concepts/strategies of the South Caucasus countries have been analysed as indicators of foreign policy strategies and directives, which serve as basic documents explaining fundamental national values and national interests and the vision of the nation's secure development, threats, risks and challenges. These documents also establish the main directions for national security policy. Furthermore, I have also conducted four expert interviews with Davit Hovhannisyan (personal communication, January 15, 2013), Richard Giragosian (personal communication, March 15, 2013), and with officials of the Foreign Ministry of Armenia, Garnik Badalyan (personal communication, February 18, 2013) and Arsen Avagyan (personal communication, February 20, 2013).

Based on the aforementioned features of the strategic culture framework, I will characterize the strategic culture profiles of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Iran.

Ithnā'asharī "governance of the jurist" and its place in Iran's strategic culture

Ithnā'asharī "governance of the jurist" (*vilāyat-i faqīh*) is the basis of Iran's Islamic Republic governmental system and became possible because of the

distinctive imamate concept in Shi'a Islam, which, from the very beginning, created possibilities for the development of new political and theological governmental concepts.

The concept of *ijtihād* (interpretation), the process of allowing qualified scholars (mujtahids/ulama) to make "legal rulings based on rational considerations," operates as an evolutionary and dynamic force in legal studies, which provides solutions to contingent issues of life and fulfils the needs of changing times. Arjomand (1989) views Iran's Islamic Revolution as the last stage in the evolution of clerical authority in Shi'a Islam which started in Safavid times. He argues that following the separation of the Shi'ite clergy from the state, the next logical possibility was to assert the superiority of the clergy over the state by expanding clerical authority into the political sphere, an idea which was explored by the Ayatollah Khomeini and which eventually enabled the Shi'ite clergy to take control of the state.

Several researchers (Amanat, 2009; Arjomand, 1988; Katouzian and Shahidi, 2008) argue that at the time of the 1979 revolution, the *Ithnā'asharī* Shi'a branch had been transformed into a political doctrine which was more like a radical ideology than a pious and conservative religion. Moreover, the democratic elements of Iran's government were excised in favour of Islamic law (shari'a) and theocratic-clerical rule.

Many authors (Buchta, 2000; Gheissari, 2009; Pick, 2000; Yonah and Hoenig, 2008) have stressed the significance of Ayatollah Khomeini's constitutional measures, namely his constitutionalization of the governance of the jurist ("mandate of the ruling jurist"), creating a governmental apparatus which will guarantee Islamic control over the state, which means that the institutional appointments and even elective bodies would be under the control of the supreme religious leader.

Since 1979, Iranian decision-making has been marked by a degree of significant tension between the absolute imperatives of the regime's political and religious doctrines and the pragmatic needs of governance and statecraft (Eisenstadt, 2011). There were great discrepancies between the revolutionary ideals articulated by the Ayatollah Khomeini or, later, Ayatollah Khamenei, on the one hand and the practice of Iranian foreign policy on the other hand. These discrepancies led to a debate about what are the influences on Iran's foreign policy decision-making and the question as to how to identify which are the Islamic factors in the affairs of foreign policy. Ramazani (1983, cited in Savory, 1986, p. 411) concludes that Khomeini's brand of Islam did influence the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic in a variety of ways, and it is used to motivate and justify policy choices. As Barzegar (2008) notes, the Shi'a factor in Iran's foreign policy is mostly acting in line with Iran's pragmatic policies in establishing friendly relations with the neighbouring countries. This created the possibility for the Islamic Republic to bring its foreign policy into line with both Khomeinist ideology and post-Khomeini pragmatism.

Iran's regional policy behaviours have been viewed either as regional containment and cooperative regionalism (Herzig, 1995), regional multilateralism (Mesbahi, 2004) or confrontational explanations within the framework of its revolutionary

and anti-Western stance, as well as its non-alignment strategies and aggressive policies in respect of the South Caucasus and Central Asia (Weitz, 2012).

Applying the framework of strategic culture, I combine these different views, trying to explain the reasons and mechanisms under which apparently contradictory modes of cooperation and confrontation become possible in foreign relations.

It is evident that the composition of the strategic culture for each country will not tend to be the complete list; rather, they will encompass comparative aspects of relations between Iran and each of the South Caucasian countries. Neither will these components be identical, deriving from the respective cultural patterns emanating from perceptions of national historical experience, aspirations for self-characterization and the state's distinctive experiences with respective "potential resources."

The relations of Iran with the countries of the South Caucasus within its religious governmental system are based on a specific strategic culture, which has the following composition:

- History and national historical memory ("Great power pride" along with its regional aspirations of influence); self-image and characterization ("defender of all oppressed [Muslims]"); representation of images of the neighbouring countries and external powers in an overall historical narrative (explaining its hostility towards the West and especially towards the US and Israel); national identity ("Shi'a Iranian-ness");
- Geostrategic and geoeconomic needs;
- An Islamic governmental system (state with religious ideology);
- Internal and external vulnerabilities (in change);
- The centrality of oil-hydrocarbon resources;
- International actors' involvements and influences in neighbourhood countries.

For Iran, with its long history, it is also true that factors which contribute to the rise and fall of great powers or civilizations have shaped its policies towards others at the regional and international levels. Particularly, Maloney (2002, p. 97) argues that 'this "Great Power pride" shapes the Iranian strategic thinking/culture' and its foreign policy towards the regions. The "deep roots Iran has in the South Caucasus" have been discussed in academic circles (Djalili, 2002, Vatanka, 2012). Explaining the policy towards this region, the argument was very common that from Iran's viewpoint, the South Caucasus is not totally foreign territory because much of the South Caucasus region was historically part of, or heavily influenced by, the Persian Empire. Furthermore, Iran's national identity is deeply tied to its historical self-perception as the dominant regional power in the Gulf and nowadays the South Caucasus. Barzegar (2011) noted that focusing on regionalism and expanding interactions with nations and states in the form of economic, political and security coalitions will provide Iran with opportunities to play its economic and political role in the region, prevent further threats and increase its bargaining power in the relations with great powers. Iran has advocated a regional system of collective security (in Persian: *amniyat-i dast-i jam'ii*), which means that from its point of view security issues would be settled within the regional states and the

region should be free from foreign interference. However, as Friedman (2010, pp. 13–14) stressed, for Iran the US-sustained military presence in the region has put its "historical oppressor" in its backyard and presents a direct challenge to the Islamic Republic's revolutionary principle of resistance to an increasingly US-dominated regional and world security order.

The socio–cultural and scholarly activities of Iran in the neighbouring countries should be viewed as one foreign policy implementation dimension which can be considered as a type of soft power (Nye, 2005). The supreme leader dispatches representatives abroad to cultural organizations and Islamic centres which have been opened in all those countries. These centres cannot oppose the religious ideology in general, though the activities vary from country to country. Thus, in Armenia and Georgia they commonly organize cultural events, language courses, translations, the publication of journals, conferences and inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue promotion, while in Azerbaijan the religious aspect has been supplemented with a special focus (Abasov, 2011, Yunusov, 2012).[3]

The internal and international context of Iranian foreign policy significantly altered in the 1990s. With the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, and the installation of the pragmatic and reform-minded Rafsanjani and Khatami to the presidency, Iran turned to its "new neighbours" in the South Caucasus and Central Asia in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Given that the dissolution of the Soviet Union implied a need to construct a new version of their national history for the each of the three republics, the application of the strategic culture theoretical framework will show how the components of their strategic culture interacted with and responded to those of Iran. Atabaki mentions that the linking to a real or imagined past, appealing to genuine or fake ancestries or even fabricating documents is not exceptional in the politics of transition from territorial identity and territorial state to national identity and nation state: 'These are all legitimized in the historiography's agenda in order to shape a significant and unbroken link with the nation's seminal past that could fill the gap between its origin and its actuality' (Atabaki, 2009, p. 1).

Modern state-building in the three republics passed through the process of a selective construction of the past. In the process, this imagined/constructed past strongly affected the choice of allies and enemies, though current security challenges and political realities were certainly taken into consideration as well. In what follows I will discuss Iran's relations with each of the three states, driven by sometimes contradictory elements of strategic culture.

Iran and Armenia: different religions, close cooperation

The strategic culture profile I suggest for Armenia consists of the following components:

- Religion: the first state to declare Christianity as its official religion;
- National identity: the preservation of "Armenian-ness" over pressures of assimilation; language and script dating back to the fifth century ad; the

Armenian Genocide, which resulted in the consolidation and expansion of a global diaspora; the coexistence of the nation-state and diaspora communities;

- The period of the Independent Republic of Armenia (a transition period involving democracy-building hardships, state security issues, closed borders with two out of four neighbours [Azerbaijan and Turkey]), a *de facto* independent Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, *de jure* unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as well as the interdependence of political and strategic choices in terms of regional (Russia, Iran) and extra-regional (US, EU) actors' involvement in this region.

Historically, Armenians and Iranians have long lived together peacefully, with a sizeable and fairly prosperous Armenian minority residing in Iran for several centuries. This is also reflected in official relations. Particularly, terms like "historical ties," "ancient ties," "friendly," "very deep-rooted" and "very specific ties between Armenia and Iran" are commonly used during the meetings of the presidents and foreign ministers of the two countries, as well as on official web sites. For example, the following statement referring to bilateral relations between Armenia and Iran is commonly used: 'Relations between Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran remain extremely cordial and both Armenia and Iran are strategic partners in the region. Armenia and Iran enjoy cultural and historical ties that go back thousands of years. There are no border disputes between the two countries and the relations between the two countries have been constructive in 20 years of diplomatic relations and the Christian Armenian minority in Iran enjoys official recognition' (Official web site of the President of IRI, Dec. 23, 2011).

Ayatollah Khamenei stated that the relations between neighbouring countries would strengthen each other and protect against damage, referring also to the "big powers": 'The big powers are trying to block regional ties under different guises' (Office of the Supreme Leader, April 14, 2009). Searching in the Armenian, Russian, English and Persian-language internet coverage on Iranian-Armenian relations, the content commonly found is within the framework of further developing, strengthening and expanding as well as boosting the mutual ties of the two countries.

The following components of Armenian and Iranian strategic cultures seem to be concurrent, though based on different reasons: a shared historical experience; security threats and closed borders, or a so-called "shared sense of isolation" (Giragosian, 2012); economic problems in the transition period for Armenia; and international sanctions over Iran's nuclear programme. This is how it is defined in the National Security Strategy of Armenia (2007): 'The development of traditional neighbourly relations between Armenia and Iran is based on a number of shared realities: shared borders, historic and cultural ties, and mutual economic interests. Armenia's main southern transit route passes through Iran, as does Armenia's strategic access to Asia and the Middle East, a reality only exacerbated by the blockade of Armenia imposed by its two neighbouring states,'

Another converging component is geography and geopolitics. In Armenia's national security strategy, Iran's engagement in various processes in the South

Caucasus region is appreciated and regarded as a factor contributing to maintaining balance and stability. Iran is also appreciated as a country with a large Armenian community.

The strategic culture profile does not reveal contradictory or disputable components, though religious differences might seem to be a source for such a perception. Interestingly, instead of creating difficulties, this difference has turned out to be positive factor. For Iran, friendly, long-term historical and good relations with Christian Armenia create a positive international image; moreover, tiny Armenia becomes a means of global reconnection for Iran (Semerdjian, 2013). For Armenia, the relationship with Iran presents an opportunity to gain approval from the other Islamic countries.

Iran and Georgia: different religions, functional relations with "slowdowns" in cooperation

The profile of the strategic culture of Georgia includes the following components:

- "Kartveloba" (Georgian-ness) as an identity has provided a framework for perceptions about Georgian history, culture, language, religion and homeland, embodied in formal and informal discourses with its two competing or intermingled projects of nation-building in the multi-ethnic society of the Republic of Georgia; the ethno-religious versus the secular/civic (Amirejibi-Mullen, 2011);
- The democratic orientation of the state; such events as the "Rose Revolution" as a symbol of democracy as a value, which has resulted in a strategic partnership with the US and defines Georgia's "way into Europe," as well as integration policies oriented towards European and Euro-Atlantic institutions;
- The image of the enemy, which has a historical aspect, as well being the result of the impact of current events (namely, the Russian-Georgian War of August 2008, inter-ethnic conflicts and the complex situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia – situations for which Georgia blames the Russians). Since the August War of 2008, Russia's image as a hostile country has intensified in Georgian political and public discourse. The National Security Concept of Georgia (2011) defines Russia strictly as a primary threat to Georgian security – one can find 85 such mentions with regard to Russia.
- The territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country are among the national values of Georgia according to the National Security Concept of Georgia (2011).

Among the South Caucasian states, only Georgia does not share a common border and seems to have the least well-developed relations with Iran. Diplomatic relations were not very strong in the past either.[4] Iran has been kept out of Georgia's internal disputes and has been low on the list of priorities in its foreign policy. In the first National Security Concept of Georgia (of 2005), there was no reference to Iran and in the second (of 2011), Iran is referred to once in the context

of economic security policy. After the August War of 2008 and the concomitant turbulence in relations between Russia and Georgia, Georgia started to think about expanding relations with Iran. Several statements by Georgian officials since 2010 illustrate this intention of a further intensification of relations, indicating a "new stage" that bilateral relations between Iran and Georgia are entering into. In the official statements from Georgia, the deputy minister of foreign affairs expressed hope of a further deepening of ties between Iran and Georgia (Civil Georgia, May 22, 2010).

Iran, as another gas-rich state in the region, was seen as a strong potential gas supplier for Georgia, which could help Georgia to break its dependence on Russia. Declarations of intentions of cooperation in the field of energy resources followed from Iran's side as well. Majid Saber, Iran's ambassador to Georgia, declared: 'Iran planned to invest in the construction of a hydropower plant in Georgia and the Georgian side had requested Iran to share its experience in wind energy development' (Civil Georgia, May 21, 2010). Thus, bilateral relations have been activated. A visa-free regime[5] agreement, signed in November 2010, came into force in January 2011 and contributed significantly to an increase in the number of Iranians coming to Georgia: 21,000 Iranians travelled to Georgia in 2010, whilst this number reached 90,000 in 2012. According to official statistics, trade turnover has been increased (National Statistics Office of Georgia, http://www.geostat.ge/index.php?action=0&lang=eng).

There are, however, several factors or contradictory components of strategic culture which could potentially lead to confrontations or slowdowns in bilateral relations. Iran's ability to be an influential actor in Georgia is limited by geography (there is no direct border between the two countries), Georgia's "way to Europe" and its aspirations of integrating into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions are unlikely to be changed or jeopardized for the sake of improving relations with Iran (Kakachia, 2011), as well as by its strategic relations with the US, which contrast with Iran's hostility to the West (with the US in focus). According to Georgian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Nino Kalandadze, the development of Georgian-Iranian relations 'in no way means a shift in Georgia's foreign policy, nor does it conflict with its priority goals of integration with the European Union and NATO. . . . We are in constant dialogue with the United States, our strategic partner, and we do not expect any problems there . . . based on our country's national interests . . . we seek good relations with all the states in the region, Iran being one of the strong regional states' (Civil Georgia, May 24, 2010).

Turkey's influence in Georgia and the Turkish-Azerbaijani-Georgian economic alliance, as well as several related projects, counteract Iran's geopolitical regional aspirations and deepen the isolation of Iran even at the regional level. Finally, unstable relations with Azerbaijan and strategic links with Armenia will not enable Iran to play a leading role in the South Caucasus region, despite the new partnership started between Tbilisi and Tehran.

The historical element of strategic culture is another contradictory aspect of Iranian-Georgian relations. The historical background and narratives pertaining to Georgia contain uneasy memories involving their Persian/Iranian counterpart.

Georgia suffered heavily from Iranian invasions that culminated in the burning of Tbilisi in the late eighteenth century, and the wars with Iran left indelible imprints on the Georgian historical memory (Sharaszenidze, 2011).

Iran and Azerbaijan: same religion, different views: strained but close cooperation

The strategic culture profile for Azerbaijan consists of the following components:

- National identity complications (a multiplicity of identities and an identity crisis[6]) have manifested at a number of levels: issues of ethnicity, language, religion and secularism combine with an officially declared current trend of a democratic state-building prerogative (Huseynov, 2010; Mahdiyeva, 2003; Tokluoglu, 2005);
- Historical narratives of the type "old-age friends and allies" or "old-age enemies and hostiles": for example, Iran is discussed as "another hostile empire next door," while Russia is perceived as the first such "empire" (Huseynova, 2012). Another historical narrative is the so-called "historical Azerbaijan" issue, impacting on the representations of neighbouring countries: historians of Azerbaijan mark out significant areas of the country's neighbouring republics' territory as belonging to a "historical Azerbaijan" (Abbasov, 2012) or as an integral part of the sovereign homeland ("national territory") of which only one part – the Republic of Azerbaijan – is currently independent (Huseynova, 2012, pp. 140–141). The same goes for a significant areas of modern Iran, specifically north-western Iran (Rumyantsev, 2008, Shaffer, 2002);
- Geography focusing on geopolitics, geo-strategy, and geo-economics in the context of being the basin region of the Caspian and Black Seas;
- Oil-led development processes in Azerbaijan: the country's relations with multinational oil companies have defined the country's Western-oriented foreign policy, which accordingly ensures energy security;
- Official declarations of an orientation to the West in the Republic of Azerbaijan, with its declared prerogatives of democratic state-building on the one hand, while on the other, since country's independence the political Aliyev dynasty has been seen as one of the components of Azerbaijan's strategic culture;
- Security threats and risks presented as the "Nagorno-Karabakh issue": Armenia is mentioned 29 times in the National Security Concept of Azerbaijan (2007) in the context of aggression. Dealing with the threats and risks is accompanied by an intensification of hard power and an increase in the military capacity of the country as one of the key issues on the agenda of the Azerbaijani political elite. However, Azerbaijan's strategic culture has a soft power component which, as Mehdiyev (2009) argues, serves to increase the prestige of the country and strengthen the natural leadership position.

In the Azerbaijani National Security Concept (2007), the four main components of the strategic culture of Azerbaijan are incorporated in one passage: 'the

historical past, the security situation, the major objectives of democratic state-building, and Armenia, perceived as Azerbaijan's major rival.'

Relations between Iran and Azerbaijan have been seen to be massively turbulent in recent years (Sadegh-Zadeh, 2008). The following interconnected sets of factors within the strategic culture components of the two countries have strained their relations: religion; the fact of a secular governmental system with a Shi'a majority population in Azerbaijan; historical narratives; national identity complications; the aforementioned "historical Azerbaijan" issue; geopolitics and oil-led economics; Azerbaijan's orientation towards the West and alliances with the US and Israel, as well as security issues (including those associated with Nagorno-Karabakh).

For the Azerbajanis, the issue of the Azerbaijani people who live in Iran is seen from range of perspectives. Huseynova (2012) shows three main arguments: some present them as an ethnic minority of Iran, others as a discriminated-against ethnic minority, while a third argument says that the Azerbaijani Turks are not an "ethnic minority" but more accurately a nation which resides in a distinct territory.

Article 19 of Iran's Constitution says that 'whatever the ethnic group or tribe to whom they belong, all people of Iran enjoy equal rights, and factors such as colour, race, and language do not bestow any privilege.' On the other hand, Article 13 recognizes only the Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians as religious minorities, according them the right to perform freely their religious ceremonies within the limits of the law and to act according to their own customs in matters of personal status and religious education. Thus, Azerbaijani people living in Iran are not considered by the Iranian government itself to be an ethnic minority within the terms of its broader, ethnicity-blind approach (the fact that the supreme leader of the country is ethnically Azeri is one indicator of this attitude), which is in apparent contradiction with the historical dimension of the strategic culture profile of Azerbaijan.

Another area of contradiction between the defined strategic culture profiles is connected to religion, although the *Ithnā'asharī* Shi'ism officially adhered to in Azerbaijan by approximately 65 per cent of the 9.2 million population (Yunusov, 2012, p. 21) might seem to be an area of concurrence. Interestingly, instead of creating affinities, this has turned out to have the opposite effect. Thus, the religious factor as a basis for commonality between the two countries is not referred to in the National Security Concept document (2007, p. 14) along with other such components as a "common rich historical heritage" and a "cultural heritage." Moreover, some concerns regarding speculations about the possible export of radical Islam to secular Azerbaijan also have been mentioned (Yunusov, 2012) as a perceived threat to Azerbaijan's secular governmental system.

Azerbaijan's geopolitical and geo-economic role is undeniable, due to its geographic location – from east to west it lies between Central Asia and the Black and Caspian Seas basin region, and from north to south between Iran and Russia, and it is also an energy-rich country (Rahr and Rieder, 2009). I do not here discuss the oil-led developments and the natural resources component of Azerbaijan's strategic culture in detail as it is too large a topic (Zahirinejad, 2010). But the fact that Azerbaijan participates in trilateral regional projects between Azerbaijan,

Georgia and Turkey (namely the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad)[7] isolates Iran (as well as Armenia) from regional projects. Moreover, the problems of defining the legal status of the Caspian Sea basin are another source of contention between Iran and Azerbaijan.

A further point of contention between Iran and Azerbaijan is the Western orientation of Azerbaijani foreign policy since the end of the Soviet Union, as well as the participation of Baku in the US-led global war on terror, which is a very disturbing issue for Tehran.

The next source of contention between Iran and Azerbaijan is the Israeli-Azerbaijani alliance (with Azerbaijan as Israel's top trading partner and second largest oil exporter after Russia), identified also as a strategic partnership "below the surface" (Perry, 2012). This has been mentioned in high-level official meetings, such as the meetings of supreme leader of Iran and the president of Azerbaijan, with Ayatollah Khamenei urging the Azerbaijani president 'to be aware of the provocations by ultra-regional powers as well as the world's Zionists towards the cordial relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Republic of Azerbaijan' (Office of Supreme Leader, 2007).

Conclusion

Explaining the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in terms of either *Realpolitik* or religiously-driven, ideological policies remains incomplete given the fact that there are no defined boundaries between politics and religion in Islamic governance. Islamic governance is formed of the modern and unique Shi'a religious governmental system which has transformative possibilities and adaptation mechanisms inherent to the Shi'a Islamic *ijtihād* concept and which can adapt new tactical changes without harming the whole concept of the religious governmental system, while taking into consideration the strategic culture of its country. Although the Islamic factor is one of Iran's foreign policy dimensions, I argue that other socio-cultural, political, economic and strategic variables are also driving, determining and affecting Iran's foreign policy and its implementation in relation to the countries of the South Caucasus.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union spawned the need to construct new versions of the national histories of the three republics. In the process of modern state-building in these three countries, the formation of a strategic cultural identity has occurred within the context of present insecurities and political realities, both internal and external. The content of the strategic culture profiles of the countries presented in this chapter reveal certain lines of contention and contradiction, as well as spheres of cooperation in the region. In those cases where the components of the strategic cultures are coincident, *de facto* models of good relations are detected, and, by the same token, in the case of contradictory components, relations were characterized by slowdowns or tensions.

Despite the decisive role of Shi'a Islam and the *vilāyat-i faqīh* Islamic governance of the jurist in the Islamic Republic of Iran, strategic cultural analyses of

the country's foreign policy reveal its multidimensionality and other decisive factors. Particularly, the strategic culture profiles of Armenia and Iran have mostly commonalities and concurrences, which have provided a basis for rather positive stances in – and possibilities for further expansion of – relations between them. Most of the components in the strategic cultures of Iran and Azerbaijan, a state with Shi'a majority population, are in contradiction and have served as bases for tensions. In the case of Georgia, a comparison of the strategic culture profiles reveal both contradictions and concurrences without a clear dominance of either of them in terms of which may get prioritized in response to internal, regional and international situational changes.

Notes

1 The former deputy ambassador of Armenia in Iran (2010–2012), currently advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Garnik Badalyan also accepted this fact of the Armenian churches and monasteries enjoying cordial attitudes in Iran, the government of Iran having allocated large amounts for the renovation and preservation of the Armenian Christian heritage (Personal communication, Feb. 18, 2013).
2 According to the sources of the ministries of foreign affairs of the three states, Iran recognized Armenia's and Azerbaijan's independence on December 25, 1991. A declaration on establishing diplomatic relations between Armenia and Iran was signed in Tehran on February 9, 1992. A declaration of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Azerbaijan and Iran was signed on March 12, 1992. Official diplomatic relations between Iran and Georgia were established on May 15, 1992.
3 Cultural centres in Armenia and Azerbaijan have corresponding web sites (http://yerevan.icro.ir; http://baku.icro.ir).
4 Over the 20 years of diplomatic relations, only two presidential visits from Georgia (1993, 2004) and one from Iran (1995) have occurred, while the number of presidential mutual visits to and from Armenia were 11, with seven visits to Iran, and to and from Azerbaijan there were 15, with eight visits to Iran.
5 The visa-free agreement with Iran has been declared to be temporarily suspended since July 1, 2013, as a part of the general revision of the previous government's immigration policy ("Abolishment of visa-free regime with Iran temporary: Georgia Foreign Minister," [online]. Available from: http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/07/04/312269/visa-deal-with-iran-will-resume-gerogia/ (accessed July 5, 2013).
6 This is how Mehdiyeva (2003) has described the identity crisis in terms of its multiplicity in post-Soviet Azerbaijan: following 'the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan went through an identity crisis. The country's complex interweaving of historical and religious bonds to Iran; ethnic, ethno-linguistic and traditional intellectual links to Turkey; and political, intellectual and linguistic ties to Russia made the creation of a coherent national identity difficult.'
7 Murinson (2010) describes the formation of two informal Eurasian strategic alliances in the expanded Middle East in the last decade of the twenty-first century; a US-supported informal alliance of Azerbaijan, Turkey and Israel (and possibly Georgia), counterbalanced by the alliance of Russia, Armenia, Iran (and possibly Greece and Syria).

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14 Russia's soft power in the South Caucasus

Discourses, communication, hegemony

Alexander Kornilov and Andrey Makarychev

The idea of soft power, as conceived by the American scholar Joseph Nye (2004), has a strong Western intellectual pedigree. Soft power is not simply a new concept for describing non-force-based methods of diplomacy but reflects a new international reality, with the growing importance of norms, the stronger roles for non-state actors and more permeable borders. Politically, it is connotative of highly normative concepts of democracy promotion and normative convergence (as exemplified, in particular, by the EU's Neighbourhood Policy).

It is only recently that the term has been applied to the policies of states that intentionally dissociate themselves from liberal political philosophy. A set of concomitant questions have still to be answered: In what modalities can soft power be used as an analytical tool which makes it helpful for understanding the policies of non-Western powers? Can the concept of soft power be detached from a democracy-based platform, and in that case, what shape might it take?

In this chapter, we examine the regional implications of the concept of soft power as a relatively new and highly contested instrument of Russia's foreign policy. Soft power is a good example of a concept which, having been coined in academic literature, has become operational for policymakers, as exemplified by the Foreign Policy Concept of Russia (Concept of the Foreign Policy, 2013). It is largely referred to as an ideational form of power, though it is reproduced by institutional and material practices, as well as by physical interactions – such as labour markets, economic transactions and so on.

This chapter consists of three sections. First, we critically examine interpretations of soft power as an analytical concept. Second, we claim that the way soft power is conceptually understood and practically implemented by Moscow significantly differs from the corresponding Western practices. Third, we shall find out how Russia's soft power works in the South Caucasus. To do so, we address a variety of instruments that Russia deploys in this region and discuss their effectiveness.

Soft power: a critical re-examination of the concept

As with many other concepts-in-the-making, the meanings of soft power are coined by placing it in the context of other concepts, such as communicative action, dialogic politics, discursive power and some others. Most of them fit into the vocabulary of social constructivism, which will serve as a methodological

frame for our analysis. In particular, Alexander Wendt (1999) has aptly combined the primacy of ideational phenomena with their grounding in structural relationship. This helps in comprehending the nature of soft power: on the one hand, it is about discourses, ideas and identities (as opposed to material factors); on the other hand, it is deeply inscribed into multilateral and intersubjective social milieus. Thus, in the South Caucasus, Russia is not only a source of soft power in itself but also an object of Georgia's soft power, as exemplified by the "Strategy on Relations with the Peoples of North Caucasus" and subsequent information (a Tbilisi-based TV Channel, *Pik*, was founded to reach ethnic groups in the North Caucasus) and cross-border policies (in a gesture of soft power, Georgia has lifted visa requirements for Russian citizens of the North Caucasus).

Our approach is based on the constructivist reading of (any type of) power as being capable of functioning only in an interactive milieu and in constant communication with other powers. Arguably, Russia faces some ideational challenges in the South Caucasus, since soft power implies agenda-setting and communicating with other actors. In the South Caucasus, Russia is undeniably one of the major players, but it faces competition from other actors, including the EU, the US, China, Iran and Turkey. Each country applies its soft power in a socially complex milieu that consists of multiple interactions between rivals, partners or opponents. Soft power is always relational and contextual, and its success directly depends upon its inscription into the fabric of international society.

This reveals a crucial distinction between power in a realist interpretation (which is mostly material and top-down) and in social constructivism. Realists would say that power is the capacity to make others act against their real interests (Beland, 2010, p. 146). Yet soft power is not a unilateral tool to coerce others and in this respect it differs from hard power or propaganda. The nature of soft power is deeply social and responsive to the existing expectations of multiple actors. A successful agent of soft power has to be aware of and sensitive to the demands of specific contexts. What works in one situation or within one system of relations may not necessarily work elsewhere. Soft power presupposes not a mere demonstration of superiority but in the first place the communicative skills which are needed to involve partners in social interactions. The structural characteristics of soft power are manifest in its agenda-setting proclivity as an inclusive foreign policy tool. A good example would be the idea of sub-regional multilateralism, which is widely discussed in the EU.

In this sense, soft power seems close to the idea of "communicative power" as developed by Jürgen Habermas with direct reference to Hannah Arendt, who indicated that power is not an agential, but a structural phenomenon, and does not belong to one single subject (Flynn, 2004, pp. 434–435). Soft power, grounded in communication, is a context-changer: by establishing social conventions through speech acts, it constructs structures of relations based on certain norms and rules (Albert et al., 2008, pp. 48–64). Soft power ought to be appropriate and even desirable, and its holders should be recognized as the rightful wielders of power.

This conceptualization of soft power also contains similarities with the Gramscian idea of structural hegemony – as opposed to domination. Hegemony amounts to 'ideological or consensual forms of control' (Worth, 2011, p. 382) and can

be tackled through a "family resemblance concept": it is constituted of shared values, accessible procedures and restraint in the use of physical power (Rapkin and Braaten, 2009, pp. 114–120). In the meantime, soft power (re)produces and (re)shapes social structures by articulating certain discursive positions (Joseph, 2008). One may agree that 'hegemony doesn't start from a pre-given set of norms with fixed meanings, but rather puts the struggles about these norms at centre stage' (Diez, 2013, p. 194).

Russian soft power: the intricacies of conceptualization

Soft power in Russia is shaped by both governmental units (for example, the *Rossotrudnichestvo* agency, officially – Agency for the Affairs of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the compatriots abroad, and international humanitarian cooperation) and think tanks (such as the Valdai Club, the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy and others). In the words of Sergey Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, '[I]n today's world the image of any country is formed from a whole range of components which, taken together, it is customary to define as soft power. This concept includes a state's cultural and scientific presence in the world, participation in aid programmes, success in sports, the development of civil society, the level of the presence of its national media in the international information space, the prevalence of its national language, achievements in education and health care, and much else' (Lavrov, 2012a).

Yet some experts deem that Russia is weak in soft power on the grounds of a lack of a competitive intellectual sphere and attractive developmental model. Others point to ineffectiveness of Russian soft power due to the government's bad international reputation, rampant corruption and bureaucratic inertia. As an international consultant who has worked in Moscow writes, 'the Kremlin wanted us to help distribute the message, not change it. It presumed that most Russians like the USSR, and that's it' (Roxburgh, 2012, pp. 190–191). Low professionalism is also an issue: 'I was once asked to comment on an article drafted for President Medvedev, with a view to having it published in *Foreign Affairs* magazine. This was in 2008, following the war against Georgia. The article was so badly written (as though as at least three people with divergent views had contributed to it) that I sent back an excoriating review, suggesting that unless they wanted their president to be seen as a crazy schizophrenic they should tear the article down' (Roxburgh, 2012).

Russia has only recently started developing its concept of soft power, which makes it academically interesting to scrutinize the intricacies of this process. Three conceptual questions seem to be of utmost importance: can Russia develop its own soft power model; can it be neatly differentiated from hard power; and what foreign policy priorities does Russian soft power serve?

A Russia-specific soft power?

Russia's discourse on soft power vacillates between its two conceptual interpretations – it can be seen either as a *universal* instrument that each state uses

internationally or as a *country-specific* tool which allows room for the contrivance of a Russian version of soft power to distinguish it from the Western one. In the first case, Russia would be doomed to only reproduce, if not imitate, the most successful of the already-existing, genealogically Western, experiences. In the second case, it would have to produce a conceptual alternative to the mechanisms of soft power practised by countries whom the Kremlin considers to be Russia's competitors or rivals.

This dilemma explains the inconsistency of Russian discourses on soft power. On the one hand, the Kremlin accuses the West of using soft power to interfere in the domestic affairs of third parties, which renders it illegitimate in the eyes of the Kremlin. On several occasions President Putin has tried to draw a distinction between Russian and Western ways of practising soft power. In his view, the West uses soft power "illegally" to provoke extremism, nationalism and separatism, to manipulate public opinion and interfere in the domestic affairs of sovereign states. Putin has claimed that soft power instruments deployed by the West might hinder the Eurasian integration project and appealed to Russian security services to quell unfriendly encroachments (Spravitsia li FSB, 2013). This securitized logic is based on a distinction between foreign interference in domestic affairs and what Putin dubs a "normal" political activity within the country. In the meantime, the Kremlin eagerly projects its own version of soft power, consisting of the support of authoritarian practices of governance in neighbouring countries. The Kremlin finds the prospect of a liberal democracy emerging on its borders threatening and as its alternative rather effectively supports authoritarian regimes.

On the other hand, Russia's soft-power institutions are explicitly based on their Western homologues. The Russia Today TV channel has been modelled on the BBC; the *Russia Beyond the Headlines* project started with the *Washington Post* and the *Daily Telegraph*; the Russian World Foundation is referred to as a Russian version of the British Council or the Goethe Institute (Dolinskiy, 2013).

Seen through this prism, soft power is a concept that Russia has wanted to appropriate semantically in its foreign policy discourse since 2012 and at the same time to infuse the concept with its own content. This mirrors post-colonial discourses which have aimed at depriving the West of its monopoly in the interpretation of international vocabulary but also at reserving a, as it were, good seat in what is still a Western-centric world. In an attempt to distinguish Russia from the West, Putin has claimed that non-Western countries don't fund their lobbyists beyond their borders, which is far from true, of course. However, Russia seems more comfortable with sharing company with China and India, which are at the top of the list of soft-power holders in emerging markets according to an index commissioned by Skolkovo, the Moscow School of Management (Rapid-growth markets, 2012).

Yet the disconnections between Russia and the West in their approaches to soft power are more profound than merely the distinction between "emerging" and "Western" markets. 'Russia's soft power denies Western values of human rights and freedoms' and more resembles a 'light force' than a power of attraction (Shiriyev, 2013). The key differences between Russia and the EU could be

easily identified by comparing their policies toward the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries which are eager to sign an Association Agreement with the EU, especially Ukraine and Armenia (although the latter in September 2013 has chosen to join the Customs Union, patronized by Russia). With all the spheres-of-influence logic that dominates the discourses on EaP, it is hard to imagine the EU acting in the way Moscow did – introducing politically motivated import bans on merchandise coming from neighbouring countries, threatening to apply economic sanctions and also resorting to military rhetoric. This reveals a deep normative gap between Russia and the EU: Moscow views itself as a regional integrator and is eager to block other sources of influence on its "near abroad," while the EU's soft-power policy is intended to generate reform and support democratic governance (Bugajski, 2013). Against the backdrop of Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014, it becomes increasingly clear that the pivotal elements of Russian soft power – the concept of the proverbial "Russian world" with the idea of protecting Russian-speakers all across the globe and the contrasting portrayal of Russia's "conservative" values as allegedly constituting a strong alternative to the European liberal emancipation – are instrumentally used as parts of Moscow's neo-imperial project, heavily relying upon traditional hard power tools.

It is the search for its non-Western authenticity that explains frequent references to the Soviet experiences of soft power that were, according to the head of the Moscow-based Council for Foreign and Defence Policy (Lukianov, 2013a), 'quite effective.' This betrays a genealogical dependence on the part of the ruling regime in Russia on its Soviet past. Russia, being the legal successor of the Soviet Union, is painstakingly trying to develop its own ideological project as a substitute for Communism, yet this project is likely to come in a nationalistic form and can hardly be used as a background for Russian soft power in the South Caucasus.

Yet what comes out of Russia's search for its authentic soft power? First, its very content, as promoted by Moscow, appears rather narrow. Moscow tends to reduce the rich variety of soft-power meanings down to one-sided demonstrations of the nation's grandeur by a blend of PR-style of nation-branding techniques (Kosachev, 2013a) and propaganda. The Kremlin simply wants to be heard and pays little attention to the content of its opinions. The lamentations that Russia is not appreciated enough internationally leads to attempts at better delivering the same messages by packaging them in allegedly more attractive forms. This approach leads to a misrepresentation of the key problem for Russia's soft power project: the rift between its 'bad image' and 'the good reality' (Kosachev, 2013b). In our view, this distinction is questionable because of the very philosophy of soft power, which sees reality as containing strong ideational and perceptional components. It is Russia's inability to formulate its long-term strategy in ways attractive to its partners that constitutes the core problem for the country's soft power policy, which turns into a technique for rectifying the reputational harm done by Russia's alleged ill-wishers.

Second, the Russian conception of soft power is overtly state-centric. In spite of the potentially transnational meanings of the Russian conception of the world, Russia's policy rather speaks the language of national sovereignty – including

triumphalist evocations of Russia's historical grandeur – than of a Russian culture that contains politically strong voices opposing the Kremlin's policies. In particular, the ".rf" project of creating a Russian language domain on the internet with Cyrillic spellings of web addresses can be viewed as one of the technological measures conducive to 'a "sovereign internet" that not only makes the virtual space "more Russian," but "more state-affiliated" as well. It creates something akin to a "cyber ghetto," a "Cyrillic curtain"' (Gorham, 2011, 38–42). This policy is hardly helpful for Russian soft power in the non-Slavic regions, where English is overwhelmingly perceived as a global means of online communication.

By the same token, the Kremlin fails to accept the activities of non-state institutions in soft-power terrain. For example, Sergey Lavrov has rightly mentioned the 'export of educational services' as an important component of Russian soft power, yet has proposed to transfer the functions of selecting foreign students to the *Rossotrudnichestvo* agency (Lavrov, 2012b), instead of enabling universities themselves to recruit students from neighbouring countries.

Russia's National Policy Strategy of 19th December 2012 emphasizes the importance of ethnic diasporas and the facilitation of migrants' integration into Russian society (Executive Order on Russia's. . . , 2012). It also mentions the relevance of tolerance and a century-long experience of relatively peaceful inter-ethnic relations (Strategiia, 2013). Yet all this is unlikely to work without autonomous civil society organizations either working with migrants or representing ethnic – including Caucasian – communities. The evident rise of anti-immigrant attitudes within Russian society in recent years, arising from the state-supported idea of an artificial homogenization of Russia's identity, contravenes the above-mentioned premises of the National Policy Strategy. The very fact that Russia was recently placed among the most xenophobic countries of the world (Travel and Tourism, 2013) certainly delivers a strong blow to its soft power prospects.

Third, there is no clear understanding of how well Russia scores in the implementation of soft power. On the one hand, Foreign Minister Lavrov deems that 'in terms of a whole series of the components of soft power, Russia does not look that bad at all' (Lavrov, 2012a). Yet on the other hand, he has recognized that 'Russia is well behind other countries in practicing soft power' (Lavrov, 2012c). The later position was sustained by President Putin, who opines that Russia 'often suffers from a one-sided portrayal. . . . Those who fire guns and launch air strikes here or there are the good guys, while those who warn of the need for restraint and dialogue are for some reason at fault. But our fault lies in our failure to adequately explain our position' (Meeting with Russian ambassadors, 2012).

Yet "explaining our position" does not necessarily imply bridging communicative gaps. For most pro-Kremlin speakers, the communications strategy is reduced to delivering certain messages to foreign audiences without being concerned about the concomitant feedback. Russia's attempts to draw a distinction between those who want integration with Russia and the reluctant elites or its promises to defend the sovereignties of its neighbours from attempts to absorb them by Euro-Atlantic institutions are of very limited resonance in the South

Caucasus. This only betrays the shortage of intersubjective communication, as well as the defensive nature of Russia's soft power as a reaction to the mounting activities of other states in this region.

Hard power versus soft power

Another important issue is how to conceptualize the distinction between hard power and soft power. In the mid-2000s, there were attempts to portray Russia's engagement with soft power as a desirable alternative to hard power. In this vein, in 2005 Andrei Tsygankov (2005, pp. 3–7) argued that it is Russia's increasing inclination to use soft power in the Caucasus that disproves accusations of its intention to maintain instability and militarily exercise imperial control in the region. In his opinion, the application of soft power tools would sustain Putin's pro-Western policies – a reason why the West should support Russia's policies as "normal." Along the same lines, Fiona Hill suggests that it is because of a newly discovered soft power potential that Russia started contributing constructively to the security of its southern tier by relinquishing 'its military presence on bases, its troop deployments, or security pacts and arms sales' (2006, p. 341). In spite of these expectations, only a few years later Russia used military force against its neighbour Georgia, deployed its bases in breakaway territories and to date keeps engaging in arms sales to the mutually opposed governments of Azerbaijan and Armenia. These unfulfilled optimistic predictions suggest that the key problem lies not in a correlation of forces between Russian "liberals" (presumably a pro-soft-power-oriented group within the Kremlin) and the "*siloviki*" (heads of military and law enforcement agencies, hard-liners) but in the complexities of the concept of soft power itself, which does not necessarily require the renunciation of hard-power instruments. Russia's policies toward Ukraine in early 2014 certainly attest to this.

Analytically, the concepts of hard and soft power are distinct, but as policies they can intermingle. We see three possible combinations of the modes of interaction between these two forms of power in South Caucasus.

First, the execution of hard power may entail the application of soft-power techniques, as was the case in the post-2008 deadlock in Russian-Georgian relations. We shall discuss this situation in more detail below in the section on policy dialogues between Moscow and Tbilisi.

Second, attempts to project soft power, especially if failed, can trigger new hard-power dynamics. For example, Armenia's rapprochement with the EU, which can be considered to be the result of a failure of Russia's efforts to keep this country within its sphere of influence, could have made Russia reconsider its military guarantees to Yerevan and reorient Moscow's policy towards closer ties with Azerbaijan.

Third, instruments of hard power and soft power can be applied simultaneously, without distinguishing them from each other. Thus, in Azerbaijan, Russia combines the logic of soft power (concerns about the state of Russian language) with hard-power arguments (which range from selling arms to Baku to attempts at engaging the US in a joint military base in Gabala).

Soft power and competing interests. Since soft power doesn't exist in a void, another structural characteristic is its inscription in the country's international interests. Soft power can't be detached from foreign policy goals and is executed in conjunction with them. In the case of Russia in the South Caucasus, there is a deep tension between two interests that are more conflicting than harmonious. One is of a realist background and consists in protecting Russia's sphere of influence as comprising the three South Caucasian countries. Another interest is expressed in the categories of international socialization – it is about securing the recognition of and legitimation of Russia's policies by major Western countries. Ultimately, even after having applied military force in August 2008 against Georgia, Russia had to address major international institutions (the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Geneva negotiations), either looking for their support or trying to alter their standpoints.

These two goals imply different soft-power instruments. Spheres-of-influence politics might incorporate linguistic and religious policies for securing areas of Russia's cultural presence; it may also include the use of diasporas for influencing neighbouring governments, as is the case in Russia's policies towards Georgia and Azerbaijan. The second of Russia's goals – a deeper socialization into the international milieu – ought to rely on a different range of instruments, including the provision of developmental assistance; legitimizing Russian policies through references to widely acknowledged concepts (such as human security); developing peace-making activities; and engaging neighbours through major events (such as the Sochi 2014 winter Olympics in which Georgia, in spite of its earlier intention to boycott the games, ultimately decided to partake in and even cooperated in security measures).

There is a logical correlation between these two goals. Seen from the Gramscian perspective, to legitimize its hegemonic positions in its "near abroad," Russia needs to be considered as representative of a group of countries. Yet this function of representation ought to be based on some normative signifiers to be constructed in the process of socially engaging with those countries whose interests Russia wishes to represent (Thomassen, 2005, pp. 294–295). This confirms that hegemony is about defining key political concepts and setting the rules that buttress the hegemon's positions (Arrighi, 1994, p. 365), which requires soft-power instruments.

A balance between these two interests is not easy, but possible, provided that there is some sort of informal agreement between the great powers (Larsen, 2012, pp. 102–119). Yet purely geopolitical considerations are not sufficient for such a "concert"; it has to be strengthened by soft- power moves that Russia has to include in its policies towards the West.

Thus, in developing its version of soft power, Russia both imitates and decries the West, which makes Russian policies more Western-centric than they are neighbour-oriented. In framing Western soft power as a security threat, the Kremlin underestimates the importance of certain Western political values in the regions of common neighbourhood, including South Caucasus. The weakest component of Russian soft power is its ineffective use of communication as a means of engaging its neighbours in sustainable dialogues and influencing their discourses.

Russia's soft power in South Caucasus: institutional framework

In this section we shall dwell upon a number of the most important elements in Russian soft power, including educational and religious institutions, governmental agencies and policy foundations.

Education

Among all three South Caucasian states, it is in Armenia where Russia tries to increase its cultural profile by means of educational pathways. The Yerevan branch of Rossotrudnichestvo strives to maintain ties with local graduates of Russian institutions of higher education. It serves as a coordinator of the Russian Language and Compatriots Federal Programmes, Inter-state Programme for Innovative Cooperation among the CIS states and the Education in Russia for Foreigners project. The Rossotrdnichestvo Centre facilitates the selection of Armenian students and postgraduates for study in Russia within state-regulated quotas, which seems to be an important asset for Russian universities competing for federal funding. In the meantime, since 2011, Russian universities may select foreign students independently of the Rossotrudnichestvo Centres.

The Russian-Armenian (Slavic) University is an educational institution that seeks to bridge educational gaps between Armenia and Russia. It works according to Russian educational standards and awards Armenian and Russian diplomas. The president of the university was awarded the Order of Friendship and the head of the Institute of Russian Literature was awarded the Pushkin Medal, while the first provost of the university received the honorary title of "Distinguished fellow of the high school of Russian Federation" (Russian President Dmitry Medvedev presented, 2010).

The Slavic University in Baku was established by the decree of the President of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev on June 13, 2000, on the basis of the Pedagogical Institute of the Russian Language and Literature. Its graduates are Russian language and literature teachers for secondary schools, as well as specialists in international relations, tourism management, interpreters and so on. The university publishes the journal *Russian Language and Literature in Azerbaijan* which dates back to 1947 and covers a wide range of questions on linguistics, philology, pedagogics, art, translation and cultural communication. The Turkish-Slavic Relations Laboratory, founded in 2001, focuses its research on the cultural, linguistic, literary and historical relations between the Turkish and Slavic nations and supports the "Dialogue of Civilizations" project promoted by Russia.

The key problem in the educational sphere is that Russia has to compete here with numerous Western programmes that are overwhelmingly aimed at fostering institutional change in the three South Caucasian states. For example, the main targets of the American Council for International Education in Georgia are reducing corruption in local universities, promoting reforms of the tests and university accreditation, raising quality standards, eradicating plagiarism and encouraging academic mobility (Blauvelt, 2010). These priorities were set in coordination

with the World Bank, association with which increases their level of international legitimacy. None of these initiatives concern Russian educational programmes in the South Caucasus.

The Russian Orthodox Church

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is heavily criticized within Russia for acting as a instrument in a coercive policy on the part of Moscow towards its neighbours. As Dmitry Trenin puts it, the 'profession of universal values or common European norms has stopped. In lieu of the Council of Europe, the Moscow Patriarchate is now the principal norm-setter' (2013). Indeed, the ROC insistently promotes the idea of an "Orthodox civilization" that might have some appeal in Georgia and Armenia, yet its role in Georgia needs a more nuanced analysis.

Russia lost many forms of influence in Georgia, especially in the aftermath of the Russian-Georgian August War of 2008. One of the few channels of communication between the two peoples was provided by the two Orthodox churches. While official relations between Moscow and Tbilisi were frozen in 2008, the clergy of both churches continued to stay in touch with each other. A highly respectful personal relationship between the Georgian Patriarch Ilia and the ROC and its clergy is an important aspect of Russian-Georgian communications. The patriarch was a spiritual son of the Russian elder Zinoviy (Mazhuga), who served as the only Russian member of the Georgian Church Synod in 1970–1980s and educated a community of spiritual apprentices, among them many outstanding Georgian and Russian clergymen (Chesnokov, 2011, pp. 6, 42, 138).

Another example is the Moscow-based St. Tikhon's Orthodox University (STOU), an educational institution of the ROC. Established by a group of Moscow priests, the university has maintained cooperation with the Georgian Orthodox Church since the 1990s, when STOU launched theological conferences with special panels on Georgian language and history ("*cartvelologia*"). Archbishops and priests, as well as members of the university faculty in Georgia, are frequent visitors to STOU, where they share their ideas on the history of confessions and Georgian culture. In Georgia in 2011, STOU signed a cooperation agreement with the patriarchate-patronized Saint Andrew University. All this explains why Ilia II has decided to visit Moscow in 2013 without waiting for the visit of the Patriarch of Russia to Georgia, who is younger and has held his ecclesiastical rank for a shorter period of time. This shows that some religious dogmas can be revised when the aim is higher than merely religious relationships.

Yet Russia's role in the South Caucasus is very much complicated by the religious situation in Abkhazia, which to some extent is reminiscent of the one in the Holy Land, where Orthodox clergy of Arab origin in the Jerusalem Orthodox Patriarchate competed with the Greek clergy which dominated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In Abkhazia, the Orthodox clergy of Abkhazian origin started to gain influence in the diocese only in the 1990s and welcomed the military success of their compatriots in the war of 1992–1993. By contrast, the clergy of Georgian origin continued to hope for a unity of all lands that are claimed

as the "canonical territories" of the Georgian Orthodox Church (Ieromonakh Dorofey, 2006). It is not surprising that plans of the Abkhazian clergy to create their own church with the assistance of the Moscow Patriarchate were reinforced after the war of 2008. However, the Moscow church took a pragmatic stand of non-recognition of the independence of the Abkhaz Orthodox Church. The Russian Patriarch Kirill stressed many times that both Abkhazia and South Ossetia continue to fall under the Georgian Orthodox Church jurisdiction. The ROC did not challenge the outcome of the August War of 2008 but followed the principle of respecting the borders of the "canonical territories" (Venediktova, 2013). In response, the Tbilisi Patriarchate refused to recognize the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which had proclaimed its independence from Moscow.

Politically, the stand of the ROC provoked controversy: the head of the Georgian Orthodox Church remained hardline, insisting that Georgia would ultimately retrieve the lost territories (Ilia Vtoroi, 2013). He even mentioned that the Moscow Patriarch Kirill makes everything possible to help restore the unity of Georgia (Rech' Ilii, 2013). Of course, the reaction in Abkhazia to this statement was predictably negative (Damenia, 2013), which demonstrates political controversies in the religious aspects of soft power.

As for the Muslim-to-Muslim contacts, they are strained by a conflict between Ravil Gainutdin, the head of the Spiritual Board of Russian Muslims, and Allahşükür Paşazadə, the head of the Baku-based Muslim Spiritual Board in the Caucasus. Gainutdin was angered by Sunnis discrimination in Azerbaijan and signalled his protest to Paşazadə (Politicheskii instrument, 2013). Moreover, in 2010 Sheikh Gainutdin openly challenged the move to appoint Paşazadə as the nominal leader of the CIS Muslims (Vesti iz Baku, 2010). This may explain the lack of visible influential Russian Islamic institutions in the South Caucasus.

Russian policy funds and think tanks. Unilateralism and a lack of support from its partners in recognizing the independence of two Georgian breakaway territories appear to be the major weaknesses in Russian policy (Charap and Welt, 2011). It was not until the defeat of President Saakashvili at the Georgian parliamentary elections of October 2012 that Russia joined debates on security and conflict resolution in Georgia. Yet Russian proposals look rather vague. Thus, the only analytical report on Russian-Georgian relations issued in the autumn of 2012 proposes that Georgia abstains from raising the key issues – Russia's military presence in two separatist territories, to discontinue using the rhetoric of occupation and to think of providing its security beyond NATO (Silaev and Sushentsov, 2012, pp. 19–20). The Russian official and semi-official discourse, being stuck in the Kremlin's intransigent position on recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, is likely to remain rather limited in its policy horizons. Meanwhile, there have been a few initiatives launched in the early 2010s that it is worth assessing, in the context of this chapter, as soft power alternatives.

The first of these is the Gorchakov Foundation, closely patronized by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which launched a number of projects (with such titles as "Caucasian Dialogue") aimed at bridging communicative gaps with Georgia. Apparently, the general approach is that rapprochement between

Moscow and Tbilisi is possible on the basis of depoliticizing the bilateral relations: cultural liaisons are to be placed above politics, and Russia has to relinquish its sense of having won the August War of 2008 (Shvydkoy, 2013). In the meantime, Sergey Lavrov's appreciation of the "Caucasian Dialogue" seemed to be excessively past-oriented: it was praised for being instrumental in 'defending the historical truth about the war in the Caucasus in the XIX century' (Sergey Lavrov, 2012). Evidently, the importance of the public diplomacy track opened by the Gorchakov Foundation reaches far beyond reinterpreting the most controversial events of the past.

The Moscow-based Centre for Strategic Estimates and Forecasts has recently intensified its research contacts with the Noravank Foundation of Yerevan. The Russian Institute for Strategic Studies held joint seminars with the Institute of Oriental Studies and the Armenian Academy of Sciences, as well as with the Armenian Public Institute of Political and Social Research of Black Sea–Caspian region. In 2013, the Russian Foundation for Basic Research held a joint competition with the Armenian State Committee for Science and the Ministry of Science and Education – although only for natural sciences projects. The Moscow Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) has convened the first World Forum of MGIMO alumni in Baku. The Russian Academic Foundation for the Humanities runs projects with Abkhazia and South Ossetia – but does not include Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The North–South Foundation sponsored a Russian–Georgian media training school, held in 2012 in Tbilisi. It was a politically important event, but controversial reactions from the Georgian side revealed obstructions in the way of reconstructing bilateral relations. Many commentators noted that Russia lacked due understanding of Georgia and often relied upon Soviet-style arguments (Rossia vkhodit, 2013). For his part, Fiodor Lukianov (2013b) admitted that Russia lacked a vision of the future, which prevented it from successfully competing with the attractions of the West, but in the meantime he assumed that, pragmatically speaking, this is not a problem for Russia since Georgia does not represent a serious threat to Moscow.

In fact, it is mainly due to Russian experts participating in different formats of discussion with their Georgian counterparts that Russia started going public with its security agenda in the South Caucasus. Yet the contours of the Russian political agenda are still controversial, since they are explicitly meant to reinstall Russia's dominance over Georgia – taking the form of recommendations to the Georgian government to cancel the law on the occupied territories, proposals of Russian "guarantees" to Georgian security as soon as it comes to threats originated from instability in Georgia's southern region and so on (Babitskiy and Sushentsov, 2013).

Another Russian public policy actor in the South Caucasus is the Moscow-based Institute of Eurasian Research, established in 2005 with the aim of restoring and developing cultural, humanitarian and educational ties between Russia and the ex-Soviet republics. Branches of the institute have been opened in Azerbaijan and Armenia, as well as in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It runs the Dmitry Mendeleev Fellowship Programme for students in Abkhazia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and

South Ossetia, as well as Kirgizia and Tajikistan. The foundation co-administers the House of Russian Books, the Russia Day celebrations, and meetings with veterans of World War II in Azerbaijan. In 2009, the foundation started publishing Russian press digests in the *Bakinskii Rabochii* ("Baku Worker") newspaper.

Thus, as we have demonstrated, Russia has launched its own soft-power policy towards the South Caucasian countries, incorporating into it a set of conceptual arguments such as portraying its southern neighbours as allegedly bound by civilizational ties or referring to the conservative tenets of politics, with the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention at their core, or reactivating Soviet mythology. These may be either hypocritical or vulnerable, but they are part of the Russian soft-power toolkit. Of course, Russia's normative arguments drastically differ from the normative base of the EU's eastward policies, but the very prominence of a normative logic in Russia's policies toward its southern neighbours certainly deserves attention. Moscow understands that realist policy can only be conducive to an economic and financial integration, bereft of a political underpinning that Moscow strives for. This is why Russia is keen on developing a number of normative frameworks to streamline its integrationist policies.

Conclusions

Our analysis substantiates the following conclusions.

First, Russia's soft power is inscribed in a context of complex, competing foreign policy priorities, on the one hand, and competing soft-power projects of other countries, on the other. This puts the search for balance in these two areas at the centre of Russian soft-power conceptualization.

Second, soft power in Russia is a politically contested concept and is open to different interpretations. It is the Western origin of the concept that ignites quite strong resistance to it, as exemplified by Putin's lambasting of its "unlawful" application as a pretext for foreign interference by the West. It appears that the Kremlin's attempts to simultaneously imitate Western soft-power mechanisms and contrive a Russia-specific model for soft power (allegedly devoid of "illegal" encroachments into the sovereign affairs of other nations) betrays a certain confusion in putting this concept into operation.

Third, following the August War of 2008, the Russian expert community in fact wasted five years by choosing to stay out of international debates on future security arrangements in the South Caucasus in general and in regard to the two breakaway territories, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in particular. Concomitantly, Russia for quite a while stayed out of Western-inspired security discourses in this region and was unable to compete for leadership in setting the agenda. As for debates on the Azeri-Armenian conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, Russian voices remain weak and mostly indistinguishable as a consequence of the status-quo in the official discourse of the Foreign Ministry. As a result, Russian discourses fail to strongly resonate in the South Caucasus and are often perceived as an imposition of Russian imperial – though "soft" in comparison to the August War of 2008 – power.

Fourth, as seen from the soft-power perspective, the South Caucasus is an important aspect of but not a priority in Russia's neighbourhood policy. This is definitely so in educational and academic exchanges, civil society contacts and other spheres. Russia's competitive advantages can be fully reified only in open communication with all the actors involved, which presupposes addressing a wider range of policy options, rather than sticking to a limited number of political dogmas. It is at this point that soft power can reshape not only Russia's relations with its Caucasian neighbours but Russia itself, making the state transform from the inside in order to be considered as an attractive developmental model by its closest neighbours.

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15 Between ambition and realism

Turkey's engagement in the South Caucasus

Bayram Balci

The South Caucasian Republics of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia have been significant neighbours for Turkey, and, historically, the Caucasian region was highly valuable geopolitically for the Ottoman Empire. However, despite these geographical and historical facts, the South Caucasus only found its way onto the agenda of Turkish foreign policy after 1991. Indeed, until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, relations between Turkey, as the eastern flank of NATO, and the USSR had been complicated, rendering any positive relations with the Caucasian countries impossible. The independence of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia has initiated a new phase in Turkish regional policy. However, the differences and the tense relations among these new countries did not make it easy for Turkey to develop a global, coherent and successful policy for this region.

This chapter aims at providing an overall analysis of Turkish ambitions and achievements in the South Caucasus. It focuses on the contrast between these ambitions and the constraints Turkish policymakers have faced both at the bilateral and regional levels. Indeed, because of their differences and sometimes antagonisms, in addition to the impact of competition between regional and global powers, Turkey's attempts to play a leading role in the South Caucasus have neither been successful nor have they failed completely. Turkey's limited political power – or hard power – contrasts with its more effective cultural influence, or soft power, despite the fact that the boundary between hard and soft power, as developed by Joseph Nye (2005),[1] is sometimes blurred.

An overview of Turkey's policy in the South Caucasus

Relations between Turkey and the Caucasian countries are characterized by an apparent contradiction. They had to start anew after a twentieth century of total disruption. Indeed, geographical proximity has in the past rendered reciprocal historical influences intense and diverse. Some regions of the Caucasus, such as Adjara, were for a short time included in the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, Azerbaijan has been very close to Turkey, as both countries share many affinities in terms of language, identity and political and ideological orientation. However, after the creation of modern Turkey by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and the integration of the three South Caucasian republics into the Soviet Union, in addition to the progressive

integration of Turkey into the Western Bloc, relations between Turkey and the three republics became impossible. On the other hand, their historical proximity had prepared the ground for a potentially fruitful cooperation. For instance, when the Russian conquest advanced into its southern region, thousands of Caucasian Muslims, Abkhazians, Georgians and many Northern Caucasians took refuge in the Ottoman Empire, which *de facto* played a major role as the protector of Muslims from the Russian Empire. The presence of these minorities (Bezainis, 1994), known as the *muhajirs*, and their descendants, did not play an important role in Soviet-Turkish relations until the USSR collapsed. Then, however, they became the go-betweens who renewed relations with the homeland and started a new bilateral dynamic facilitating the development of newly established links.

The end of the Soviet Union is indeed a turning point in the relations between Turkey and the now independent republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus. The new geopolitical context was unsettling for the US and Western European countries – disturbing enough for them to encourage Turkey to play a more proactive role in serving as a model of transition to a liberal market economy and secular democracy (Aydin, 1996). Turkish and Western policymakers aimed to fill the ideological vacuum created at the end of the Russian supremacy and the failure of the communist experience, as well as to contain rising Islamism in Azerbaijan and other possible anti-Western influences in the other republics. Despite its own imperfections, the Turkish economic and political experiences were promoted as a model for development. Ankara took the opportunity to develop a new foreign policy and extend its sphere of influence eastwards, especially into the Turkic republics of Azerbaijan and Central Asia. In concrete terms, Turkish policymakers thought that emerging as a regional leader would reinforce Turkey's position at the international level, especially on the Cyprus issue, and its attempts to join the European Union.

However, Turkish ambitions proved to be unattainable for at least two reasons. First of all, the Caucasian countries are not homogeneous enough to allow any foreign diplomacy to use a regional approach; they require distinguished and demanding bilateral efforts. Excellent relations with Azerbaijan and good relations with Georgia contrasted too much with Turkey's incapacity to resolve its historical disputes with Armenia to forge a coherent regional policy. Secondly, promoting Turkey as a model for the Caucasus involved neglecting and underestimating the Russian factor and proved unrealistic and naive, as Russia made a surprisingly strong comeback into Caucasian affairs after a brief eclipse due to its own difficulties and the transition to a federal system.

Turkey has neither become a leading power in the Caucasus nor has it totally renounced its influence. Indeed, boosted by exceptional economic growth, the government of the *Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi* (the Justice and Development Party, AKP), elected in 2003, initiated a more assertive foreign policy towards the Middle East and also the Caucasus. But again, AKP's international ambitions weren't realized. Ahmet Davutoğlu (2008), first as an influential adviser in the first AKP government, then as minister of foreign affairs, came up with the so-called "zero problems with neighbours" policy. The idea was to normalize relations with close

rivals and former or latent enemies in order to become more influential in global politics. In the Caucasus, this meant improving relations with Armenia. Ankara recognized Armenia's independence in 1991 but did not establish diplomatic relations with the new state because of the unresolved conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan (a close ally of Turkey) over Karabakh, as well as the 1915 genocide controversy. The preliminary diplomatic initiatives of 2008 failed. They coincided with a five-day military intervention by Russian forces in Abkhazia and Ossetia. When Russia invaded Georgia in August 2008 to protect the secessionist South Ossetia from Tbilisi's pressure, it was making a clear signal to the world that it had not renounced its influence in the south. Then Turkey made a daring political move and launched the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (Fotiou, 2009), hoping to keep all channels of communication and dialogue with Russia open. The immediate concern for this platform was to resolve the conflict but it actually had a broader agenda, including the resolution of all frozen conflicts in the region. In doing so, Ankara hoped to resolve a number of regional issues without the intrusion of "foreign" actors such as the US and EU. This somewhat naive idea underestimated the resilience of Russia's influence over the whole Caucasian region and rendered Turkey inefficient and weak.

However, Turkey's attempt to emerge as a regionally important actor has not failed completely, thanks to the realization of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline for the transportation of Caspian oil from Azerbaijan to Turkey and the European markets (Cornell et al., 2005). Massive investment and lobbying, supported by Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the US and other Western countries, made the new pipeline possible. The BTC was completed in 2006 and coupled with a gas pipeline, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE). This was a victory for Turkey and its Western allies because the new route avoided Russian, Iranian and Armenian territories and reinforced Turkey's role as an "energy bridge" for the transportation of Caspian oil and gas to the international market (Efe, 2011). In July 2013, Turkey's "energy bridge" role was confirmed through the ratification by Azerbaijan and other partners of the Trans Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP), another pipeline for channelling gas from Azerbaijan to Greece and Italy via Turkey. In this respect, Turkey has become a major regional economic actor, rather than a political leader.

Turkey's achievements in the Caucasus in terms of cultural and religious soft power (Oguzlu, 2007) have been more impressive. More than the public ones, Turkish private sector initiatives have met with unexpected success. The best illustration of this is the work done by the Fethullah Gülen movement, named after a leading religious leader and influential intellectual. Its most notable achievement is the implementation and management of numerous educational institutions, high schools, tutoring centres and universities across the region. In Azerbaijan, but also in Georgia, the *fethullahçı* are extremely strong in the sphere of education and also in the media and in business. These schools disseminate the Turkish language, and they create strong cultural links between Turkey and the countries where they have been established. In Armenia, the Gülen movement has not developed its activities, despite the presence of a strong Turkish studies department at Yerevan State University promoting the study of the Turkish language, history and culture.

Therefore, the regional Turkish policy towards the Caucasus has been ambitious but ineffective in the early years of independence. After a brief lapse, Turkey embarked on a new policy when the AKP came to power in 2003. Turkey's economic and cultural policies were still more successful than its political efforts, but the AKP has made impressive achievements.

Turkey-Azerbaijan relations: from romanticism to realism

Turks and Azeris have shared so much historically and still share so much in the present that establishing good bilateral relations in 1991 was easy. They are ethnically close, and until 1937 the people of Azerbaijan were officially designated as Turkish. The term "Azeri" was imposed by Stalin's "ethnic engineers." Linguistically speaking, the Azeri language is very close to Anatolian Turkish, which facilitates communication and exchange. When Atatürk established a modern republic on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, Azeri intellectuals such as Ali Bey Huseyinzade and Ali Ağaoğlu went to Turkey to contribute to the formation of the republican and secular Turkish state in accordance with Ataturk's ideas. During the Soviet period, there were no formal ties, but it was possible for Azeris to listen to Turkish radio or enjoy Turkish poetry by Nazim Hikmet, who had taken refuge in the Soviet Union because of his communist ideas. Turkey was the first country to recognize Azerbaijan's independence in 1991. More importantly, the second president of independent Azerbaijan, Abulfaz Elchibey, was a prominent pan-Turkist nationalist who desired strong cooperation with Turkey and the West at the expense of Russia and Iran in order to counterbalance their influence. However, political instability in Azerbaijan forced him to resign in 1993. He was replaced by former KGB official Heydar Aliyev, who initiated a more traditional and balanced foreign policy, reassuring regional powers, especially Russia and not only Turkey, of the security of their interests and support (Ismailzade, 2010). Although Turkey considered Aliyev's takeover as a failure, it actually better served Turkey's principal economic and political interests. As a matter of fact, only three years after arriving in office, Aliyev commenced the implementation of an ingenious policy of oil diplomacy, appealing to many Western countries and international oil companies, of which the result was the signing of a contract for and later construction of the BTC (Jafalian, 2004).

Since the end of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan has been the most fervent supporter of Turkey's project to unify the Turkish-speaking world or at least develop solidarity among the Turkic states. Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkish leaders hoped for a Turkic union, so as to reinforce the political and cultural relations between Turkey and the Turkic states of the former Soviet Union, comprising Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan. Baku welcomed positively Ankara's idea of holding regular Turkic summits. Some of them were held in Azerbaijan. Moreover, concerning the Karabakh issue, Turkey has always shown its solidarity with Azerbaijan, and they are united in the struggle against the various lobbying initiatives in Europe and in the US for the recognition as genocide of the mass killings of Armenians

in 1915. Another political affinity has been Turkey's efforts for Azerbaijan to develop good relations with the Turkish, unrecognized Republic of Northern Cyprus. Baku did not recognize the independence of Northern Cyprus, as Turkey wished, but unofficial relations and even direct private flight connections were opened between Baku and Nicosia. However, it is crucial here to specify that their good relations were made possible not only thanks to linguistic and ethnic affinities but also because Baku's and Ankara's interests naturally converged. Both are Western-oriented, both aspire to reduce the Russian and Iranian influences in the region and, last but not least, both were pressured to develop good relations so as to maximize their benefits from oil and gas extraction and transportation from east to west.

Indeed, when it comes to economic relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan, the energy sector is undoubtedly preeminent. As well as the BTC and the BTE and a recently signed agreement for the construction of the TANAP, the two countries have a number of other economic relations. Many Turkish companies in the construction sector (Enka), in communications (Teletaş and Türkcell) and agriculture (Azersun) have been very active in Azerbaijan. Economic and business relations are particularly intense in the autonomous region of Nakhchivan, which has a border with Turkey while being geographically separated from the rest of Azerbaijan. The economic boom particularly benefited the city of Igdir. Bilateral economic dynamism is such that Turkey has always been among the first and largest partners of Azerbaijan in terms of both imports and exports.[2]

It is the cultural links which are by far the most advanced. The image of Turkey among Azerbaijanis is very positive, which fosters friendly relations. Turkish TV channels are very popular in Azerbaijan, and Turkish music and soap operas are very much appreciated by the population.[3] Religious cooperation is also very dynamic. Despite the fact that the majority of Turks are Sunnis, while 65 per cent of the population in Azerbaijan is Shi'a, Turkish and Azerbaijan official religious authorities have developed far-reaching religious cooperation. The Turkish Diyanet has supported Azerbaijan in its attempts to redefine relations between the state and Islam. Many Islamic NGOs have created strong links at the community level between Turks and Azerbaijani people (Balci and Goyushov, 2013). Special mention should be made of the activism of Fethullah Gülen's movement. His followers have implemented an extensive educational network of high schools, a university and a media service all around the country. The motivations of this movement go beyond religious proselytism: the overall objective is to contribute to the formation of new elites in Azerbaijan and not necessarily religious ones; in fact, they are most often secular (Aliyev, 2013).

Good relations between Ankara and Baku were based, in the beginning, on very romantic and ideological views. They progressively became more balanced and anchored in reality. Moreover, as Azerbaijan reaffirmed itself in the international community and strengthened its independence and sovereignty, it has occasionally reacted negatively to Turkey when Ankara's interests have diverged too much from its own. A good illustration of this political *Realpolitik* was Baku's reaction to Turkey's attempts to normalize its relations with Armenia.

Turkey and Armenia: an impossible reconciliation?

Armenia is the country with which Turkey has the most complicated relations, due to three contentious issues. First of all, the two countries have conflicting interpretations of their mutual history, especially concerning the genocide issue. Secondly, Turkey and Armenia have a border issue, in the sense that Turkish officials consider that Armenians have not clearly enough recognized the borderline separating them. Moreover, the conflict over Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan, a close ally to Turkey, continues to sour bilateral relations. Despite these difficult issues, Turkey was among the first countries to recognize Armenia when it became independent. In addition to the tense regional geopolitical context and the domestic political issues in each country, these three issues have not facilitated relations. For Armenia, the massacre of Armenians in 1915 by Ottoman Turks should be considered genocide and the official ideology in Armenia demands that every government advocates a recognition of the genocide by the international community. On the opposite side, Turkish officials refuse the term of genocide and consider these massacres to have occurred in the context of a war between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, and they prefer using the term "tragic events" from which Armenians and Turks both suffered (Gültekin, 2013). Their common border was defined in 1921 by the Treaty of Kars and signed by both Turkey and the communists of Russia, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan just before of the establishment of the Soviet Union. While Turkey has recognized it and does not make any territorial claims, Armenians have proved to have a more ambiguous attitude to their Soviet legacy, especially in relation to the Armenian diaspora, which is an important factor and a major actor in Armenia's foreign policy. Armenia has not officially expressed territorial claims in respect of Turkey but the regular references to the genocide and to Mount Ararat, a national symbol for Armenians which is situated in contemporary Turkey, clearly indicates that the border with their eastern neighbour is contested (Göksel, 2011). However, the main obstacle to the normalization of relations since Armenian independence is actually the Karabakh issue. Indeed, despite the absence of official relations between Ankara and Yerevan, there were regular consultations and contacts. The border was even open from 1991 until 1993, but with the escalation of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, when some Azeri regions fell under Armenian control, Turkey in solidarity with Azerbaijan decided to close the border and stop the humanitarian assistance they had been providing to Armenia (Gültekin and Tavitian, 2003).

When the AKP won the national elections in Turkey in the autumn of 2002, it inaugurated a new Turkish foreign policy with a particular focus on relations with Turkey's immediate neighbours. First of all, the AKP took measures to make Turkish state institutions more democratic and, in order to reinforce civilian control over the military, which had been traditionally suspicious towards any Islamic party, moderate or not, the government of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan gave priority to Turkey's EU membership. But Turkey's candidacy would have had a better chance of success if Ankara had normal relations with all of its neighbours

(Rahigh-Aghsan, 2011). Moreover, another fundamental ally of Turkey, the United States, also favoured a rapprochement with Armenia.

In parallel to this regional and political push for a Turkish-Armenian dialogue, NGOs emerged, advocating for the development of relations. The creation in Turkey of the Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council (TABDC) provides a good example of this evolution. This private initiative encouraging trade and organizing business contacts between Turkey and Armenia was established even before the AKP came to power, but it really started to thrive after 2002 (Elanchenny and Marasliyan, 2012). The emergence of this association was a precursor for the development of new attitudes in Turkey. The global philosophy of TABDC was that business and trade can facilitate political dialogue, and its main objective was to open the border between Turkey and Armenia. As far as history and ideology are concerned, some taboos also have been progressively eliminated. Thanks to the progress of democracy in Turkey, unprecedented debates about Turkish-Armenian joint history and about the genocide issue could be engaged in.

This new context, both internal and external, gave Turkish diplomacy the courage to take ambitious initiatives concerning Armenia. Secretly, several meetings took place between Turkish and Armenian officials. In September 2008, President Abdullah Gül was the first modern Turkish leader to visit Armenia, for a football World Cup qualification match, on an invitation extended by his Armenian counterpart (Tait, 2008). This historical visit marked the beginning of a more substantive dialogue. The new relation has allowed the preparation of protocols for the normalization and establishment of diplomatic relations.

Prepared after months of secret discussions, these protocols were signed in Switzerland in October 2009 with the support and encouragement of European, American and even Russian diplomats (Osipova and Bilgi, 2013). The objective of these protocols was a normalization of relations. To be effective, they had to be approved by the parliaments of both countries. However, just after they were signed, discrepancies in their interpretation by both Turkey and Armenia appeared, as well as by some representatives of the Armenian diaspora and Azerbaijan, which were not officially among the stakeholders but put pressure on negotiators (Welt, 2013). Yet the authors of the protocols, Armenian and Turkish diplomats, have been cautious. They deliberately adopted a vague and imprecise vocabulary concerning the most contentious issues, such as the genocide question. At the same time, the issue of Karabakh and Turkey's request that Armenia withdraw from the occupied regions of Azerbaijan were not mentioned in the protocols. The idea was to avoid talking about these thorny issues in order to facilitate the normalization of relations and to postpone the resolution of the most complicated problems. However, as predicted on both sides, the hardliners voiced their concerns very abruptly and even with hostility, making this historical initiative a total failure (ICG, 2009). On the Armenian side, mainly among the diaspora, the fear is that the normalization of relations with Turkey will most certainly weaken the lobbies' work to have the genocide internationally recognized. For most members of the Armenian diaspora, the precondition for normalization is Turkey's official recognition of the genocide, a point on which officials in Yerevan have

not insisted, although some of them have taken a very ambiguous stance. On the Turkish side, the most vehement opposition did not come from Turkey but from its closest ally, Azerbaijan. For Baku these protocols and more specifically Turkey's intention to normalize its relations with Yerevan was a betrayal of the Turkish-Azerbaijani brotherhood, and Baku employed all its resources to make this normalization impossible prior to the resolution of the Karabakh conflict. Indeed, the Azerbaijani reaction was swift and clear: Baku's authorities threatened to change their energy agreements with Turkey and even started to negotiate important energy deals with Russia (Valiyev, 2009). The transmission of this strong signal to Turkey, and even to the Europeans, who do not wish to be too dependent on Russia in terms of energy supplies, was effective in discouraging Turkey from engaging further with Armenia. Immediately after the signing of the protocols, to which Azerbaijan reacted so negatively, the Turkish prime minister went to Baku to negotiate and appease matters. He delivered a speech insisting on the importance Turkey ascribes to the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and restating his support for his main regional ally (Kardas, 2008).

It is unclear whether Turks and Armenians were actually strongly motivated in their attempts to normalize their relations or if they merely wanted to give the impression they were trying in order to satisfy the international community. In any case, this initiative was audacious, and in the long term it will certainly contribute to a rapprochement between Ankara and Yerevan. In the meantime, it has certainly helped in the development of informal relations, of trade and business in particular.

Indeed, economic relations do exist between the two countries. An important area of business, difficult to quantify, takes place between Turkey and Armenia thanks to the existence of direct, low-cost flights performed by private companies between Yerevan and Istanbul. Moreover, Turkish products reach Armenia through Georgia. The opening of the border would certainly increase the level of trade between the two countries, mostly to the benefit of Armenian economy, which is in a difficult situation. In the city of Kars, close to the border, local businessmen are very ardent defenders of a normalization of the relations with Armenia, at least concerning the opening of the border (Goshbarian, 2010).

In the sphere of human relations, NGOs, cultural cooperation, think tanks and so on, the dialogue between Turkey and Armenia is quite intense. Armenians and Turks meet each other very often for academic and policymaking conferences. The Armenian issues are more and more commonly debated in Turkey, where actually Turks do not have an elaborated knowledge about Armenia. In Armenia, attitudes to Turkey are still negative among the population, but at the same time, there is a growing interest in the country and in its influence in the region.[4]

Turkey – Georgia: Good relations but some prejudices

Georgia is a good example of successful Turkish diplomacy in the region. In fact, for many centuries, relations between Turks and Georgians were complicated, where generally the Turks were aggressors and the Georgians victims. In the

Ottoman period, Georgia was regularly threatened by the Turks, and during the Soviet Union, the two countries belonged to two highly antagonistic blocs, as Georgia was part of the Soviet Union (Kononczuk, 2008). The border was among the most militarized in the world. However, despite this negative legacy, in 1991, when Georgia became independent, Turkey was the first state to recognize it and very quickly the two countries have established good relations. Both countries had good reasons for and interest in creating a good atmosphere of neighbourliness in the sense that there was a clear convergence of interests. For Turkey, Georgia represents two political and geostrategic values following the demise of the Soviet Union. First of all, this country is a bridge between Turkey and the Turkic world, as it is the only route from Turkey to Azerbaijan and then to Central Asia. More importantly, Ankara's energy policy has been a driving force in Turkish-Georgian relations. Indeed, three pipelines, the BTC, BTE and TANAP, have been crucial economic factors for Turkey. As for Georgia, Turkey has been important as it represents a sort of window to Europe. Both countries have a pro-Western foreign policy and the two states also have a shared interest in reducing Russian influence in the South Caucasus.

This convergence of interests explains the existence of good relations between Ankara and Tbilisi from 1991 onwards, despite the fact that both countries have frequently changed prime ministers and presidents. During the incumbencies of Eduard Shevardnadze, Mikheil Saakashvili and Bidzina Ivanishvili, Ankara has not experienced particular difficulties in maintaining good relations with Tbilisi. However, Ankara has in some cases been embarrassed by Tbilisi's intentions, for instance, its extreme desire to become a NATO member, something Ankara does not approve of, preferring to maintain good relations with Moscow by being satisfied with friendliness and cooperation instead. In the same vein, after 2002, when Turkish diplomacy started to prioritize good relations with Moscow, Ankara was embarrassed by Saakashvhili's anti-Russian rhetoric. On the eve of the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, Ankara was particularly upset by Tbilisi's policy, judged by many officials in Turkey to be provocative and "irresponsible." In October 2012, when Bidzina Ivanishvili became the new prime minister, many analysts thought this would certainly engender a paradigm shift in Georgian foreign policy, augmenting Russian influence and reducing Turkish political and economic power in Georgia (Zasztowt, 2013). In reality, however, this shift has not occurred, at least not as far as Turkey is concerned. The new prime minister has indeed declared that his government will be revising all the important agreements signed by his predecessor and some of them have been signed with Turkish companies, but no anti-Turkish measure has been adopted by Tbilisi. Moreover, Ivanishvili's first visit abroad after his election as prime minister was to Turkey, showing the continued importance of Turkey for the new Georgia.

In the economic field, relations between Turkey and Georgia are very dynamic, and they are not limited to the energy sector. Indeed, in 2012, plastic materials and electrical machines occupied key positions in Turkish exports to Georgia. Meanwhile, in Turkish imports from Georgia it was metallurgical products which were most significant.[5] After the deterioration of relations between Tbilisi and Moscow,

Turkey became Georgia's primary economic partner. Turkish construction companies have been very active in Georgia since the beginning of independence. Tbilisi airport is managed by a Turkish company. But it is in Adjara, because of its proximity to Turkey, that Turkish economic influence is the strongest. A free trade agreement was signed between the two counties in 2007, and the realization of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project in 2014 will certainly enhance economic relations between the two countries. The (reciprocal) visa-free arrangement has also contributed to improved relations, mainly in the field of tourism, a vital and essential sector in the relations between Turkey and the three Southern Caucasian republics. Indeed, Turkey has become a major destination for tourism not only from Russia but also from the South Caucasus. In 2001, 1.4 million Georgians, 590,000 Azerbaijanis and 70,000 Armenians visited Turkey.[6]

There are also relations in the cultural sphere, but they are less important, and they can be considered as issues of contention. Indeed, Turkish cultural and religious influences in Georgia are visible and although not disapproved of by the official authorities, they sometimes irritate some segments of the Georgian population and the Georgian Orthodox Church. Many Turkish Islamic movements have developed their activities in Adjara, where the population is partly (30 per cent) Muslim. Among them, the representatives of the famous *naqshbandi* group of Suleyman Tunahan, called *süleymancı,* as well as the followers of Sait Nursi, a prominent Turkish cleric, are particularly active, as they make efforts to respond to the needs of the local population, which has discovered its Islamic identity since the end of the Soviet Union (Balci and Motika, 2007). Generally, the representatives of these Turkish Islamic movements are descendants of Muslim Georgians who were forced into the Ottoman Empire when Russian conquest progressed into the Caucasus at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the remainder of Georgia, Turkish religious influence is noticeable mainly in the Azeri-populated region of Kvemo Kartly, where the representatives of another Islamic group, Oman Nuri Topbas, have an official and registered *madrasa.* Last but not least, in Tbilisi, Batumi and Kutaisi there are Turkish high schools and a university managed by the followers of Fethullah Gülen. Despite its mainly Islamic identity, however, this movement has no religious proselytism and its activities are essentially educative and secular. The modern education granted in these schools contributes to Turkish soft power in Georgia as new Georgian elites are emerging there.

The good relations between the two countries are, however, accompanied by some points of friction. Apart from this Turkish Islamic groups' activism in Georgia, which the local Christian population, under the influence of the Georgian Orthodox Church, disapproves of, there are two major issues and one minor issue of contention.

The first is the Abkhazian issue, a very sensitive one for Georgia, which does not recognize the *de facto* independence of this autonomous republic. Turkey always has clearly demonstrated its attachment to the territorial integrity of Georgia and had never established official relations with the unrecognized, self-declared republic of Abkhazia. When the leaders of Abkhazia have visited Turkey, and they have done so very often, Turkish officials have never received them.

However, in Turkey there is a strong and well organized Abkhazian community, established there since the end of the Ottoman Empire. This community strongly advocates the development of relations, and especially business relations, with Abkhazia in order to support it through the economic embargo imposed by Tbilisi. Economic activities between Turkey and Abkhazia, organized by the Abkhazian diaspora in Turkey, have in many cases complicated the relations between Turkey and Georgia. At the same time, Tbilisi prefers these relations to the alternative of more active cooperation between Abkhazia and Russia, which is why it limits itself to verbal criticisms.

The second issue of contention is the Meskhetian problem. This Turkish minority was deported from the Turkish-Georgian border to Central Asia by Stalin in 1944. Following the end of the Soviet Union, many members of this community wanted to be returned to their historical homeland, the region of Meskhetia close to the Turkish border (Pentikäinen and Trier, 2004). In very similar fashion to Anatolian Turks, these Meskhetians have had strong expectations of Turkey's support for their project to return to their villages. Turkey, like Georgia a member of the Council of Europe, supported their demands and the Georgian government has consistently declared and promised to allow their return. But in reality almost no family could return home. The majority went to Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Ukraine. This issue has sometimes complicated the relations between Turkey and Georgia. However, as Ankara appreciates the sensitivity of minority issues in Georgia, it has always avoided turning the Meskhetian issue into a diplomatic crisis.

A third, minor, source of tension is related to places of worship. The Georgian Orthodox Church has strongly pushed the official authorities in Tbilisi for the restoration of old Georgian churches situated on Turkish territory. For their part, Turks have wanted restoration of the old Ottoman Aziziye Mosque in Batumi. The terms of agreement around this bilateral religious cooperation have not been clear enough, and to some extent this has created some tension between the two countries (Göksel, 2013).

Conclusion

Turkey has shown a substantial interest in the South Caucasian region since its three republics have become independent, first of all for economic reasons and second for security concerns. This and the strong correlation between energy issues and interest in the region are likely to remain the main characteristics of Turkey's engagement in the South Caucasus, especially since the impressive growth of the Turkish economy requires huge energy resources. For the last decade, the rate of growth in Turkey has been between five and ten per cent, and this dynamic situation is expected to last, according to various economists.

This energy-oriented Turkish Caucasian policy, rather than Turkish-Azerbaijani fraternal feelings, explains the excellent relations between Ankara and Baku. In fact, those warm relations are in some cases problematic for Turkey, as Turkish diplomacy has become a sort of hostage of fortune to these relations. On the other

hand, relations between Turkey and Armenia are mainly defined and decided by Azerbaijan, which is opposed to any improvement of Turkish-Armenian relations. This attitude keeps Turkey from playing a major role in South Caucasian affairs. As long as there is no progress on the Karabakh issue between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Turkey will not be able to implement a more ambitious policy in the Caucasus. Moreover, the genocide issue, which is an important aspect of Turkish-Azerbaijani-Armenian relations, will continue to be an obstacle to the implementation of a more audacious Turkish policy, and influence, in the Caucasus.

Notes

1 The concept of soft power which Joseph Nye first began to use in the 1980s, is deeply rooted in the idea that alternative power structures exist in international relations alongside economic and military power. According to Nye, there are three ways to achieve one's goal: a) threatening the other party and going to war if necessary; b) "buying out" the other party; and c) persuading the other party through the use of "soft power."

In that sense, soft power is 'the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments.' This is possible through persuading the other party by means of convincing arguments and rational policies. Here, credibility and the art of persuasion constitute the main elements of soft power. These elements also provide legitimacy to the use of power. According to Nye, soft power explains 'the attractiveness of a country's culture, political notions and policies.' The acceptance of a country's policies as legitimate by others also defines that country's soft power capacity. Unlike 'hard power, soft power explains fields of influence and attraction beyond military and economic indicators.' Various factors feed soft power: culture, education, arts, print and visual media, film, poetry, literature, architecture, higher education (universities, research centres and so on), non-governmental organizations, science and technology, the capacity for innovation, tourism, etc. Soft power emerges as a combination of these elements and gives us an idea about a country's cultural richness and social capital (2005).

Traditionally the concept of soft power is applied to the United States, in order to understand its influence in different parts of the world. However, since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new powerful and influential countries, such as Brazil, South Africa and Turkey, it is common for analysts to turn to this notion in their attempts to understand some regions and countries. Turkey is one of the newly powerful countries for which this concept is very important.

2 See the official data given by the Foreign Economic Relations Board: http://www.deik.org.tr/KonseyIcerik/5066/Azerbaycan_Ülke_Bülteni.html [Accessed Oct. 10, 2013].

3 Author's repeated personal observation.

4 When I visited Yerevan State University in June 2013, I was impressed by the dynamism of the Department of Turkish Studies. At least 200 young Armenians were studying the Turkish language and civilization, and I saw them to be very interested in the evolution of Turkey. They will certainly play an important role in future relations and maybe in the reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia. However, according to some experts, these students could also, on the other hand, play a negative role, as some of them adhere to nationalist ideas.

5 See official figures provided by the Turkish government and published at the Foreign Economic Relations Board at: http://www.deik.org.tr/KonseyIcerik [Accessed Oct. 10, 2013].

6 See official figures done by the Turkish government: http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1072.

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