



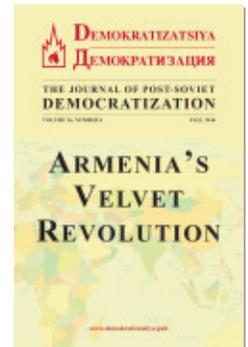
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THE ARMENIAN ANOMALY: TOWARD AN INTERDISCIPLINARY INTERPRETATION

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Abstract: The popular revolt of Spring 2018, which ended the regime of post-Soviet restoration in Armenia, is analyzed in two historical perspectives: the *longue durée* of Armenian nation-making and the contemporary socio-political history of *conjuncture*, marked since the 1960s by the cumulative learning of civic self-organizing in a succession of movements. Furthermore, the inordinate ethno-social cohesiveness of Armenians as genocide survivors, their famed labor and entrepreneurial skills, and the globally connected diaspora suggest the economic model of a developmental state similar to Israel and Ireland. If the fledgling revolutionary regime of 2018 survives the challenges of likely foreign intervention and consolidates itself into an accountable and agile state bureaucracy, this revolution may yet lead to rapid economic growth based on post-industrial activities, to which the landlocked Armenia may have no alternative.

In Spring 2018 a vertiginously surging wave of protests brought the regime of post-Soviet restoration in Armenia to a sudden end.¹ The

¹ The authors are grateful to Anonymous Reviewer #1, whose detailed and impressively informed suggestions critically helped us to reflect not only on the present text but also the Georgi Derluguan is professor of sociology at New York University Abu Dhabi and the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences (“Shaninka”). Ruben Hovhannisyian is a graduate student in psychology at the Higher School of Economics, Moscow. Contact: gd44@nyu.edu.

powerful, yet non-violent blow seemed to unite the entire population across the lines of social class, gender, and age in unanimously rejecting the ruling elite in an “us versus them” manner more reminiscent of the 1989 “velvet” revolutions in Central Europe than the much messier and divisive “colored” revolts of the 2000-2010s in Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and Kyrgyzstan, let alone the repeated failures of isolated oppositions in Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Russia. At the peak of the protests, one could see in the city squares of Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, students side by side with elderly peasants, intellectuals and taxi drivers, ethnic Armenians as well as the minority Yezidis and Assyrians, even soldiers in uniform and mothers with babies in strollers. In the face of the incumbents’ indecision, which soon turned into retreat and surrender, on April 23 the protesting crowds burst into an exuberant celebration in the streets of Yerevan and other Armenian towns. After a tense fortnight of last-ditch maneuvering by the parliament’s official majority amid the renewed pressure of street protests and impressively disciplined stoppages of city traffic, the same parliament elected charismatic protest leader Nikol Pashinyan, until recently a back-bench opposition MP, as the country’s new Prime Minister. In a consequential political irony, Pashinyan thus legally inherited the extraordinarily broad executive powers that the ruling Republican Party had destined, in a recent change to the constitution, to then-incumbent Serzh Sargsyan. The once-powerful defense minister and president of two decades had intended to bypass the constitutional two-term limit in this castling move, securing election from the obedient parliament as the new super-premier. As a result of the revolution, the devious scheme spectacularly backfired, giving the same powers to the oppositionist Pashinyan.

All this may look, however, quite surprising given the relative poverty of post-Soviet Armenia, its wholesale dependence on Russia, and the strains of ongoing military confrontation with Azerbaijan over the disputed territories of Karabakh, not to mention Armenia’s remote geographic location and its traumatic historical memories. Valerie Bunce once mused that, for all the variety of factors suggested by political scientists to explain the differential rates of success in transitions from communist rule, the most obvious fact of geographic proximity to the borders of the EU could alone robustly predict the prospects of such transitions.² The Republic of Armenia borders Turkey and Iran rather than Scandinavia or Austria. Historically, Armenia was long dominated by foreign conquerors: Romans, Persians, Byzantines, Arabs, Ottomans, imperial Russians, and Bolsheviks. Such legacies might be expected to render the pattern of Armenian politics closer to that of the Balkans or

future of this whole project.

² Valerie Bunce. 1999. *Subversive Institutions: The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Middle East than Central Europe.³

Evidently something besides geography must be at play here—perhaps the same factors that in February 1988 resulted in a completely unexpected mass mobilization of Armenians demanding reunification with their fellow ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. Need we be reminded that it was the seemingly peripheral Karabakh conflict that once ignited the chain of events leading the Soviet superpower to its collapse?⁴ If you were to ask Armenians to explain it, many, drawing on their own ethno-national discourse, would point to the venerable antiquity of their civilized nation and its own brand of Christianity, officially adopted as early as 301 C.E., before the Roman Empire itself. Others might add that Armenians have long been *par excellence* sensible traders and hard-working craftsmen, in other words a bourgeois minority nation forged even before capitalism in a far-flung diaspora and despite hostile foreign rule. These days, however, scholars have rightly become suspicious of explanations derived from geographic determinism and ethnic stereotypes. Yet such stereotypes cannot be completely ignored, at least insofar as they tend to shape popular imagination and channel political action.

We shall first briefly re-trace the peculiar making of the Armenian nation, illuminating the common narrative tropes with the insights of historical sociology. Closer to our times, we rely on the techniques of social psychology and participant observation made during the youth protests of the last five years. It is our central claim that these protests, while largely considered failures at the time, in fact consolidated and diffused the emotional charge feeding into the novel repertoire of collective action, culminating in the 2018 revolution. To borrow a famous phrase from Lenin, the Armenian revolt of 2018 had numerous “dress rehearsals,” starting in the mid-1960s, continuing through perestroika in the late 1980s, and, most recently, being revived by a new generation of self-described “social” protesters in the 2010s. The present text can therefore be read both as a scholarly article reporting preliminary findings from the currently live and very active field and as a much broader guide aiming to mark promising directions for future systematic studies of modern Armenia and comparative studies of democratization.

Revolutions are historical moments when audacity seems eminently warranted. Audaciously, we shall draw a line of argument that stretches over the two and a half millennia of Armenian ethnic history and runs all the way to the present. Still more audaciously, we must try to identify encouraging possibilities in the near future. This latest revolution can yet

³ Randall Collins. 1999. “‘Balkanization’ or ‘Americanization’: A Geopolitical Theory of Ethnic Change.” In *Macrohistory: Essay in Sociology of the Long Run*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 70-109.

⁴ Thomas de Waal. 2003. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press.

achieve sustained democratization if its political and social charge acquire an economic vector. In the end, we find reasons for optimism. After all, Armenians are full of surprises even if they often ignore their real advantages, which are taken for granted.

Antiquities

The fundamental fact about Armenia is that it is a landlocked mountainous area with a contrasting harsh climate of the extreme-continental variety: hot, dry summers and surprisingly cold, snowy winters. The historical Armenian heartland—a much larger area located roughly around the triangle of lakes Van, Urmia, and Sevan—bordered on the Near Eastern cradles of early civilizations.⁵ Nonetheless, its prohibitive ecology rendered Armenia perennially unattractive for agrarian colonization.⁶ This was so in the times of ancient Babylon and even into the mid-twentieth century, when the planners in Moscow decided to industrialize Soviet Armenia instead of forcing its rural populations into the mass cultivation of grains or cotton. Of course, there were also grapes, which, according to archeological evidence, were probably first domesticated in the South Caucasus some five or six thousand years ago. Today, Armenian and Georgian wine-makers boldly promote their products as the most ancient wines in the world. Indeed, the Behistun (Bisitun, ancient Persian Bagastana) rock relief from the sixth century B.C.E. depicts an Armenian chieftain offering in tribute to the Achaemenid king Darius the Great an ornate vessel probably containing wine. There is, however, no evidence of these wines ever being traded at any distance before modern times, for the obvious reason that exporting the heavy wine jars or amphorae required sea shipping like on the ancient Mediterranean or at least rafting on the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. Relatively isolated by their landscape, the ancient and medieval farmers of Armenian highlands remained perennially poor, but also largely free from bondage. Therefore, they also continued to be a linguistically separate branch of the Indo-European family of languages and have been genetically continuous since the late Bronze Age.⁷

Casting aside ethnic pride in “pure bloodlines,” mountain refuges anywhere in the world have typically fostered independence from agrarian empires and produced demographic outflows rather than the influx of populations.⁸ Consequently, the ancestors of Armenians from time

⁵ Adam T. Smith. 2015. *The Political Machine: Assembling Sovereignty in the Bronze Age Caucasus*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

⁶ Charles Burney and David Marshall Lang. 1971. *The Peoples of the Hills: Ancient Ararat and Caucasus*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

⁷ Marc Haber, Massimo Mezzavilla, Yali Xue, David Comas, Paolo Gasparini, Pierre Zalloua, and Chris Tyler-Smith. 2016. “Genetic Evidence for an Origin of the Armenians from Bronze Age Mixing of Multiple Populations.” *European Journal of Human Genetics* 24: 931–936

⁸ James Scott. 2017. *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*. New Haven,

immemorial had to pursue labor migration to richer destinations. Contrary to later stereotypes, the job-seeking Armenians were traditionally warriors rather than traders and craftsmen. The hardy tribal and later feudal mercenaries, who arrived from the native highlands with their own weapons and horses, were welcome additions to the imperial armies of Persia, Hellenistic kingdoms, Rome, or Byzantium. In return, the Armenians brought home prestigious artifacts and cultural influences from the contemporary centers of civilization, both Rome and pre-Islamic Iran. The standing testament to these multiple early influences is Armenia's major tourist attraction: the wonderfully preserved Hellenistic temple to the sun-god, Apollo/Mihr, in the village of Garni, outside Yerevan. Armenian mercenarism reached its peak in late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.⁹ Two processes of founding importance shaped the social and cultural structures of Armenian highlands during the first millennium C.E.: the proliferation of feudal Armenian kingdoms and the early conversion to Christianity. Both processes left an enduring imprint, seen in the numerous recognizably Armenian churches and monasteries and in the cherished national alphabet, invented in 405 C.E. and still in use today.

From the outset, the Armenian version of Christianity differed from the Byzantine and Roman orthodoxies. This fact seems to owe as much to contemporary geopolitics as to doctrinal controversies or national pride.¹⁰ For almost two thousand years, at least since the first century B.C.E., the Armenian highlands have been a buffer zone squeezed between the succession of empires emerging to the south-east, in Iran and Mesopotamia (the Parthians, Sassanids, Arab Caliphate, Seljuks, Safavi Persia) and their rivals building tributary bases in the rich agrarian lands of western Anatolia, Syria, Egypt, and the Balkans (the Romans, Byzantines, and Ottomans). In such a neighborhood, it would seem prudent to symbolically distinguish oneself from the mighty belligerents. There is, however, little evidence that the medieval Armenians rationally chose to abide by their separate Christianity. After all, the neighboring Georgians straightforwardly embraced Byzantine orthodoxy and then, just like the Armenians, stuck to their fateful ideological choice at great cost through the horrible centuries that followed the demise of Byzantium. In this part of the world, early medieval conversions to one or another variety of Abrahamic religion, perhaps chosen at the time under fairly contingent circumstances, soon hardened into enduring traditions that continue to influence modern

CT: Yale University Press.

⁹ Johannes Preiser-Kapeller. 2016. *Climate, Ecology and Power in the Armenian Highlands, 7th-11th century*. Report to the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Belgrade, August 22-27, 2016.

¹⁰ George Bournoutian. 2006. *A Concise History of the Armenian People*. Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publ.

politics and culture.¹¹ Why this is so remains poorly understood by our present theories. For the purposes of this article, suffice it to note that the Armenians had, by the first millennium C.E., already become a religiously bounded ethnic nation united by the immanent morale of their own brand of Christianity and the national church network of literate monks and parish priests that persisted alongside ephemeral dynastic states and foreign empires.¹²

If anything at all characterizes the history of Eurasia in the middle period between the demise of Antiquity and the rise of new gunpowder empires in the sixteenth century, it is the repeated waves of nomadic invasions reaching into the old centers of agrarian civilizations from China to Central Europe and the Pyrenees. The lands of Armenia were raided by Scythians in the early Iron Age (which contributed to the demise of ancient Urartu) and later by the Khazars and even Scandinavian Vikings (or the Rus) arriving by boat via the Caspian and river Kura. These, however, remained merely plundering raids. It was the Arabs, inspired by the new universalistic religion of Islam to build a world empire, who became, in the seventh century C.E., the first invaders to begin irreversibly changing the demographic and cultural landscape of eastern Anatolia and the South Caucasus. The Muslim Arab rulers, interested in the Armenian mountains primarily as a military buffer zone, proved generally lenient to the local Christian lords whose vassal services they needed to sustain control. Yet the Arab caliphate brought the first bands of Turkic mercenaries and the Iranian-speaking tribes later called the Kurds. The fortunes of medieval Armenian polities followed the general Byzantine pattern of periodical revivals until the ultimate defeats by the Seljuk and later Ottoman Turks. The last Armenian kingdom lingered in Cilicia, on the Mediterranean coast of Anatolia and northern Syria. Although bolstered by the European Crusades (which contributed a number of Old French borrowings to Armenian, including *baron*, the generally polite address equivalent to “Mister”), Cilician Armenia nonetheless fell in the late 14th century with the rest of the Crusader kingdoms.¹³

Until the twentieth century, the Armenians would remain an oppressed minority in their former homeland, divided between the perennially warring Ottoman and Safavi Persian empires. Borderland geopolitics once again ravaged the Armenian highlands. This time, however, it was worse than ever before. In a “scorched earth” strategy, much of eastern Armenia—including the Ararat valley—was depopulated on the orders of Safavi Shah Abbas in the early 1600s. The erstwhile Armenian feudal

¹¹ Michael Cook. 2014. *Ancient Religions, Modern Politics: The Islamic Case in Comparative Perspective*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

¹² Michael Mann. 1987. *The Sources of Social Power: Volume 1, A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹³ Simon Payaslian. 2007. *The History of Armenia*. New York: Palgrave.

elite was completely undone (save for a few noble families that persisted in Georgia and Mountainous Karabakh). The Armenians were reduced to a stateless nation of priests and peasants.

This was fraught, however, with consequential ironies. Like the Jews, the Armenians developed a successful merchant diaspora sustained by the internal trust of ethnic religion and capably exploiting the new possibilities created by the tremendous expansion of global trade in the early modern world. The Armenian trading communities spanned almost the entire expanse of Eurasia, from Isfahan to Madras and Manila and from Constantinople, Smyrna and Alexandria to Tiflis, Moscow, Krakow, Venice, and Amsterdam.¹⁴ At the same time, and unlike Jews, a significant majority of Armenians remained peasants and continued to inhabit their historical homeland. In this, the Armenians resembled other relic ethno-religious nationalities surviving under foreign empires: the Celtic Irish, Egyptian Copts or Greeks. From the late seventeenth century, this situation fed among Armenian enlighteners the dream of rebuilding a national state with the help of the ascendant Christian European powers.¹⁵ At the turn of the twentieth century, however, this modernist dream clashed with the no less modern project of Turkish nation-building.

The Anvil

The facts of Ottoman genocide are now well established thanks to an impressively internationalist effort by scholars.¹⁶ Its interpretation is incorporated into the growing body of comparative-theoretical literature on genocides that emphasizes the modern roots of this ghastly phenomenon. The massacres at the turn of twentieth century were arguably not a traditionalist religious conflict. In Persia and among the Arabs, politically unambitious Armenian communities remained traditionally secure. Conflicts emerged in areas of rapid capitalist development, which allowed many Armenians to advance into newly opening commercial and professional positions or at least into the skilled urban proletariat, like in Baku's burgeoning oil industry.¹⁷ The same kinds of processes generated lasting tensions, though short of serious violence, between ethnic Armenians and their fellow Christians, Georgians, whose outsized traditional nobility and

¹⁴ Sebouh Aslanian. 2014. *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

¹⁵ Harris Mylonas. 2012. *The Politics of Nation-Building: Making Co-Nationals, Refugees, and Minorities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁶ Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek, and Norman Naimark (eds). 2012. *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁷ Ronald Grigor Suny. 1972. *The Baku Commune, 1917-1918: Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution*. New York: Columbia University Press.

landless peasantry had suffered humiliating dislocations with the arrival of capitalist markets.¹⁸

A compounding source of interethnic tensions, less explored by historians, must have been rapid demographic growth and the spread of commercial agriculture, which ignited land disputes across the rural areas of the Caucasus. Once Russian imperial policing was disrupted by the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the land disputes escalated into ethnically-tinged armed clashes between peasant families and whole villages.¹⁹

Popular memory is a venerably powerful yet quite imperfect mechanism of transmitting knowledge. The pre-1920s agrarian conflicts stopped making intuitive sense after the enormous urbanization of Soviet times. What remained, however, were the emotional echoes of past violence now popularly construed as solely ethnic and totalizing: *They tried to kill us*.

The ultimate cause of ethnic cleansing was the formation of modern political units claimed and legitimated as national states.²⁰ In areas with historically mixed populations, these putative national states emerged through actual violence in times of war and revolution, or, during more stable periods, exercised “merely” administrative pressure by disenfranchising and denying opportunities to members of unwanted minorities. The ethno-homogenizing demographic results still looked largely the same all over the Caucasus. In the course of the twentieth century, the western Armenian lands left in the modern Turkish Republic (confusingly also called eastern Anatolia or, more contentiously, northern Kurdistan) became devoid of Armenians and remain underpopulated to this day. Meanwhile, the much smaller Republic of Armenia became almost entirely mono-ethnic and profoundly conscious of its grievous losses. Mount Ararat, the national symbol whose ice-covered summits are seen from nearly every street in Yerevan, stayed beyond the Turkish border after 1920. As the soulful Armenian song goes, like the Moon it shines but cannot be touched. The trauma of genocide remains a central factor in Armenian mass perceptions and politics. Less acknowledged are the profound social consequences of the exodus of survivors and refugees to Russian Eastern Armenia, followed by its Sovietization. The traumatic and transformative processes of the twentieth century homogenized and also modernized the new Armenian nation concentrated in its drastically reduced homeland.

Yerevan never fails to impress visitors with its modernistic yet distinctly national cityscape. This achievement is universally attributed to

¹⁸ Eric Lee. 2017. *The Experiment: Georgia's Forgotten Revolution, 1918-2021*. London: Zed Press.

¹⁹ A valuable contemporary source is Stepan Lisitsian. 1992 (c. 1922). *Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh: An Ethnographic Essay*. Yerevan: Izdatelstvo Akademii nauk Arm.SSR.

²⁰ Michael Mann. 2005. *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

the architectural genius of Alexander Tamanyan. In the majority of world capitals, the main squares typically feature statues of national poets and great statesmen or some kind of triumphal columns. In Yerevan, a basalt statue instead depicts the legendary chief architect pondering over the city plan. But what allowed Tamanyan to rapidly build the new national capital almost from scratch? Born in Russia into the modest family of an army scribe, the young talent made a brilliant career in Moscow and St. Petersburg at the turn of the twentieth century. There, he designed elite mansions and commercial buildings in a style that meshed Art Nouveau with the Slavic retro-romanticism favored by his rich Russian clients. This was actually an inventively Russified adaptation of the conservative monarchist aesthetic pioneered in the Victorian neo-Tudor style and the continental neo-Gothic, later to be multiplied on American Ivy League campuses.

After 1917, Tamanyan fled the revolutionary Petrograd for the newly-proclaimed nationalist Republic of Armenia. But in 1921 the Bolsheviks caught up with the prominent bourgeois architect—and, withstanding their first impulse to shoot the class enemy, astonished Tamanyan by offering him the opportunity to build the new capital of Soviet Armenia. In similar fashion, other Armenian “bourgeois specialists” who had scattered in the aftermath of the genocide, war, and revolution were allowed to stay and oversee the creation of modern medicine, engineering, arts, and humanities in the tiny devastated Soviet republic, which was in desperate need of development. Despite the Stalinist decimations of the late thirties, these high-end refugees fostered in Armenia a grand intelligentsia of enduring influence and profound respect among common Armenians, the majority of whom were also refugees and tenacious survivors.

Tamanyan (who died a natural death in 1936) accepted the inevitable statues of Lenin and shock-workers as the latest fancy of his new clients, yet he also artfully dressed the façades in the splendidly carved volcanic tufa and austere basalts. The exterior ornamentation, directly inspired by medieval Armenian churches and illuminated manuscripts, transformed typically boxy Soviet buildings into distinctly national architectural gems. For all his artistic genius, Tamanyan could rely on the coercive concentration of manpower and resources in the years of Stalinist industrialization. Furthermore, in shaping the new cityscape he was least constrained by the existing old town, which had been small, dusty, and looked “too” Oriental—a provincial Persian and Turkic legacy deemed unworthy of preservation. Yerevan is arguably ancient, though very little above the ground has survived over the centuries. In the late 1950s, a team of archeologists from Leningrad’s Hermitage museum excavated a Urartian cuneiform inscription dating the foundation of Erebuni’ to 782 B.C.—earlier than Rome! This provided an excellent occasion for grandiose

jubilee celebrations and lobbying in Moscow for extra funds to further expand and beautify the “oldest city in the USSR.” And there it stands today, a city of one million people, almost all of them now Armenians, the product of socialist modernization with a venerably neo-traditional national look.²¹

Tamanyan’s story broadly reflects the paradox of the Armenian experience in the Soviet era. The modern Republic of Armenia was proclaimed in spring 1918 under the direst of conditions, the last stand of famished peasants and genocide survivors led by a handful of nationalist revolutionaries and guerrilla commanders.²² At the end of 1920, facing complete destruction at the hands of superior Turkish forces, the Armenian nationalists surrendered to the Bolsheviks as the lesser evil. Later, in emigration, many of the same nationalists spearheaded the creation of robust diaspora communities with their own churches, schools, and social institutions in Lebanon and the Balkans, as well as in France and the United States. In the 1930s a few of the more combative émigré nationalists bet on fascism as the awesome rising force in the rather naïve hope of carving a larger Armenia through the coming war. These ultra-nationalists—known by their *noms-de-guerre* “Nzhdeh” (Garegin Ter-Harutyunyan) and “Dro” (Drastamat Kanayan)—are now officially commemorated in post-Soviet Armenia as fighters for the First Republic (1918-1920), their Nazi collaboration downplayed. Curiously, at the same time, the Soviet monuments to Armenian communist leaders—Stepan Shaumyan, Alexander Miasnikian, and Marshal Ivan Bagramyan—continue to occupy prominent positions in central Yerevan. National pride in Armenian heroes has subsumed past ideological differences. Today, the local neo-fascist and neo-communist groups are small, eccentric sects without political influence. In this, the contrast to many post-communist countries, with their bitterly divided political legacies, could not seem greater, and yet this unique reality is barely noted by observers and Armenians alike.

The Missing Factors

Social scientists face considerable difficulties in accounting for absent socio-historical factors, since in contrast to those that are present, they are not open to empirical measurement and analysis. The following enumeration is therefore only tentative and the attached explanations must be treated as hypothetical. Sketched here is a program for future research pointing to the unexplored yet promising directions that might help us explain something important about Armenia’s present and possible futures.

²¹ For revealing parallels, see Tarik Cyril Amar. 2015. *The Paradox of Ukrainian Lviv: A Borderland City between Stalinists, Nazis, and Nationalists*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

²² Richard Hovannisian. 1971–1996. *The Republic of Armenia*. 4 volumes. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

The gender dimension seems like a good place to start. Like many other recently rural societies, Armenian society remains fairly conservative and patriarchal. Western demographers cite alarming data indicating that, like in other post-Soviet countries, sex-selective abortion may be being practiced in Armenia, although the motivations for this are not entirely clear.²³ Nevertheless, women were conspicuously present in all the recent protests and often took the lead, even in the construction of barricades on the central Marshal Bagramyan Avenue during the 2015 spontaneous campaign against the new electricity tariffs. And then comes an unexpected observation from a visiting Polish anthropologist, a Slavic natural blond who courageously conducts field research in the North Caucasus. Unlike in Dagestan, where she had to become accustomed to casually putting down suggestively whistling men or Georgia, where motorists would casually stop and invite her to a restaurant, in the streets of Yerevan the Polish woman provoked nothing of the sort. By all accounts, the city is very safe for women, both local and visitors. The reason could lie in the distribution of gender roles in traditional Armenian families, where mothers and wives largely control the household resources to care for dependents of all ages. Women's role apparently grew even more important in the years of the post-Soviet industrial collapse, when working-class men became jobless and many had to leave periodically for labor migrations to Russia. Adult males are strongly expected to provide for their families, but their contributions do not belong to them alone. In short, Armenian society is patriarchal but not masculine-dominated, let alone machist. Armenian gender norms, unlike those in Georgia and the North Caucasus, do not derive from the traditional ethos of nobility or warrior clans. Instead, it seems to be a society of peasant labor migrants, craftsmen and traders, learned priests and respected intelligentsia. This observation may have (albeit rarely noticed) implications for the behavior of Armenians in military combat. Unlike the dashing, notoriously competitive North Caucasians, young male Armenians feel less peer pressure to prove their masculinity in daring action.²⁴ They are generally disciplined, hardworking, and patriotically tenacious. Could this be why the Armenian trenches in Karabakh appear so properly dug to full height and even the aging Soviet hardware is meticulously oiled and maintained?

A classical Durkheimian mechanism seems at work here: strong

²³ Marc Michael, Lawrence King, Liang Guo, Martin McKee, Erica Richardson, and David Stuckler. 2013. "The Mystery of Missing Female Children in the Caucasus: An Analysis of Sex Ratios by Birth Order." *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 39: 2: 97–102.

²⁴ Georgi Derluguian. 2016. "The Post-Soviet Industrial Extinctions and the Rise of Jihadist Terrorism as Male Gender Role in the North Caucasus." In Jayati Ghosh, Rainer Kattel, and Erik Reinert (eds.), *Handbook of Alternative Theories of Economic Development*. London: Elgar, 729–37.

external conflict generates equally strong internal cohesion.²⁵ In 2017 the Armenian police registered only 49 cases of homicide—that is, 1.6 per 100,000 inhabitants, as low as in Western Europe. A large and influential underworld of “thieves at law” has existed in Armenia since Soviet times, but they largely operate abroad and demonstratively behave as good citizens in their impoverished homeland, where everyone seems to know everyone else.²⁶ The new authorities emerging from the revolution in 2018, however, boldly began putting pressure on the domestic criminal authorities and asserting the state monopoly of legitimate violence.

Conspicuously missing from Armenia’s politics and society is the salience of internal divisions along the traditional lines of clan, region, dialectal sub-ethnicity, or religion. The label of “Karabakh clan,” often attributed to the incumbents overthrown in April 2018, is but a journalistic euphemism. The second and third presidents of post-Soviet Armenia, Robert Kocharyan (1998-2008) and Serzh Sargsyan (2008-2018), were indeed outsiders from Karabakh who took power in Yerevan in a tangled intrigue, replacing the first President, Levon Ter-Petrossian (himself born in Syria). Their support networks differed not in any sub-ethnic traditional solidarities, but rather in terms of social class and what the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu called *habitus*, the socially ingrained dispositions and pre-rational ways of doing things. Levon Ter-Petrossian, a historian of medieval manuscripts, represented the cosmopolitan intelligentsia of Yerevan, whose road to power was predicated on high non-official prestige and strategic uses of nationalist discourse in perestroika-era debates and public rallies. By contrast, both Kocharyan and Sargsyan were provincial strivers who had first pursued official Soviet careers in the local Komsomol and Party organs and eventually grew prominent as leading organizers in the Karabakh war of the early 1990s.

Armenians do indeed speak many different dialects, but this does not translate into political or sub-cultural groupings. A University of Pennsylvania linguist exuberantly shared the latest findings from his fieldwork: in just a single village near Lake Sevan he found three distinct dialects spoken side-by-side without any visible friction, sometimes even in the same family between husband and wife. All three dialects were actually from Turkish western Armenia, brought by different streams of refugees. The horizontal social solidarity with equally displaced refugees extends to the non-Armenian minorities of the linguistically Semitic (neo-Aramaic) Christian Assyrians and Yezidis, whose language is the Indo-European Kurdish. (The Yezidis, however, refuse association with the

²⁵ Randall Collins. 2008. *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

²⁶ Elen Babayan. 2018. “Vor v zakone byl chut li ne v kazhdom dvore” [The Thief In Law Was in Almost Every Yard]. *Lenta.ru*. July 16, 2018, At https://lenta.ru/articles/2018/07/16/nikol_i_vory/, accessed October 21, 2018.

Muslim Kurds and insist on their separate religious identity.) Both Yezidis and Assyrians suffered genocidal exterminations during World War I and the survivors fled from persecution to the Republic of Armenia.

No less impressive is the vertical national solidarity binding the high intelligentsia and the common people. The Armenian intelligentsia appeared fairly late, at the end of the nineteenth century, and almost all those caught in the Ottoman Empire in 1915 had been murdered. Subsequently, the majority of the Armenian intelligentsia had origins in the Russian Empire and continued to develop in the Soviet Union. Educated in the centers of Russia and Western Europe before 1914, the Armenian intelligentsia became world-class from the outset. Also from the outset, the intelligentsia assumed the mission of guiding the nation, inevitably taking a share of prestige from the Armenian priesthood. Curiously, this did not provoke any serious lasting conflict with the church hierarchy, probably because the Armenian Church could never use secular state power to persecute its rivals. Unlike Russia and Western Europe, the Armenian secularization, excepting a few instances, was not marked by either reactionary clericalism or passionate anti-clericalism. Today, some ranking personalities in the Armenian religious hierarchy might be attacked for sharing in the corruption of the neo-Soviet regime overthrown in 2018, yet there are no attempts to mobilize religious fundamentalism on either side. Armenian Christianity as a venerable national tradition remains practiced rather casually in both diaspora and homeland.²⁷

The relations of the Armenian intelligentsia to the sizable bourgeoisie of their co-nationals in the diaspora and to the communist nomenklatura in Soviet Armenia have been more contentious, though usually restrained. From the bourgeoisie, ever politically cautious and traditionally favoring donations to churches, the intelligentsia typically wanted more funding for secular education and culture. Relationships with Soviet officials were far more fraught and, in the Stalin era, deadly dangerous. Still, the behavior of the rulers of Armenian SSR never reached the despotic pomposity observed in many other republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia. A clue as to why this is might be glimpsed in an anecdote about the head of the Armenfilm studio denying the request of ideological censors to stop the production of Rob Sahakyants' cartoon that dared to translate Armenian folklore into a psychedelic experiment reminiscent of the Beatles' *Yellow Submarine*. The studio head famously retorted, "Vah, last time I was talked into shelving an incomprehensible film it turned out to be the genius of Paradjanov!" The Armenian communist nomenklatura in the 1960s-80s evidently felt humbled by the realization that they were in charge of a

²⁷ D.E. Furman, 2011 (c. 1992). "Armianskoe nationalnoe dvizhenie. Istoria i psikhologia" [Armenian National Development: History and Psychology]. In *Izbrannoe*. Moscow: Territoria budushchego, 244-261.

small Soviet republic that was linked to a parade of world luminaries and modern icons of Armenian pride: the composer Aram Khachaturian, the painter Martiros Sarian, the astrophysicist Victor Ambartsumian, the mathematician Sergei Mergelian, and the chess champion Tigran Petrosian, among others.

The memories of atrocities and losses suffered in the 1915 genocide remained unspeakable and unspoken until the late 1950s. This changed when the younger post-war intelligentsia began to succeed the generations of traumatized survivors, both in the diaspora and in Soviet Armenia.²⁸ In a remarkable exception to general Soviet attitudes, in 1964 Moscow consented to Armenian popular demands (seconded by local communist officials) and allowed the construction of a monumental genocide memorial on Yerevan's Tsitsernakaberd hill (the Swallows Fortress). Ever since, the hilltop memorial has served annually as the destination for massive solemn processions on April 24 commemorating the anniversary of the genocide. In Soviet Armenia, therefore, people became accustomed to essentially non-Soviet large public gatherings long before democratization. In 2018, Serzh Sargsyan's decision to step down on April 23, the day before the annual procession, was universally attributed to his seeing the danger and ultimate futility of any attempts to forcibly contain the angry grieving masses.

The Post-Soviet Collapse and Restoration

Gorbachev's perestroika in the late 1980s gave the Armenian intelligentsia previously unthinkable opportunities to assume the moral and political leadership of the nation. These opportunities were seized primarily by relatively junior intellectuals from Yerevan, who had less to lose and much more to gain than their prominent seniors.²⁹ After several trial mobilizations in the early perestroika period—around fairly uncontroversial issues such as school reform, conservation of historical monuments, and environmental protection—in 1988 the Armenian intelligentsia found a truly pan-national cause in the demands to transfer the predominantly Armenian-populated province of Mountainous Karabakh from Azerbaijan to Armenia. An administrative transfer from one Soviet republic to another at first seemed far more realistic than demanding the restitution of historically Armenian lands under Turkish control. Yet this proved a huge political miscalculation on many sides. The adamant refusal of Soviet officials in Baku, supported by an angry counter-mobilization of Azeri nationalism that soon turned to ghastly pogroms, suddenly exposed the impotence of Gorbachev's rule

²⁸ Peter Balakian. 2004. *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response*. New York: Harper Perennial.

²⁹ For a detailed discussion, see chapter 6 in Georgi Derluguian. 2005. *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

and created irresolvable deadlock that rapidly escalated to actual warfare between the two nominally Soviet republics.³⁰ By 1990 the communist regime in Armenia had effectively vanished amid raging popular mobilization for war resolutely intended not to permit another genocide of fellow Armenians in Karabakh. The radical nationalist intelligentsia was ushered into state power—but now the state itself was rapidly collapsing along with the centrally-planned economy.

Remarkably enough, the nationalist intellectuals around President Ter-Petrossian stayed in power through the years of wartime hardships, industrial collapse, and internal splits. They were helped by the victory in Karabakh and vital support from the Armenian diaspora. Still, their moral and political standing suffered huge damage. In 1994 an intelligentsia candidate in the parliamentary elections met with the pointed question from his constituency: “We asked you to deliver Karabagh but you gave us capitalism.” Worse, it was a crooked corrupt capitalism of the variety emerging all over the ruins of Soviet state and economy. The intellectuals stayed in power not through victory in the war alone. They learned how to operate in this kind of capitalism by adopting the immoral tricks elsewhere usually associated with ex-communist officials.³¹ Its erstwhile popular legitimacy nearly exhausted, Ter-Petrossian’s ruling group allegedly resorted to widespread vote falsification. This did not help, and in 1998 the discredited intellectuals were ousted in a bloodless coup by the Armenian military forged in the Karabakh war.

For a short while, it seemed that the prostrate Armenia had fallen into the hands of Vazgen Sargsyan (no relation to Serzh Sargsyan), a former wrestler turned war hero and then aspiring strongman. The burly, bearded guerrilla commander showed surprising political acumen in bringing on-board the aging Soviet-era head of the Armenian SSR, Karen Demirchian, by then fondly (if not entirely correctly) remembered by many elderly Armenians as a capable administrator and patriotic lobbyist for Armenian interests in Moscow. But the rising duumvirate was gunned down in October 1999 during the parliamentary session. The bizarre group of assassins incoherently called for an insurrection to save the nation before surrendering and going to jail. In the ensuing chaos and despite poisonous accusations, President Robert Kocharyan, hitherto overshadowed by the impressive Vazgen Sargsyan, managed with considerable difficulty to emerge as the new man in control of Armenia’s army and state apparatus. Relying on his Soviet-era political skills and his wartime network of collaborators, Kocharyan steered Armenia toward a recognizably neo-Soviet restoration. In this, he was helped to no small degree by

³⁰ Derluguian, *Bourdieu’s Secret Admirer*.

³¹ Henry Hale. 2014. *Patronal Politics. Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

the economic recovery that came to nearly all the former Soviet countries after 2000. Singularly important was the emergence of Vladimir Putin, who became Kocharyan's key external patron and reportedly a personal friend, as President of Russia.

The political regime in Armenia, however, was but a pale imitation of Putin's Russia. Like Russia, its control rested on personally loyal governors, a handful of obedient economic monopolists, and a cultivated circle of public careerists who became the official parliamentarians. This political "machine" served two main purposes: controlling and skimming all economic flows of any significance and periodically supplying votes during elections. Nevertheless, post-Soviet authoritarianism in Armenia never became consolidated in the same way as its Russian counterpart.³² Fresh off their successful mobilizations, the Armenians were fearless in the face of authority—if also bitterly cynical. They refused to give up their freedom of expression, at least on the internet and in street conversations. Moreover, almost one-third of the Armenian citizenry now routinely shuttled between their homeland and a wide range of foreign destinations in labor migrations. Of course, the diaspora remained an economic and moral influence despite the Yerevan authorities' efforts to constrain external influences by imposing legal barriers and engaging in various bureaucratic tricks. As a result, a motley succession of opposition candidates regularly mobilized surprisingly large protest votes, although they were never allowed to achieve a majority. In February 2008, however, there was a close call when ex-president Levon Ter-Petrossian chose to re-mobilize intelligentsia and the broader Yerevan population at the moment when power was being transferred from Robert Kocharyan to his former deputy and fellow Karabakh striver Serzh Sargsyan. All the familiar elements of "colored" revolutions seemed present: a credible and well-known contender who had once been in power and could still rely on a few clients and allies; the opposition intelligentsia, youth activists, and journalists broadcasting and magnifying news of the protests; loud allegations of electoral fraud; and foreign backing at least from the diaspora and Western foundations sponsoring liberally-oriented NGOs. Nevertheless, the attempted revolution failed, in part because too many Armenians had bad memories of Ter-Petrossian's rule in the 1990s, which greatly reduced the size of supportive crowds. In the meantime, the incumbents, likely bolstered by Moscow, demonstrated their brutal resolve by resorting to armed force, imposing a curfew, and issuing scores of arrest warrants. The overnight clashes on March 1, 2008, resulted in hundreds of wounded and ten fatalities (including two servicemen). The bloody spectacle of Armenians fighting their fellow Armenians in the central streets of Yerevan stunned the nation.

³² Alexander Iskandaryan, Hrant Mikaelian, and Sergey Minasyan. 2016. *War, Business, and Politics: Informal Networks and Formal Institutions in Armenia*. Yerevan: Caucasus Institute.

Armenia Alienated

A new political reality emerged in the aftermath of the March 1 clashes, although in the heat of unfinished battles followed by years of tired disillusionment few observers noted this. Former president Ter-Petrossian secluded himself in his official villa, leaving the protesters without leadership. Outgoing president Kocharyan also disappeared from public view, presumably moving to a comfortable existence abroad. Indicatively, both Ter-Petrossian and Kocharyan, in the eyes of Armenians at home and abroad equally complicit in fratricide, could never again play the ceremonial social functions of ex-presidents. Instead, this role passed to the legendary French singer of Armenian origin Charles Aznavour or the California-based rock musician Serj Tankian, founder of the *System of a Down* band. In Armenia itself, the public scene was now embarrassingly devoid of any great personalities. Moral leadership could not be claimed even by the national church, now tainted by allegations of economic corruption, nepotism, and a cozy association with what many regarded as the mafia-like regime, with its scandalously pompous weddings and funerals.

The new president, Serzh Sargsyan, proceeded to consolidate his position by swiftly completing his appropriation of the same political “machine” based on the flow of patronal favors and illicit exemptions. Despite or perhaps thanks to his tough reputation as the recent chief of security and military forces, he could also afford to mark a stylistic difference from his uncompromising predecessor. Intelligently enough, Serzh Sargsyan sought to demonstrate his benevolence to popular attitudes and even lenience to former opponents. This included his future nemesis, Nikol Pashinyan, who had long been a vociferous journalistic critic and was a leading organizer of the 2008 protests. After a year in hiding, during which he was apparently unable to emigrate, Nikol Pashinyan surrendered to police and began serving his long prison term. In slightly more than a year, he was amnestied and allowed to take up an opposition seat in the parliamentary elections of 2012.

But what was now left of the parliamentary opposition? Just a few small and largely personalistic parties manifesting their existence mainly in news conferences during the passage of controversial bills (which nonetheless always passed). Like the ruling Republican party, all oppositionists professed patriotic programs unconnected to the difficult socio-economic realities. The parties differed mainly in the sources of their sponsorship, which were either the American diaspora or local economic oligarchs who supplemented their business ventures with vehicles of political pressure out of bargaining calculation or sheer vanity. An atmosphere of disgusted alienation from politics characterized the following decade in Armenia.

The true novelty, which gradually emerged from under the radar after 2008, was the urban youth movements. They mobilized networks of supporters through the internet and student cafes and first became visible on purely social issues concerning only the inhabitants of Yerevan. These included the defense of urban public spaces and historical buildings from commercial encroachments, volunteerism in the arts, and computer classes for children started with donations from the diaspora. The rapid spread of the internet became a potent new factor in more than one respect. Socially, it connected far-flung Armenian populations in real time. One could now see grandparents even in remote villages talking on Skype to their children and grandchildren in Australia, Europe, America, or Russia. Economically, even in this landlocked country, the internet enabled the rapid growth of information technology firms subcontracting for global corporations and independently entering world markets. In turn, this development fostered a significant new middle class whose incomes and social attitudes were independent of the state and patronal politicians. Last but not least, the internet proved difficult to censor and control.

The educated urban youths and the internet first proved their salience in August 2013 during the briefly exuberant boycott of *marshrutki*, the clunky and overcrowded minibuses that were the main means of public transportation in post-Soviet Yerevan. The 50% fare increase, excused as the sole way of renovating the fleet, provoked a storm of citizen indignation that the internet activists successfully focused into a universal refusal to pay the new fares. In those days, one could see charming displays of solidarity at bus stops all over Yerevan, like private motorists offering free rides and schoolchildren dancing together with the mustachioed elders and singing (what else?) the old patriotic songs of guerrilla resistance to the Turks. The overworked and now humiliated bus drivers themselves threatened a strike and formed a labor union. The protests ended when President Serzh Sargsyan publicly chastised the mayor of Yerevan, suggesting that he should find a better way to solve the city's budget problems. The same pattern of repressive tolerance would be repeated in a succession of urban social protests, which in July 2015 culminated in barricades on Marshal Bagramyan Avenue next to the Parliament and Presidency buildings in protest against the increase of electricity tariffs.³³

Importantly, the new generation of protestors quickly learned to avoid violence and association with any politicians, maintain a merry festive attitude, and generally attract the sympathetic attention of the citizens of Yerevan, who consequently did not mind the temporary disruption of city traffic. No less importantly, the protestors engaged the police as "fellow Armenians," making mutual agreements to abide by the law. The

³³ Zhanna Andriasyan and Georgi Derlugian. 2015. "Fuel Protests in Armenia: A Field Study of Social Movements." *New Left Review* II: 95: 29-48.

protesters' insistence on the completely non-political and "networked" leaderless nature of their spontaneous campaigns, however, eventually proved their greatest pitfall. By default, this left the last word on every campaign to President Sargsyan, who also learned to play his part as a wise and benevolent statesman calming the passions.

In the meantime, an external menace was gathering. The enormous increase in the world oil price enabled Azerbaijan to launch an ambitious rearmament after 2008, conspicuously spending more on its military than the entire annual budget of Armenia. Trained by Turkish instructors and armed with the latest Russian, South African, and Israeli weapons, the Azerbaijani forces began persistently harassing the Armenian positions with sniper fire and nightly incursions by special forces, causing a continuous loss of lives.³⁴ The vulnerability of the Armenian forces derived from their being underequipped, undermanned, and bound to the static defense of extensive trenches. The official Yerevan reacted only passively, decrying the loss of soldiers' lives and ritually denouncing the aggressiveness of Armenia's eastern neighbor. The situation exploded in April 2016 with unusually massive Azerbaijani attacks in Karabakh from several directions simultaneously, using Israeli guided missiles and unmanned drones with a lethal sophistication that the Armenian forces had not experienced before. After four days and nights of intensive fighting, the Azerbaijani forces made a few small but loudly trumpeted territorial gains while killing and wounding several hundred Armenians. The short and deadly conflagration deeply troubled the Armenian society and diaspora. How could the soldiers on the Karabakh frontlines lack the essential equipment and even adequate food while their superiors were driving expensive cars and building mansions? The Sargsyan regime, so far tolerated for lack of better alternatives, now entirely lost its legitimacy. The leaderless youth movements with their mocking non-political campaigning equally suffered a loss of purpose in the face of grave geopolitical reality. This was certainly not a situation when anti-war protesting could gather sympathy.

In this somber atmosphere, in July 2016 a self-styled militia platoon of Karabakh veterans rather portentously named Sasna Tsrer (the Daredevils of the Sasun mountains, after the medieval folkloric heroes resisting the Arab conquest) at dawn attacked and captured a police base on the outskirts of Yerevan. Three police officers were killed and a score of the top brass taken hostage. This attack actually followed a long-established pattern of fringe nationalist terrorism seeking to overcome the moments of emotional downturn in spectacular acts of self-sacrificing violence and grandiose calls to wake the Armenian nation from slumber. Also like in the 1890s, the 1920s, the 1970s, and in 1999, the lone fighters soon met

³⁴ K.V. Makieno (ed.). 2018. *V ozhidanii buri: Iuzhnii Kavkaz* [Waiting for the Storm: The South Caucasus]. Moscow: Tsentr strategicheskikh tekhnologii.

with political defeat. After a nerve-racking two-week-long siege, the rebels surrendered and, unrepentant, went to jail. The waiting tactics of Serzh Sargsyan seemed to work again. To his credit, he prudently abstained from calling anyone a terrorist and using the arsenal of brutal counter-terrorist measures visible in Putin's Russia. However, a few hundred Sasna Tsrer sympathizers rioted in the streets of Yerevan, darkly overshadowing the previous achievements of peaceful youth movements and forcing the Armenian society into ever more pessimistic soul-searching. What could come next? Armenia's post-Soviet political development seemed to have reached a very dead end.

New Dawn?

After everything we have said, the revolution of April 2018 should not look so unexpected. All its structural ingredients were already in place and just waiting for activation. Still, the revolution came as a surprise of gigantic force. If there exists one common trait in all revolutions, it is that they are always surprising. In hindsight, one can see that this revolution had a very typical run-up in which popular disenchantment fed the smug arbitrariness of rulers. First, Serzh Sargsyan's ruling Republican party used the 2015-16 atmosphere of public disillusionment and apathy to fortify its formal positions by changing the constitution in a dubiously legitimate referendum. This turned Armenia into a parliamentary republic with nearly regal powers accorded to the prime minister. Before the new constitution came into force, a likable and competent business executive, Karen Karapetyan, seemed to be being prepared as the new prime minister. Also born in Karabakh, Karapetyan earned his mathematics degrees in Yerevan and made a splendid managerial career for himself at the Russian energy giant Gazprom. Karapetyan looked suave, cosmopolitan, and like a milder pragmatic edition of the Armenian intelligentsia—in short, not at all like the many fat brutes in the ruling regime. At the time, this surprising promotion appeared to be a smart move to assuage popular misgivings.

One cannot guess whether Serzh Sargsyan ever seriously considered the young technocrat as his successor. In the end, having offered some hope of change, President Sargsyan rudely betrayed it. His last-ditch clumsy maneuver was likely at the instigation of worried cronies and minions: patronal regimes sustained by insider deals inherently fear the change of hands. The recently changed constitution made the 2017 parliamentary elections crucial, although their importance seemed lost on many Armenians, drowning as they were in cynical apathy. In effect, the elections allowed the ruling party to unceremoniously reduce the opposition, with the singular exception of Nikol Pashinyan's electoral bloc, inventively called *Yelk* (Way Out). Virtually alone among the contenders, the young

Yelk-ers applied their energies in a grassroots campaign to personally mobilize the voters and hundreds of election observers trained to prevent fraud. These efforts gained *Yelk* a small foothold in the new parliament, but the more seasoned and prominent oppositionists altogether failed to overcome the barrier. The game seemed all set.

Then, in spring 2018, Serzh Sargsyan committed two cardinal mistakes in succession. For whatever reason, after much evasiveness, he ended up putting himself up as the new Prime Minister, with huge executive powers and no term limit. Electoral authoritarianism now appeared fully consolidated. This left many Armenians aghast and looking for a way out.³⁵ Sargsyan's second mistake, which in the beginning looked minor, was to rely on the familiar tactic of benevolently disregarding the protest campaign immediately launched by Nikol Pashinyan. Unusually for Yerevan-centered Armenian politics, Pashinyan, himself a provincial, started by mobilizing provincial Armenian towns hitherto regarded as the bailiwicks of local potentates. Changing his appearance from a clean-shaven parliamentarian in a suit to a rugged bearded hiker with a backpack, if not a guerrilla warrior en marche, Pashinyan walked the miles back to Yerevan, bringing with him a growing troop of supporters. All along, he insisted on the non-violent but this time absolutely political nature of protest. Moreover, this movement also clearly had a leader, although much of the action was still left to the networks of autonomous activists seasoned in many previous mobilizations. And, of course, everything was broadcast live on the internet. In short, the latest Armenian revolution achieved success because it built on the well-rehearsed contemporary repertoire of collective action and revived the impressive internal solidarity of Armenians beyond distinctions of class, gender, age, or locality. This time proved different because the protest had an unambiguous leader untainted by previous failures and a clear political goal of ending the self-serving regime, which proved scandalously unprepared to defend the nation from external attack. With proper direction, the spark set an explosion.

But once the revolution succeeded, where could it be headed next? Its single leader, Nikol Pashinyan, after becoming the provisional Prime Minister, carefully avoided taking any position on the potentially divisive social, environmental, and economic issues. His only reference to economic concerns was a publicized Skype chat with American professor of economics Daron Acemoglu, a fellow Armenian, who predictably advised that the extractive regime be replaced by an inclusive one. Pashinyan's first hundred days in power were marked largely by the

³⁵ This actually recapitulated a common pattern of revolutions erupting to forestall the looming consolidation of durable authoritarianism. On the pathbreaking English precedent, see Steve Pincus. 2009. *1688: The First Modern Revolution*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

spectacular investigations and arrests of the former top officials, including ex-president Robert Kocharyan, who overconfidently agreed to travel from Moscow to Yerevan on interrogation summons. In the short run, this helped to maintain the huge popularity of the new regime. Yet it also alarmed Putin's Moscow. Furthermore, the lack of clear policy goals and credible candidates for government appointments inevitably called into doubt the professionalism of the new Armenian leader, however understandable his hesitations.

The structural context of dilemmas, however, is glaringly visible and therefore the available options appear constrained and calculable. Armenia is a small landlocked country located in a distinctly hostile geopolitical environment. The industrial plant built in Soviet times is largely beyond repair and its bulky inputs and outputs could not be transported anyway because the railroads leading to Armenia across both Georgia and Azerbaijan have been severed since the Caucasus ethnic wars of the early 1990s. Even theoretically, Armenia cannot afford to break its dependence on Russia. The former imperial metropole still serves the single major supplier of military security, as well as the biggest destination for Armenian labor migrants and predominantly agricultural exports (again, traveling by air or automobile across Georgia and the mountain passes of the Greater Caucasus). At the same time, Armenia's imports of industrial goods are largely from EU countries or purchased via Georgia from the unfriendly Turkey. Iran is also an important neighbor and potential energy supplier, but here the trade prospects are seriously aggravated by logistical transportation bottlenecks and international political constraints. Armenia's balance of payments, meager as it is, at present critically depends on labor remittances and foreign aid. All this seems plenty on the negative side.

Given that Armenia seems to be following the well-established path of many revolutions, the trial and likely conviction of ex-president Kocharyan, the former "monarch," would likely provoke foreign intervention. This could take the form of Moscow's cutting the lifelines to Armenia or indirectly encouraging Azerbaijan to have another try in Karabakh. Baku must be itching for it anyway, having burdened itself with stockpiles of unused expensive weapons, facing the inertia of revanchist propaganda, and probably also feeling the need to deflect domestic social pressures after the end of high oil prices. The demonstration effect of the revolution in Armenia, coupled with the political turmoil in Turkey, could trigger instability in Azerbaijan. Add to this Russia's own strategic frustrations with its military base in Armenia. It is the closest foothold to the Syrian theater of operations, yet this base cannot be reliably resupplied due to Georgian objections and Azerbaijan's blockade of Armenia from the Caspian side. A short war in Karabakh might provide Moscow with an opportunity to introduce its peacekeeping forces, thus enlarging and making operational

the Russian military extension in the South Caucasus. (Baku must also see and fear this prospect.) But will the war be short? This time the better-prepared Armenians could hold to their positions and, in one of the most venerable revolutionary patterns, rise to the challenge in a patriotic *levée en masse*. This prospect at once makes the future dangerously incalculable. Revolutions under external attack often radicalize with surprising force. Could the hitherto peaceful and legalistic Nikol Pashinyan survive such a turn of events? Will he be replaced by a yet unknown Armenian Bonaparte or become a Napoleon himself? In the eventuality of a longer ferocious war, very possibly with the use of strategic missiles, what could be the reactions of Turkey, Iran, and, if Iran moves, Israel, as well as Europe and the United States? Given the roster of dire prospects and the prior geopolitical commitments of Moscow, it could just as well take a more conservative approach and let Pashinyan's Armenia meet its own economic ruin and disillusionments in near future. But will Armenia be ruined?

Not necessarily. On the positive side, Armenia seems to possess surprisingly strong economic potential that has been waiting for a political activation like the recent revolution. This hopeful scenario can be designated, in short, as a developmental state. Social scientists studying economic development know too well that, historically, Third World countries' successes in upgrading their world markets positions have been strongly correlated with authoritarian regimes (examples being South Korea, Chile, or Singapore).³⁶ There are, however, democratic exceptions to this rule, like the island nation of Mauritius and, much closer to Armenia, Israel and Ireland—the latter two both mid-sized states with strong ethno-national identities and a large overseas diaspora. The recent revolution created in Armenia the charismatic concentration of political authority that can conceivably manage the necessary spark. What would then come into action?

At present, the people of Armenia are impoverished but have preserved their traditional craftsman skills, family discipline, and the famed entrepreneurial spirit. Perhaps only one-third of all Armenians today remain in the homeland. In addition to historical dislocations and migrations, in the aftermath of Soviet collapse Armenia suffered a massive labor emigration and brain drain. This recent loss could yet become a gain in the longer run because the Armenians, toughened and united by their difficult history, remain patriotically attached to their ancestral land and culture. The combination of diaspora resources and connections (today necessarily including Russia and other post-Soviet countries) with high-quality and relatively inexpensive labor in the homeland seems a recipe for fueling economic growth. Unlike China with its ocean of cheap labor, but much

³⁶ Dan Slater. 2010. *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics, State-Building, and Authoritarian Durability in Southeast Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

like the middle-income Israel or Ireland, the Armenian model of development must focus on post-industrial economic activities: information technologies, advanced chemistry and electronics, healthcare, education, tourism, ecological high-value added agriculture, etc. This does not exclude old Keynesian tricks like launching public works programs that immediately create jobs and repair and upgrade the battered roads and city streets. A renovated Armenia would look still more attractive for investments and repatriation from diaspora. Among the positive factors one can list the internal safety of Armenia, its abundance of fresh water from the mountains (which still needs conservation), the diversity of climate zones with pronounced seasons, and the openness and polyglot traditions of Armenian culture, which puts a premium on education and achievement. Incidentally, chess is a compulsory subject in Armenian schools starting in the fourth grade.

Critically missing until now was the accountable and sufficiently strong political regime that could credibly guarantee investment and proactively pursue both Armenian and non-Armenian investors (rather than begging donors). It remains to be seen whether Nikol Pashinyan and his growing circle of collaborators could foster such a regime. Yet the opportunity seems real enough.