The art of losing the state: weak empire to weak nation-state around Nagorno-Karabakh
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The conflict around Nagorno-Karabakh offers an insight into the rules and processes that governed the transformation of a weak empire into even weaker nation-states. More than other conflicts escalating into collective violence during the demise of the USSR, Nagorno-Karabakh had connotations of civil and inter-state war, heavily involved official central and local Soviet institutions and lead to the creation of new local institutions. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was midwife to the different ways three post-Soviet entities organised their (recognised or unrecognised) statehood.

This chapter deals with the interdependence of institutional weakness of states and the organisation of conflict. Institutional weakness of statehood is at the same time both cause and consequence of violent conflict. On the one hand the escalation of conflict into violence is connected with the local exploitation of organisational voids in the official Soviet institutions. On the other hand, re-institutionalising non-violent conflict after war and forced exchange of population has proven to be a formidable challenge to weak post-Soviet statehood.

What it is all about?

Usually, when writing about a conflict, the first thing to do would be to introduce the object of and parties to the conflict and to offer a bracket around time and place. In the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict these parameters themselves are strongly disputed. According to the position of the Azerbaijani government, part of its territory is occupied by the neighbouring state of Armenia and the conflict is therefore a problem between two sovereign states. To official Armenia and, for that matter, also to the unrecognised Nagorno-Karabakh government, it is a struggle for independence and self-determination by the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh against Azerbaijan.

A rather anecdotal result of these differences in the interpretation of what the conflict is about and who is party to it is the fact that diplomats concerned with the conflict bear official titles too long to fit on any business card. There is, for example, a 'Personal Representative of the Chairperson in Office of the OSCE on the conflict dealt with by the Minsk Conference'.

These neatly clear cut and opposing perceptions of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict soften and blur in a diachronic perspective that not only relates to the positions formulated in the international arena. In the beginning the ultimate normative frame of reference was 'Moscow' rather than international law and the conflict was played according to the Soviet rules of the game. The key administrative initiatives in the beginning of 1988 focused on either keeping the *status quo* (i.e. Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (AO) remains a subordinated administrative region inside the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR)) or changing its association (i.e. transferring Nagorno-Karabakh AO as subordinate administrative region into the Armenian SSR). The Soviet institutions involved initially respected the hierarchy of competence; the first official requests for a transfer in February 1988 were addressed by the local Nagorno-Karabakh AO Soviet to the Supreme Soviets of the Republics and further to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. At this early stage nobody of consequence

raised the question of upgrading the status of Nagorno-Karabakh AO instead of transferring it from one Union Republic to the other.

However, the proximate objectives of the parties directly involved changed over time:

- The evolving Armenian leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh initially moved away from demanding the transfer of the territory to Armenia to a (temporary) transfer to the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (RSFSR) or, alternatively, to direct administration from Moscow. The demand for, from the Armenian point of view, a re-unification with Armenia was later changed to the current official viewpoint of independent statehood.
- The positions of the Armenian Karabakh Committee and later leadership of independent Armenia also changed over time and was only slightly different from the Karabakh positions: from transfer of the AO to unification with Armenia after independence and finally to the *de facto* independence of Nagorno-Karabakh. For some time the question of official acknowledgment of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic as an independent state by Armenia remained a sticking point between factions in the first government of Armenia.
- The position of the Azerbaijani authorities changed from maintaining the *status quo* to favouring direct rule by Baku and the annulment of autonomy altogether, to the current official position of offering Nagorno-Karabakh maximum autonomy within Azerbaijan.

The question of a starting point in space and time for the conflict became as disputed as the question of what the conflict is over and who is fighting.

According to the official Azerbaijani perception, Armenian inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh AO started the conflict in February 1988 by unilaterally demanding the transfer of the oblast to the Armenian SSR. Armenians, on the other hand, consider the escalation of violence against their ethnic compatriots in the industrial town of Sumgait some 30 km north of Baku at the end of February 1988 as the immediate starting point of the conflict.

In the course of seeking ultimate justification for their objectives, the ideologists of the conflicting parties pushed the question of when the conflict was started decisively backwards in time. It has been increasingly linked to the question of 'who was first to settle on the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh'. This question gained importance in relation to the dispute over the legitimacy of borders and administrative status established in the early days of Soviet rule (Goldenberg 1994: 159-60; Jacoby 1998a: 71-76). Whereas the latter issue touches upon the general problem of the legitimacy of borders decided by colonial powers (Swietochowski 1995: 161-168), the first issue has been raised by both sides as a fundamental claim to ethnically defined ownership of land and tended to drift from population statistics around the turn of the last century backwards via pre-Russian, pre-Ottoman and pre-Persian history to prehistory itself.

Volker Jacoby's view on the sometime absurd dilemma of the intellectual game of 'who was first, wins' cuts through the futile debate (Jacoby 1998b: 238, translated by author):

The territorilisation of questions of origin is in any case highly problematic. The line of argumentation of 'we were here before you' does not decide the question

of origin; the latter depends on the time frame applied in order to assess autochthony or allochthony. Is the frame of reference 100 years, 200 years, 4,000 years or 1.5 million years? In the end even zoological evidence needs to be consulted to prove a point.

Violent Conflict in Word and in Deed

Generally speaking, the search for rules governing social processes is complicated by two factors when dealing with society in violent conflict: a) the widening divide between the rational of action and the normative narratives assigning sense to deed *ex post* and b) the increasing relevance of informal institutions, often hidden in the coat-tails of their official hosts and dressed in fancy gowns sewn by the ideologists of conflict.

The bulk of journalistic and, in part, also scholarly writing on the present Nagorno-Karabakh conflict concentrates either on the emic conceptualisations of the causes of conflict or on geopolitics and outside interference in the conflict.[1] While most observers come to the conclusion that the mutually exclusive dogmatic positions of the parties to the conflict cannot be taken at face value they tend to assume that the core problem of the conflict lies in these mutually exclusive normative narratives of 'us' and 'them', of historical injustice and grievance. The impact that the way people make sense of themselves and the other has on conflict and in particular the sense made of violence endured and inflicted, is not denied here. However, making sense of a social process (like violent conflict) and the social process itself are not the same thing and require different approaches for analysis (see Laitin, Suny 1999).

Concerning external interference, while outside interests certainly do play a role in the politics of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict today,[2] outside influence has sometimes been grossly overestimated for the phase of hot conflict itself (for the very limited impact of various external mediation efforts see Mooradian, Druckman 1999). This is also true for Russia, which became an external rather than internal force at the end of 1991, although it did play a role in terms of supplying weapons and training at different stages to all parts of the conflict. Before the dissolution of the USSR outside interference was either difficult to define (in the case of interference from the centre) or was irrelevant (as in the case of diaspora support for Armenians).

Unless an outside power directly intervenes it has to play to a large extent by the local rules of the game, making use of lobbies and interest groups existing on the ground.

Focusing only on the normative transcript of a violent conflict blurs the crucial analytical line between socially controlled conflict and conflict beyond the bounds of a society's toolbox of regulation. Collectives capable of formulating distinct interests while sharing limited resources are bound to conflict with each other. But only when conflict breaks the boundaries of its social embedding, when it takes place in a space not penetrated by the rules set by society, is it perceived as disruptive and dangerous (see the classic concept of social conflict elaborated by Coser 1956: 121-128; compare also Hirschman 1994: 297-299). The focus of analytical scrutiny should therefore not concentrate so much on who started the conflict between Armenians and Azeris or whose normative claims appear to be justified but rather on the process of disintegration of the institutions that controlled conflict and negotiated order between the distinct groups.

In practice, under the condition of a functioning statehood, the social self-organisation between different communities is usually less mutually exclusive than the normative narratives of those communities may suggest. Since the ideal order of (imagined) communities is usually transported in the sphere of values and believes these normative tales may easily imply cultural clashes as the core of conflict. In the way Armenians and Azeris conceptualise the Karabakh conflict a notion of mutually exclusive 'culture' or 'civilisation' occupies a prominent place next to versions of historic truth among nationalist intellectuals (on primordial concepts of 'ethnonations' propagated by (post-) Soviet intellectuals see Tishkov 1994: 450-451). However, in order to understand the decisions and behaviour of people in conflict it is not sufficient to take into consideration only the normative discourses on identity. Media and especially the entrepreneurs of communitarian identities (be it cultural, national, ethnical or the like) are selling this excluding story of 'us' and 'them'. In situations governed by violence and fear the war-mongers may succeed in officially turning the normative identity into a total identity, not only subordinating, but denying other strategies of orientation for individuals and groups inside the we-group.[3] Here the radical exclusiveness of identity is rather the result of dynamics of violent conflict than its cause. As long as the Soviet state functioned in the sense that it prevented violent strategies of conflict-resolution between social groups, 'culture' as ability to command various social languages (from local over Caucasian to Soviet codes) was rather a means to connect, communicate and do business with each other (Koehler 1999: 43-46).

Undeniably, however, late Soviet statehood ceased to function for decisive social forces in and around Nagorno-Karabakh AO and it is this fact, rather than ancient history, cultural superiority or who fired the first shot, which should serve as starting point for the analysis of the escalation that followed.

Stages of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict escalation

Usually the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is divided into two phases defined by change in the level of violence from low intensity to all out war and roughly coinciding with the dissolution of the USSR in the second half of 1991. Instead of concentrating on a subjectively perceived degree of violence, the conflict process will be subdivided into stages defined by changing social modes of conflict control and organisation of violence (cf. Waldmann 1999: 70-76). The capacities of the USSR in the periphery and the post-Soviet states to emerge serve as starting point of discussion.

> In October 1987 the regional administration of the Azerbaijani town of Chadakhly took the decision to transfer some land from one *kolkhoz* (collective farm) to a neighbouring *one*; the former *kolkhoz* was administered by Armenians, the latter by Azeris. When the Armenian workforce refused to comply, the RAICOM (regional committee of the Communist Party) fired the Armenian director of the *kolkhoz*. This measure led to demonstrations by Armenian farmers and escalated into a violent confrontation with security forces (allegedly units of the KGB) from the Azerbaijani SSR in which at least one official was injured. Thereafter Special Forces surrounded the village in the *kolkhoz* and physical reprisals against some inhabitants reportedly took place (Jacoby 1998b: 169). When the news broke, the first public demonstrations took place in Stepanakert (Nagorno-Karabakh) and Yerevan, demanding the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhichevan to the Armenian SSR (Fuller 1987).

In a nutshell, here is a model picturing the initial protagonists of the mystery play 'dawn of the Soviet empire', repeated in various interpretations all over the peripheries of the former USSR.

As in the case of the first violent clashes in Abkhazia around the introduction of a branch of Tbilisi University as a competitor to the existing Abkhaz controlled Sukhumi University (Gelaschwili 1993: 91-92), the initial conflicts were not new nor about ethnic belonging. Instead they were about the control of lucrative segments of the shadow economy by competing networks of trust, or, more bluntly, as Georgia's witty warlord Djaba Ioseliani put it on many occasions, they were about 'the legal entitlement to steal' (here as quoted in Gelaschwili 1993: 91).

Since the 1960s illegal economic activity, intimately linked with official functions in the Soviet state-run society, increasingly began to structure those parts of the social space in which the organisational voids of the official system were most obvious. Thus a sophisticated system of parallel rules emerged in the shadow of the official institutions. This system became known as the 'parallel economy' of the *kombinaty* (industrial complexes), *kolkhozy* and *sovkhozy* (state collective farms), the 'shadow economy' in general, the 'economy of shortages' and the 'administrative market'.[4] By the 1980s, especially in the southern periphery of the empire, these shadows had merged into a parallel social order and had a tendency to 'catch up and overtake' the official order as incentive-structures for the relevant participants in the society.[5]

Serious and well-organised illegal business needs to address one crucial deficit: the deficit of trust. Trust is essential in any long-term and far-ranging business operations involving the transfer of commodities and cash flows, in operations based on unspecific reciprocity rather than direct exchange of goods or favours. In the official world this future reliability is usually achieved by contracts between institutions rather than individuals (guaranteed by national or international law and backed by the sanctioning power of functioning states) and reinforced by the threat of sanctions involving reputation (spoiling the prestige of a company in the relevant market segment).

Obviously, in the illegal business activities of *apparatchiki-biznesmeny* (Soviet entrepreneurs) trust could not be generated by written contracts, taking the cheating business partner to a Soviet court or ruining his reputation by complaining to a '*tovarishchskii sud*' (court of comrades) about breaking an informal agreement, were not options.

There were a number of more or less effective ways of generating trust in the shadows of Soviet statehood (cf. Koehler 2000: 75-104); the most important for the development of conflict control in the region of interest were (ethnic) kin and '*zemlyachestvo*'. In the writing of journalists and political scientists these two frames of reference are often merged and called 'clan', a term more concealing than revealing unless clearly defined.[6] '*Zemlyachestvo*' refers to solidarity from a notion of community, of the same local or regional upbringing, usually irrespective of ethnic or religious belonging.[7] Kin, by contrast, was the most important social institution in the Caucasus that remained very sensitive to ethnic and religious belonging. Mixed marriages in the bigger cities did take place, however, they were the exception to the rule and very often accompanied by serious conflicts in the extended families

(Anderson, Silver 1996 (1983): 494-96; for the Georgian case see Koehler 2000: 73, 97).

It would be misleading, however, to assume that from ethnic connotations of kin a principle of solidarity among ethnic groups followed; for the network of trust based on an emic notion of kinship, the point of reference was rather the extended family than an imagined ethnic community. In the case of patrons in the shadow economy (the soviet entrepreneurs we call *apparatchiki-biznesmeny*), their identity was closer to a socio-professional group that relied, as key resource for trust, on interpersonal relations with relatives belonging mostly, but not exclusively, to one ethnic group. These were not ethnic networks of trust but patron-client networks that were frequently dominated by one ethnic group as a by-product of informal constraints on interethnic marriage.[8] These networks cooperated or competed with other networks of the same socio-professional group, as in the above example of the 'Armenian' administered and 'Azeri' administered *kolkhozy*. Only in cases where a strict (informal) ethnic division of labour had been implemented for some time (e.g. Azeris as shepherds in Armenia or Kurds as street-cleaners in Tbilisi), contact in this important informal world may have been as rare and as insignificant as it was in public life.

Kinship as one of the key-resources for knitting networks of trust to secure economic or social advantages in the Caucasus is by no means a private matter, a pre-modern cultural left-over in opposition to or retreat from the state, as implied by some authors (cf. Theisen 1999). Family-business in this sense was (and is) closely integrated into the way both the Soviet and Post-Soviet states functioned in the Caucasus. 'Tradition' has been a flexible resource to react to chances and deficits of the official order and proofed to be – in a non-normative sense – a creative social and political asset (cf. Platz 1995). Taking into account the interplay between state, kinship and neighbourhood, the 'privatised' Caucasian network-state may appear rather post- than pre-modern.

During *perestroika* the well-established relationship between official Soviet institutions and the shadow economy with its entrenched networks of trust were shaken by two developments. First, the legalisation of some private economic entrepreneurship (the blossoming of cooperatives, usually under the patronage and on the territory of existing Soviet industrial complexes and *kolkhozy*) helped to institutionalise economically interested networks of trust officially. The second was the public development of a nationalist frame of reference to explain success and failure, hardships and difference, first in semi-official, later in official local media outlets. This sense-generating filter was not entirely new – before *perestroika* the normative nationalist discourse had simply rarely left the kitchen and the occasional piece of '*samizdat*'. Going public with nationalist ideology was the domain of those provincial representatives of the intelligentsia, who had been rehearsing this hidden code on their informational island of marginalised dissidence.

What is significant in the above *kolkhoz* incident is that a conflict over which group controls legal (and, probably more relevant, illegal) revenues from two *kolkhozy* was publicly taken up as a national discrimination issue in administratively unconnected entities (the centres of the Autonomous Oblast and the neighbouring Union Republic) and was then connected to fundamental questions of revising administrative borders between Soviet republics.

Hidden transcript into public transcript: dissident nationalists leave their informational island

Discovering the nation in pollution...

> What actually has been the most striking feature of Armenian politics since independence is a lack of ideology rather than ideological differences. Had the survival of African elephants been a popular issue in Armenia, there can be little doubt that the same individuals who formed the Karabakh Committee would have been members of a "Save the Elephants Committee" if this would have given them chances of coming to power. (Simonian 2001: 377)

A common feature of late-Soviet mass movements in the peripheries of the empire was that initially most of them appeared in public as pro-*perestroika* environmentalist movements. This holds true for the first rallies that were organised in Armenia, after details of the ecological problems were published, in Yerevan in summer 1987 up until the first mass demonstrations there on 16 February 1988. Even the above-mentioned demonstration of 17 October 1987, in which about two to four thousand demonstrators raised the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhichevan, had developed as a splinter group from a larger demonstration under ecological banners (Platz 1996: 98).

News – but more often rumours – of violent incidents between Azeri and Armenian individuals, *kolkhozy*, villages or communities in Nagorno-Karabakh and some border regions in Armenia with large Azeri populations were spreading at that time in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Before the end of February 1988 these rumours had not turned into the official transcript of the Armenian movement but remained mostly under the cover of the official ecological motto. As stated above, a situation in which local incidents between individuals or collectives have been interpreted along ethnic lines – independent of the actual background of the concrete conflict – was not new to the kitchen gossip of Armenian and Azeri households. What, indeed, was new in Armenia was the galvanised atmosphere of mobility of a rapidly evolving public with the organisational know-how of the new masters of those masses. This situation in the Armenian capital was in stark contrast to the reality in Baku where no public was fermenting into a movement independent from the organisational potential of official Soviet institutions, yet.

During the last ten days of February 1988 the tide turned and the hidden code of a nation under dire threat went public. The two crucial events, which are usually used as markers of the beginning of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, took place:[9] on 20 January 1988 the Armenian delegates of the Soviet of Nagorno-Karabakh AO (Azeri delegates did not participate) passed a resolution to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the Azerbaijani SSR and Armenian SSR requesting the transfer of the oblast to the Armenian SSR; and between 26 and 29 February a mob rampaged unhindered by Soviet law enforcement agencies through predominantly Armenian inhabited quarters of Sumgait, an industrial city in the vicinity of Baku.[10] On 24 February 1988 a group of organisers of the 'ecology' movement had already reinvented themselves as (first) Karabakh Committee (Jacoby 1998b: 172).[11] On 27 February it had declared a moratorium on demonstrations after assurances from the Politburo in Moscow.[12] Instead, on 4 March 1988 the Karabakh Committee issued a declaration branding the

violence in Sumgait a genocide against the Armenian people and thereby linking it to the genocidal massacres and deportations Armenians suffered during the First World War under the Ottoman Empire (Jacoby 1998b: 180). In Stepanakert on 3 March the Krunk Committee was founded by representatives of the Armenian intelligentsia, the local Soviet and by local patrons (the directors of *kolkhozy* and industry) to coordinate and informally represent the interests of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. This cocktail of newly invented institutions, a prestigious intellectual establishment, a vitalised Soviet institution of democratic representation and influential official patrons from important informal networks quickly developed into an organised formidable adversary to the central control of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) in Nagorno-Karabakh and in Armenia. It proved to have the power and will to reframe existing rules of conflict and, ultimately, withstand and organise sustained violence.

Those last ten days of February resulted in a paradigm shift that rapidly rocked the region and finally the USSR on three different levels:

i) The canon of Armenian historical experience, trained over decades as a hidden transcript of an officially suppressed discourse of national identity among provincial intelligentsia, was breaking into the open discourse of an organised public. The ritualised dogmas of this canon were a) the latent danger of again being subject to genocide at the hands of the Turks (who in this discourse equal Azerbaijanis) and b) the historical experience of being left in the lurch, even betrayed, by a supposedly friendly power (Russia). The programmatic term 'Genocide' was used in a vast variety of connotations: as 'white genocide' or 'white massacre', referring to the repression, assimilation or eviction of Armenians from their (claimed) historical homelands by non-violent means; as 'biological/ecological genocide' referring to the level of pollution caused by Soviet infrastructure in Armenia and, after Sumgait, as physical extinction (Platz 1996: 96-97).
 This formerly hidden discourse of permanent victimisation rapidly developed into the new and mighty normative transcript of the national cause, publicly administered by the Karabakh Committee.

ii) On the official level a taboo had been broken in Stepanakert by formally absolutely legal means: the irrelevant and powerless institution of a local Soviet had, like a zombie, come to life and dared to place a nationalist demand, bypassing (and eventually even 'bringing to heel')[13] parallel local CPSU and executive control (the RAIKOM and IZPOLKOM) against the traditional top-down command line. There had been territorial administrative changes before in the USSR – but always the decisions were cooked up and finally taken by the centres of power. The problem was not of a legal matter – formally, when both the involved Union Republics were in favour of a territorial transfer and the Union Centre had no objections, they were free to do so. The problem was that a local institution which had never been charged with significant power by the centres of Soviet might, took the initiative and thus had indisputably come to life – and no one knew how to put it back to sleep (for the different approaches discussed in the politburo see Gorbachev 1996: 333-340).

iii) Sumgait became the first widely publicised example, in a long list of similar failures to come, in which the Soviet state grossly undermined its very basis: the legitimate

monopoly of violence (and of collective violence in particular). The disintegration of the USSR has shown that the legitimacy of modern statehood not only in Western free-market democracies, essentially rests on two principles: the convincing defence of its monopoly of violence and the implementation or at least facilitation of procedures fit to deal with the conflicting interests of its citizen in a non-violent way on a day-to-day basis. The USSR performed poorly on the level of official procedures and delegated a good part of those functions to informal institutions; the legitimate monopoly of violence, on the other hand, was functional and undisputed. The agony into which the Soviet state was sliding, was a combination of lacking official institutions to deal with publicly ethnicised conflict in a sovereign and calm manner and at the same time (from ignorance, arrogance or outright panic on the part of the central decision-makers) the failure to at least deliver what people had come to rely upon: a strong, decisive but in effect rather neutral central force consistently suppressing the collective use of violence on a local level (with the possible exception of General Lebed's performance in Moldova/Transdnestr). When Soviet law enforcement not only failed to intervene for days during the rampage in Sumgait, but was even widely suspected of having encouraged the violence in order to deliver a warning to Armenians with their unheard of nationalist demands, Soviet legitimate authority exposed itself to a rapid undermining in the eyes of perpetrators and victims alike.

It is no coincidence that it was in Armenia that the interpretation of multifaceted conflict first 'switched' to a radically simplifying nationalist paradigm in public discourse. Following the concept of 'hidden transcripts' developed by James Scott (Scott 1990) for the organisational potential of hidden discourses in oppressed societies,[14] it is shown that behind the curtain of the officially prescribed discourse of '*druzhba narodov*' (friendship of the peoples) most peoples of the USSR practiced some variations of national identity in private space.[15] Not every private discourse on identity has the potential to be a hidden transcript, the potential to function as a code for sudden unified resistance against the official order upon its public expression. In the Armenian case, the first differentiating criterion of hidden national discourse was its level of integration: national belonging and 'Armenianness' were not a question of individual interpretation but an individual obligation in the most ethnically homogenous of the Soviet republics (Platz 1996: 192-197). The second and maybe even more important qualifying criterion, was the normative, internally unquestionable and therefore dogmatic code that connected national identity to the historical experience of genocide. The public redefinition of political and social conflict (on pollution, control of resources, communal violence in another Union Republic) as potential or actual genocide taking place connected to a uniform normative code individually rehearsed in thousands of Armenian kitchens and triggered off a truly national change of public discourse on the world. The physical survival of the nation appeared once again to be at stake and a repetition of the failure of 1916 not to perceive this threat and not to take decisive counter measures in time to head off the threat would be committing the ultimate crime against the nation.[16] 'Any problem connected to Nagorno-Karabakh is connected to the question of the existence of our people' (position paper of the Karabakh committee delivered in summer 1988, quoted by Jacoby 1998b: 265).

On the official discourse level the dominating normative narrative of socialism had been replaced by nationalism among Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia.

Conflict breaking out of its social embedding

The essential breakdown of societies' capacity to deal with conflict in a non-violent way or at least to avoid an escalation of violence does not take place on the level of discourse. It takes place on an institutional level or, more precisely, when conflict loses its social embedding and finds itself re-embedded in institutionalised violence.

The problem with the USSR confronting public reinterpretations of conflict along national fault lines was that the state had not established the rules of a game that was considered taboo by the CPSU (i.e. nationalist demands from a subordinate entity). The institutions formally designed to deal with the conflicting interests of communities on a local level – most prominently the local Soviets with elected representatives from the different professional and ethnic communities – were practically dependent on the decisions taken by their counterparts in the centre and more generally on guidelines transmitted by the local branches of the most powerful hierarchal Soviet institution – the CPSU. Therefore the local Soviets (and for that matter the Soviets in general) were unable to take significant decisions by due, reliable process and were more of a place representing a ritual power generated by other institutions. With opponents of *perestroika* gaining ground in the CPSU, Gorbachev increasingly relied on the popular support organised in the Soviets and therefore cleared the way for reviving those tamed pseudo-parliaments.[17]

After February 1988 the local Soviet in Stepanakert was *de facto* taken over first by the Armenian majority of deputies, then detached from the informal power line connecting it to the RAIKOM and simultaneously connected to the informal, agenda-setting Krunk Committee.[18] Attempts by the Central Committee of the CPSU to regain its local influence by replacing functionaries of the RAIKOM proved unsuccessful.[19] This logic of reactivating dormant, but existing institutions rather than destroying them and inventing new ones was a trait followed on a grander scale some months later in Armenia.[20] Here the powerful informal Karabakh Committee called the shots but left the procedures of the Supreme Soviet unharmed. It implemented its will through existing rules of the game, a practice that – quite like events in the Baltic republics – proved functional in providing for an internally non-violent transition to independent statehood.

In the course of consolidation by nationalist radicalisation, any official or informal institution that might have had a mediating effect thanks to crosscutting ties and interests was brought to heel, driven out, or outright 'nationalised' (including interregional segments of the criminal world and shadow-economy, explicitly targeted by Minister of the Interior Vano Siragedian in 1993-94). An unavoidable by-product of unification by radicalisation were the new fault lines inside the nationalist camp. The pressure on moderate positions in the ranks of the Karabakh Movement increased in the course of their ascent to power. First conflicts appeared between Levon Ter-Petrosian's so-called pragmatism in relations with Turkey and concerning the question of recognition of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and representatives of diaspora-backed positions like the ruling Dashnak party in Stepanakert or co-founder of the Karabakh Movement Vazgen Manukian in Yerevan (Goldenberg 1994: 147-150; Jacoby 1998b: 257-291).[21] Until the end of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh these rifts inside the new Armenian political leadership and even between the, at times, very different interests of

the Armenian state and Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians did not lead to a major political crisis and were kept under the cloak of national cause and unity.

The discourse of existential national urge entertained by urban intellectuals found a sturdy and reliable manifestation in the Karabakh Armenians willing to hold on by all means to the land they lived on. This 'war-nationalism', a mixture of rehearsed nationalist cause and concrete existential exterritorial threat disciplined Armenian politics as long as the war was going on and delayed the infighting between informal networks that was to haunt the country for the rest of the 90s (cf. Iskandaryan 2001; Dudwick 1997: 89-91).

The way in which the binding-power of the official Soviet institutions deteriorated in the capital of Azerbaijan was quite different, though no less significant, for the further development of the conflict. The most visible difference is marked by the fact that

> a) a popular mass movement (that only by July 1989 became known as the Popular Front) emerged only a year after its Armenian counterpart (Croissant 1998: 31) and there was no rapid and all-encompassing switch in public discourse from communism to nationalism, and
> b) the emerging national movement did not succeed in taking over parliament (the Supreme Soviet) and then eventually the government by playing by the rules of existing institutions. It was rather the communist leadership's attempted to control the opposition movement by a combination of concessions and manipulation, like falsifying elections, abolishing institutions (temporarily the Supreme Soviet) and inventing new ones (*Milli Shura*), that lead to uncontrolled change.

If the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict served to integrate national dogma for Armenian politics – a factor that soon even centrally appointed CPSU secretaries had to fall in line with – in Azerbaijan the conflict instead served to gain and lose the highest portfolios on sale in the corridors of power of Baku. Ayaz Mutalibov was installed as First Secretary of the CPSU of the Azerbaijan SSR in the aftermath of the 20 January 1990 military crackdown on the opposition in Baku ordered by Moscow. This change of CPSU leadership was last in a series of general attempts of the Central Committee of the CPSU to keep the situation in Azerbaijan and Armenia under control by well-established means (i.e. by installing new local leaders of the CPSU first in Stepanakert, then in Yerevan and finally in Baku).

Up to this point official Baku, in relations to the Nagorno-Karabakh problem, had followed a script which it seemingly never even came close to controlling and one that was hardly influenced by the official measures taken. As in the case of serious and highly symbolic incidents of inter-communal violence in February 1988 in Sumgait and January 1990 in Baku no matter if and how the authorities in the Azerbaijani capital were involved in providing for actual escalation (Altstadt 1997: 122), the initiative and control of the consequences were never with the authorities. In both cases the Armenian side made 'innovative' administrative moves through decisions taken in the local, respectively Supreme Soviet (in the first case formally requesting the transfer to the Armenian SSR, in the second by the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR deciding to include Nagorno-Karabakh in its budget). The corresponding Azerbaijani institutions in

both incidents officially reacted by condemning the decisions. Right after these decisions, gangs rampaged through the Armenian quarters in Sumgait, and Baku respectively, undisturbed by local law enforcement agencies.

When the centre finally decided to react and sent armed forces into Baku on 20 January 1990, the measure was too late for the remaining Armenian citizens and too heavy handed for the opposition movements to be interpreted as a central state exercising its monopoly of legitimate force to restore order. The move basically prevented the Popular Front from taking over from the CPSU and provided for the implementation of a handpicked new First Secretary - Ayaz Multalibov.

Nowhere and at no time in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict did the central state use its resources decisively and successfully in order to prevent mass expulsion and ethnic cleansing taking place. Even operations that took place in deteriorating situations and under an agenda clearly in line with the core functions of a legitimate state monopoly of violence – such as those to stop violent rioting and plunder in Baku or disarming guerrilla formations north of Nagorno-Karabakh in April-June 1991 – the so-called operation *Kol'tso* (Ring) – the central state authority was seen from all sides more as part of the problem than as a superior and legitimate force (cf. compilation of material on abuses on *Memorial* homepage).

Until the dissolution of the USSR and change in government in Baku the communist leadership in Moscow and in Azerbaijan, while reacting strongly to administrative acts and decisions taken in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, seemed to have had no interest in addressing the fact that parallel to the expulsions of Armenians from cities in Azerbaijan all of the Azerbaijani population of Armenia was driven out. It was the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians who raised this subject by sharply protesting against the resettlement of Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia in the administrative unit to which they laid claim, and on 12 September 1988 a general strike in Nagorno-Karabakh was resumed in connection with this forced transfer of population (Jacoby 1998b: 198). In Azerbaijan the exploitation of this very significant failure of the Soviet state – i.e. protecting minorities against majorities – was left to the propaganda of the opposition groups.

After the installation of Mutalibov, the dynamics of political process in Baku and its relation to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh changed. The heavy-handed and short-lived military occupation of Baku left the legitimacy of central Soviet institutions shattered. Mutalibov's attempts at saving his authority by applying a mixture of concessions to the demands of the opposition while at the same time misusing and manipulating new democratic procedures, further added to the rapid decline of statehood itself. The first multi-party elections to the Supreme Soviet in September 1990, were overshadowed by fraud so obvious, that after only one year the overwhelming victory of Mutalibov's CPSU was *de facto* annulled by the invention of a new consultative body, the *Milli Shura*, which was made up of members of the opposition and the communist majority of the Supreme Soviet (25 members each) and functioned as de-facto 'small' parliament (Altstadt 1997: 124; Goltz 1999: 114). It was a concession of the First Secretary of the CPSU of Azerbaijan to the opposition that in the long-run put the newly elected parliament beyond use. The 'full' parliament was reintroduction with the *Milli Milet* in May 1992 but parliamentary elections did not take place until November 1995 (Altstadt 1997: 124). At the same time – in the aftermath of the August putsch in Moscow that the First Secretary in Azerbaijan allegedly initially backed – Mutalibov left the CPSU and had himself elected as first president of the

independent republic of Azerbaijan in single candidate elections. By contrast to his Armenian counterpart he did not achieve this position following an election to first become speaker of parliament (Supreme Soviet), and then president.

With the state institutions weakened and the opposition excluded from significant responsibility in official institutions and thus confined to the power techniques of a mass protest movement, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict became the single most important toy in the hands of the political struggle between opposition and government in Baku. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict grew to be dominant in Azerbaijan not as a nationalist cause of great urgency unifying the political forces as in Armenia; on the contrary, it was simply the most important tool of political infighting in the capital. In a nearly bloodless coup, Mutalibov was finally overthrown by the Popular Front in May 1992 after he tried, by manipulating parliament procedures, to return to power. His regime had come under increasing pressure after ineptly attempting to cover up the first significant successful and rather ugly[22] military counteroffensive of Armenian forces in Nagorno-Karabakh in late February (Goltz 1999: 117-130; Goldenberg 1994: 153). As an immediate result Mutalibov was forced to resign and temporally cede power to the Speaker of Parliament Yakub Mamedov (nicknamed "Dollar", allegedly for preferring bribes in hard currency in his former job as director of the republic's Medical Institute). During his three months as acting president Azerbaijan managed to loose the strategically crucial and from a military viewpoint unconquerable town of Shusha to the Armenian forces resulting in the opening of the Lachin corridor from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia (Altstadt 1997: 126). However, the real new president, Abulfez Elchibey, elected in chaotic but otherwise undisputed and free elections in June 1992 with nearly sixty per cent of the votes, only a year later fell victim to the same dynamics of un-institutionalised conflict that brought him to the top in the first place. Elchibey's credentials as a nationalist and 'pure' patriot were and remained undisputed. His main problem was that he did not have anything even close to a staff of professional bureaucrats (a lack of professionalism in political administration that extended to himself) at his disposal to run the country (Yunusov 1997: 155-156). Since he was not inclined to make use of the just ousted former communist networks he had to seek new alliances with local and regional strong men. The two most important figures to do the networking were the newly appointed minister of the interior and powerful leader of the paramilitary Grey Wolfs (*Bozkurt*), Iskender Hamidov, and Ministers of Defence, former head of the Military Defence Council of the Popular Front and maths-teacher in real life, Rahim Gaziyev, whom Elchibey inherited from the interim president Yakub Mamedov. The crucial objective was to integrate the various armed groups into a disciplined army (Croissant 1998: 83; cf. Altstadt 1997: 133). In the quest of a middle way between pressure and incentive deals were also struck with local big-men of the *biznesmen-patriot* type like Surat Huseinov, warlord in Ganja and former director of a wool mill in Yevlakh. The problem with these kinds of allies was that they continued to be highly unreliable in the way they conducted (or entirely failed to conduct) the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. In effect, the project of creating an integrated army failed; even the early military success of a large offensive Elchibey ordered on 12 June 1992, right after taking office, has been attributed more to the significant amount of military hardware the leaving Russian army left behind than to organisational improvements (Croissant 1998: 83-84). The year Elchibey stayed on in power ended with devastating defeats of the Azeri forces in Nagorno-Karabakh. When in spring 1993 the Kelbajar corridor between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia was swiftly taken by

Armenian forces while Huseinov, who had pledged to defend the region with his well-armed troops and was ordered to do so, was busy requisitioning the military equipment from the leaving Russian army base in his hometown of Ganja, time was up for Elchibey (Goldenberg 1994: 124-125; Goltz 1999: 345, 357-359). The problem was that on 8 February Huseinov was dismissed from his self-styled position as 'commander of forces of the northern front', coinciding with the sacking of Minister of Defence Gaziyev (Altstadt 1997: 128). But instead of succeeding to call the warlord to order that very *biznesmen-patriot* decided to have his men march on Baku to make sure the people responsible for trying to bring him to heel would be punished. When Elchibey finally called the high-profile Soviet leader Heydar Aliev to the rescue, military operations in Nagorno-Karabakh were conducted by a state that in effect no longer existed.

Physical loss of the state's monopoly of violence

The most obvious aspect of conflict spinning out of control is the state physically losing its monopoly on violence and enforcement. The deterioration of the legitimacy of this functional monopoly has been discussed above as one aspect of the failure of core state institutions. However, without the emergence of organised armed groups challenging the state, conflict does not escalate into civil war.

State control over material and organisational resources of violence are essential assets of statehood and were provided for by the Soviet state. With the sense of security and trust in state capability and willingness to protect its citizen from collective violence fading, Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh and the region of Shaumian to the north started organising self-defence units at a very local level, individual courtyards, tower blocks, or streets; armed with primitive weapons like sticks, knives or hunting rifles. In a situation of mistrust, the lack of state guarantees of security and the lack of reliable information, it is generally impossible for collectives to differentiate between the aggressive potential and the defensive intention of such armed groups (a situation political scientists call a 'security dilemma') and some local Azeri communities reacted accordingly. In other regions, quarters of cities and towns with compact ethnic settlements, the option taken by the minority was virtually everywhere 'exit' rather than 'voice' – Azeris in Armenia and Armenians in all other parts of Azerbaijan left without organising significant resistance and without being protected, backed or organised by any state agency.

Military equipment entered the scene with the emergence of armed gangs in Armenia 'organising' weapons from local police and army units through illegal trading and raids, a process that gained velocity in 1990 and resulted in the declaration of a state of emergency by the Supreme Soviet of Armenia on 29 August 1990 in order to disband the armed groups (Croissant 1998: 38-39; Zverev 1996). These groups had been organised on a nationalist pretext of backing their ethnic brethren in and around Nagorno-Karabakh but soon became a serious problem for internal stability in Armenia (cf. Dudwick 1997: 78, 83) before being more or less successfully disarmed or merged into a the Armenian National Army (ANA), which was the strongest among those groups. At the time of the declaration of independence in September 1991 the ANA as most significant among the groups was a semi-officially institutionalised proto-armed force of the Armenia. The various guerrilla-groups were finally disbanded or absorbed into the official army only after the ceasefire in 1994.

On the Azerbaijani side, police and army units obviously possessed serious weapons from the outset and were – when under local command – taking part with a

strong Azeri bias. However, like the Azeri population in Armenia, the Azeris of Nagorno-Karabakh seem to have relied more on Soviet troops and law enforcement for protection than their Armenian counterparts did. This difference in local organisational resource proofed to be of decisive impact on the conduct and outcome of the war: from the onset the local Karabakh Armenian population was clearly the highly motivated backbone of the fighting while the military action of the opponent was organised by a fluid gathering of Soviet apparatchiks, nationalist intellectuals and *biznesmeny-patrioty* infighting for power in far away Baku (Petrosyan 2000a; Kechichian, Karasik 1995: 62-63).

With diminishing discipline on the side of the official local and central armed forces, weapons became increasingly available also in Azerbaijan to informal armed gangs only nominally under any official command (as in the mentioned cases of the private armies of Surat Huseinov or the *Bozkurt* of Iskender Hamidov). In effect the late Soviet state and the succeeding republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan deteriorated in Nagorno-Karabakh into an armed gang amongst others. After the break-up of the central state, this situation has been characterised by the hesitant and, in effect, unsuccessful attempt in Azerbaijan to form an integrated national army since autumn 1991 and the overall reluctance of Ter-Petrosian in Armenia to embark on transferring the various gangs into an official state army, a process that finally took off in 1992-1993 (Zverev 1996). There may have been a number of reasons for Mutalibov and Ter-Petrosian being less than enthusiastic about establishing an effective and integrated armed force in the brand new states they found themselves governing. One may have been the fear of confrontation with the institution of real firing power – the still deployed former Soviet, then Russian Army. An internal and no less significant reason may have been the intuition of those leaders recognising that it is highly unlikely for 'instant armies' to be loyal to an, in effect, as yet nonexistent state and that it is far from clear that the leaders of those armed forces (particularly if they were Soviet professionals or, worse, nationalist hotheads) would show any personal loyalty to the presidents. If the state is weak, armed forces with a functioning central command can be quite threatening to a fragile political leadership. For Armenia, another factor played a role: officially the country was not involved in the fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh. The situation of having (after initial differences on the practice of raiding before independence) *de facto* control over by far the strongest informal force, the ANA, while abstaining from organising an official force that might get involved and trigger off an interstate war, probably made a lot of sense to the political leadership weary of the long-term goal of international recognition for the Armenian cause.

Finally, with the clashes escalating to warfare including the use of heavy artillery and tanks it was the (former) Soviet Army, pulling out of Azerbaijan, which made supplies available to both sides, certainly not always according to agreement or central control from headquarters in Moscow (Zverev 1996; Malek 2000: 11-13).

The fact that the Armenian 'informal' forces towards the end of the conflict proved much more effective than their 'official' Azeri adversary is also owed to an important organisational advantage (Petrosyan 2000a): both newly independent states had recalled their conscripts and professional soldiers from the (successors to the) Soviet Army. Of the professionals who answered the call, as a rule the Armenians were much higher in rank and 'battle-readiness', because proportionally more Armenians made careers in the Soviet Army than did representatives of Muslim republics. Conscripts of those republics usually served not in combat-units but rather in the

notoriously undisciplined *stroibaty* (construction battalions) (Altstadt 1997: 127). The Azerbaijani defeat was also associated with the fact that professional soldiers and officers proved reluctant to offer their skills under the dubious command and increasing ranks of warlords with no military education whatsoever. In Armenia the situation was different in two regards: as long as the all-encompassing nationalist hype imitated statehood (cf. Iskandaryan 2001) it kept a notion of an urgent common cause alive and internally disciplined the armed gangs. Also as the going got increasingly rough (around 1991/1992) highly qualified officers like '*Commandos*' (Arkadi Ter-Tadevossian) were granted the authority they requested by the *biznesmeny-patrioty*. When the war came to a victorious end, this authority was again taken from the professional soldiers and in many cases they were left offended by their unprofessional colleagues driving Jaguars and Mercedes 600s in the ranks of generals with salaries of around eighty $US a month. It therefore came as no surprise that '*Commandos*' was asked in May 2000 to lead the competitor veteran organisation (UVLS – 'Union of Veterans of the Liberation Struggle'), which was designed to reduce the power of war veterans and war profiteers organised around Yerkrapah[23], founded and lead until his death by Minister of Defence, then Prime Minister Vazgen Sarkisian (Petrosyan 2000b; Ter-Saakyan 2000). '*Commandos*' quit after a few months, arguing that it was impossible to keep the organisation out of politics (Fuller 2000b).

The end of violence

Violence ended with a radical reduction in the complexity of the conflict, which was implemented on the ground: the Armenian side in and around Nagorno-Karabakh achieved maximum gains on the battlefield, including a sizable buffer zone, sealed by a handpicked Line of Contact around a completely ethnically cleansed and physically wrecked territory (Mooradian, Druckman 1999: 723-24). Armenia had ridded itself of all its Azeri population and no Armenian minority was left in Azerbaijan.

Violence stopped because one side won the war over the control of territory and both sides consistently reduced the social complexity of the conflict to a military question of high, electrified fences keeping people, commodities and information apart.[24] Even during the period of violent clashes there was more contact between local commanders and the heads of neighbouring local administrations on both sides than after ceasefire.[25]

The real challenge for the three entities considering themselves states began when they had to embark on institution building without war. It proved to be especially challenging because the war was won or lost respectively, not by disciplined armies but by a motley gathering of entrepreneurs of violence, unprofessional volunteer fighters, nationalist believers and few (though decisive) professional officers and soldiers from the former Soviet army. The returning *biznesmen-patriot* type of 'big men'[26] proved to be the greatest challenge for stabilising post-war state institutions, particularly in the Armenian case where they returned victorious and were conscious of the fact that in any functioning state system their education, abilities and recent personal history of professionalising in violence would, at best, bring them back to till the fields they came from, and at worst they might end up in jail or die a violent death.

In Azerbaijan it took the new political heavyweight Heydar Aliev about a year to get rid of the most ambitious *biznesmen-patriot*, the former Soviet wool 'merchant', unruly warlord and short-lived Prime Minister, Surat Huseinov in October 1994. The destabilising 'Huseinov Factor' stayed for some time in Azerbaijan's internal politics

and only ceased to be a real threat after forces loyal to president Aliev put down a mutiny of special police forces under Rovshan Dzhavadov in March 1995. Some last remnants of the influence of former warlords have kept flaring up, the last one in early 2000 when the local big man Aga Akperov, a pharmacist turned major, was ousted from his position as head of local administration in the Goranboy District, and his son, Colonel Rasim Akperov and commander of an infantry brigade, threatened to overthrow the authorities if his father was not reinstated. The son was arrested on different charges on 9 February 2000, just one day after his father had been sacked by the president (Fuller 2000a).

In Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh it proved much more difficult for a political establishment that did not owe its power directly and solely to the organisation of violence in the war, to regain some influence. Already during the long demise of the Ter-Petrosian regime people like the physical education teacher, Vazgen Sarkisian, founder of the Armenian army and of the politically, economically and militarily extremely influential organisation of veterans (*Yerkrapah*), were in control of vital institutions of the state by means exceeding their official posts (for Sarkisian the minister of defence, and then prime minister).[27] His deputy in the organisation and former lorry driver, Manvel Grigorian, had a notorious reputation as a 'fund raiser' by any means among the directors of factories and former *apparatchik-biznesmeny* in general, who were persuaded to share the burden of building up the armed forces and backing the campaign in Nagorno-Karabakh by donations in cash and in kind. Grigorian succeeded Sarkisian as acting leader of *Yerkrapah* (the deceased Sarkisian was elected eternal president) and became deputy minister of defence (Danielyan, Khachatrian, Melkumian 2000). The hybrid official and informal network of power around Vazgen Sarkisian dramatically ceded influence to the new Karabakhian key leaders of Armenia – President Kocharian (the former 'president' of Nagorno-Karabakh) and Minister of National Security, then Minister of Defence Serzh Sarkisian – only after he was killed together with five other leading politicians, two members of parliament and one journalist in the massacre in the Armenian parliament on 27 October 1999.

The internal political situation in Nagorno-Karabakh resembles Armenia on a smaller scale. This is owed to the fact that both political entities, though officially separate, (Nagorno-Karabakh is not even recognised as a sovereign state by Armenia), are informally intrinsically connected and maintain interdependent relations (Panossian 2001). The budget of Nagorno-Karabakh is almost entirely secured by Armenia. Their armed forces are closely related and in part integrated, including both command and conscript levels. Karabakhians that need to travel abroad receive passports of the Armenian republic. From the very beginning these relations, as obvious as they may be, have never been fully officially admitted and have always taken place on an informal level.

The most important test for the professional politicians (professional in that they are not essentially connected in their power to the legacy of war) thus far was reducing the influence of the *biznesmeny-patrioty* turned politicians and replacing the high-ranking warlords in the army with professional soldiers. Samvel Babayan was removed from his posts as Minister for Defence in June 1999, and on 17 December 1999 with the hands-on backing of the Ministry of Defence from Yerevan also as Supreme Commander of the armed forces of the would-be state (Khachatrian, Atanesian 1999). His replacement was Lt Gen Seyran Oganyan, a professional soldier who received a good part of his professional training at the Military Academy in Baku. On 22 March

2000 the president of the statelet, Arkadi Gukasian, was seriously wounded in an attempt on his life. This assassination attempt was immediately linked to Samvel Babayan and he, his clan in part and his associates (altogether around thirty people) were arrested in the days following the incident. The authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh successfully used the possibility to demolish the 'system Babayan' and bring the assets of this system under their own control, including the relevant segments of the army loyal to their former commander and decorated hero of the Karabakh war. To this end, just like in Armenia after the sudden and violent death of 'big man' Vasgen Sarkisian, a new veteran organisation was set up in competition with the powerful *Yerkrapah*, controlled by popular war heroes considered loyal to the political leadership.

To gain and keep control over the lower ranks and conscripts as well, has never been an easy task in post-Soviet armies in general and in the region in particular: crucial authority in the units is exercised by an institution of informal authorities in principle inherited from the Soviet Army but dyed with a particular underworld understanding of honour and aspects of the idealised 'big men' of the warlord system of the civil war (cf. Snark 2000). The widespread and highly institutionalised informal substructure of authority among the conscripts in the Soviet Army was called '*dedovshchina*' (Lewada 1993: 126-139). It has proved difficult to eliminate the institution in the post-Soviet armies and the high rate of non-combat deaths in Armenia and Azerbaijan are to a large extend attributed to the fact that this 'school of cruelty', as it was called by the sociologist Jurij Lewada, survived in one form or other (Ali 2001; Snark 2000). In Armenia the authorities of this system are now called 'observer' instead of the '*ded*' (grandpa) of the '*dedovshchina*' and are exercising authority that also the officers are unable to ignore. Often officers have to negotiate their orders with or via the informal authorities. For ordinary soldiers to survive this parallel system of command physically unharmed they (or their family) either have to bribe official and unofficial authorities (these payments may be outright extortion from the families of recruits) or to prove themselves as 'good lads', capable of withstanding and applying violence. Random shootings often occur because of peer pressure and inner-group violence in those small units of directly associated young men.

Paying bribes or using relatives (doctors, military ranks) to avoid service was common practise not only in the Transcaucasian republics in the late Soviet period. The extortion of money seems to be a new phenomenon, though, connected to the fundraising practise of the Karabakh war.[28]

The situation in the Azerbaijani forces seems to be different insofar as the official authorities (officers, commanders) managed to 'take over' the financially interesting part of the informal system of authority, not to abandon it but to exploit it materially for their own benefit.[29]

Endnote: Farewell to arms

The peace process – or the re-institutionalisation of non-violent conflict as a norm – has been more off than on ever since violence came to an end. This process, loosely equipped with an international diplomatic toolbox called the Minsk Process in the framework of the OSCE, is influenced by a number of factors on the ground, factors intimately connected with the process of conflict escalation and the way violence came to an end.

From the perspective of the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders involved, there has been an informal timeframe pending over the principle chances for peace. On the

one hand a political decision maker must feel confident enough at home that he politically, or even physically, will survive a deal based on mutual compromises. This situation has never been fully achieved in Armenia and Karabakh ever since they reached their objectives on the battlefield. Some observers even recon that it is not in the interest of the present (Karabakh) leadership of the Republic Armenia to strike any deal because only the situation of 'no war, no peace' guarantees their power (cf. Shakhnazaryan 2001). On the other hand the deal has to be done before age, health, the constitution or poorly manipulated democratic elections force a leader capable of delivering a peace deal out of office and trigger a race for power and the resources of competing networks that may well paralyse or even destabilise the state for an unforeseeable period. As stability in Azerbaijan depends on a single person, the age and health of Heydar Aliev are the core variables in Azerbaijani politics.[30] The question of striking a peace deal including painful compromises in Azerbaijan has not so much been a question of whether Aliev could deliver; it is more a question of how long he will still be around to deliver and connected to this, of how long a deal guaranteed in effect not by a state, but by a strong patrimonial network with ailing super-patron, can last.

Both states, Armenia and Azerbaijan, are states with decisive institutional weaknesses even though they present themselves as authoritative states (and often are perceived even by their citizens as authoritarian).[31] The institutions and procedures defining statehood have in effect been taken over by informal pressure groups, networks and institutions that are not taken into account by the way the state is formally constituted. The fact that influential patrons occupy key positions in the state and keep services to some degree functioning, conceals to some extent the absence of a *reson d'etat*. It conceals a situation in which the official part of the state is run in many cases as a non-profit organisation, a noble NGO-engagement of *apparatchiki-biznesmeny* turned *biznesmeny-patrioty* pursuing network-interests rather than common or national interests.

Notes

1   The level of narratives and geopolitical circumscription in Armenia is explicitly targeted by Volker Jacoby, narratives and making sense of change by the anthropologists Stephanie Platz and Nora Dudwick (Jacoby 1998b; Platz 1996; Dudwick 1994). All three dissertations are excellent first-hand accounts of Armenian society in the late 1980s and early 1990s respectively. Engaged journalists and scholars may take a less critically conscious approach to the view of the world from within (e.g. Chorbajian, Donabedian, Mutafian 1994; Mamedova 1995; Soljan 1995). Notable exceptions to this are the few first-hand accounts by journalists who stayed for a long period of time in the region and are, for some part, describing social processes rather than discourses on processes (e.g. Goldenberg 1994; Goltz 1999).

2   An obvious example would be the initially unaccounted for and later admitted Russian weapons delivery amounting to about one billion $US to Armenia 1993-96 (Malek 2000: 11-13); more general but often quoted topics are US oil interest in assumed but for the larger part not yet proven Azerbaijani oil reserves and ambitions pipeline projects bypassing Russia (Lieven 1999-2000); also last but not least the

radicalising factor of Armenian diaspora influence on the interpretation of conflict and (long decreasing) financial support.

3   Scheffler 1995 convincingly makes the point that this strategy of unifying by force is always ambivalent: a violent claim to total identification with a group always creates lines of division, uncompromisingly separating 'others' (like traitors, unbelievers, dissidents and the like) outside and inside the defined group. In situations where expectations of decisive gains (e.g. in the case of administrative privileges) or losses (e.g. in the case of administrative discrimination or even suppression) are not formally connected to the way a person defines their identity, people do not seem to care too much about a limiting definiteness in defining their belonging. Choice is radically limited as soon as people are being convinced that they will not be able to master their everyday life if they will not unambiguously define their identity.

4   Different from the first two anonymous terms widely used in the USSR the latter two have 'name-tags' attached to them: economy of shortages was introduced by Kornai 1980 and the concept of the administrative market by Kordonskii 1995.

5   For an extensive portrait of the patronage and parallel networking in Soviet Azerbaijan see Willerton 1992.

6   See for example Kechichian, Karasik 1995. In social anthropology the term 'clan' usually refers to a group of people defining themselves by a notion of common decent, that is by an emic concept of extended kinship, usually drawing on a mythical common ancestor.

7   In the case of, for example, the often quoted Nakhichivanian 'clan' of Heydar Aliev (Altstadt 1997: 142; Kechichian, Karasik 1995: 60-61) as important power-base for his political career, the question of breaching ethnic or religious borders does not arise since the point of territorial reference is, in an ethnic sense, homogeneous.

8   Katherine Verdery links the concept of 'economy of shortages' in her case study of Romania directly to ethno-nationalism, rather than treating it as a by-product; her view is concentrating more on 'whom to favour' with deficit goods than on 'whom to trust' with illegal activity (Verdery 1993: 173-75); the latter seems much more important for the larger-scale and longer-term business relations the *apparatchiki-biznesmeny* in the Caucasus were seeking.

9   Sometimes cited by Karabakh Armenians as the first deadly incident but neglected here (for lack of general symbolic weight) is the clash between Armenian and Azerbaijani demonstrators close to Askeran (Nagorno-Karabakh AO) on 22-23 February 1988 that resulted in the death of two Azeri demonstrators and fifty people were injured on both sides; the Armenian version maintains that a primitively armed Azeri mob marched on Askeran and Armenians defended their settlement.

10 According to the final official account thirty-two people were killed, six of them Azeris, the remaining Armenians (Jacoby 1998b: 178).

11 This first committee, dominated by activists with a explicit irredentist nationalist agenda also in relations to Turkey, was replaced in May/June by the group of leaders that became known as 'The' Karabakh Committee and founding fathers of the Armenian National Movement (ANM) (see Shakhnazaryan 2000; cf. Dudwick 1997: 78-79). The new committee put considerable effort into separating the general ideological issue of '*Hai Dat*' (the Armenian cause) from the struggle in Karabakh.

12 The events have been reconstructed here drawing on detailed accounts of Jacoby 1998b, Platz 1996, Croissant 1998 and, in some cases, interviews with eyewitnesses of that time, conducted in 1996 and 2001 by the author.

13 Only one day after the local Soviet placed its request on transfer of the AO, the OBKOM of the CP in Stepanakert agreed overwhelmingly (80/10) to the resolution. Informal local pressure and incentives proved to be stronger than the attempts of the Central Committee in Moscow to reign in their comrades in the outpost.

14 James Scott focuses his discussion on the conditions of development of hidden transcripts on the part of the weak and powerless (Scott 1990). According to Scott hidden transcripts are identity exercises or discourses of power (-lessness) of the weak behind the curtain of the official discourse of power (public transcript). Hidden transcripts may serve as an unrecognised breeding ground for mostly passive resistance. Scott considers open resistance to be rarely successful over longer periods of time. However, the relevant case here, is not only a hidden transcript going public but also being successful and turning into the next dogmatic public transcript to stay.

15 One prominent earlier outbreak took place on 24 April 1965 in Yerevan in the realm of semi-approved mass demonstrations about the fiftieth anniversary of genocide (Goldenberg 1994: 139).

16 The most important accusation against the Dashnak party was that they missed the opportunity to organise effective resistance by trying to reach agreement with the demands of the Ottoman, then Young-Turk government of that time; this devastating criticism of being partly responsible for the genocide of ones own people by failing to engage in civil war was reactivated in the show-down between the Dashnak party and Levon Ter-Petrosian in late 1994 that ended with the (temporary) ban of this important Armenian party of the diaspora in December of that year (Jacoby 1998b: 287).

17 On 15 September 2000 in an interview with the BBCs Tim Sebastian, Gorbachev regretted (again) not having cooperated with local movements more as an alternative to the unreformed CPSU.

18 On 23 March 1988 'Krunk' was banned by the authorities, but as an alternative Karabakh Armenians organised a 'Council of Directors of Enterprises'. Krunk and the Council of Directors of Enterprises were banned between 12 January and 28 November 1989, in the period of central administration of the Special Administrative Committee.

19 Most importantly the replacement of the First Secretary Boris Kevorkov with Henrik Pogosian on the initiative of the Politburo in Moscow was executed via an

especially founded PARTAKTIV (special task force of the CPSU) in Nagorno-Karabakh (25 February 1988).

20 The same futile attempt to regain the central initiative occurred some months later in Yerevan, when the Central Committee decided to replace Karen Demirchian with Suren Harutyunian as First Secretary of the CPSU in Yerevan.

21 For a critical assessment of an oversimplifying division taken by former members of the Ter-Petrosian government in pragmatists (like Ter-Petrosian) and ideologists or hardliners (like the early Kocharian or Manukian) see Simonian 2001. To him pragmatism or ideology in Armenia is not an opposing conviction but rather a situative strategy of accessing power.

22 The strategically important village of Khochaly was taken on 25 February 1992, in an operation that left a large number of civilians dead.

23 Yerkrapah was originally founded as unpolitical association of Karabakh war veterans but quickly developed into the most powerful informal organisation capable of turning the fortunes of ministers and even presidents (as in the case of the ousting of Levon Ter-Petrosian in 1997/98) and claiming the last say in any peace-deal (Seyranian, Melkumian, Zakarian 2000). The influence of Yerkrapah has been diminishing after the death of their paramount founding father and leader Vazgen Sarkisian.

24 This radical segregation is implemented only at the official level – informal exchanges do take place on small scale, e.g. some Azerbaijani products are available in Stepanakert; more significant is the semi-official interregional market in Sadakhlo, a region in Georgia inhabited mainly by Azeris and bordering Armenia where business mainly takes place between Armenians and Azeris (de Waal 2000).

25 This was a frequent complaint of local administration and commanders in conversations during visits of the vicinity of the Line of Contact during 2000, who pointed out that it was easer to settle common local problems during conflict than after; compare Mooradian, Druckman 1999: 725).

26 For the classic classification of the political entrepreneur, securing influence by controlling violence and the redistribution of goods, called the 'big man' of non-state-societies see Sahlins 1963 and Strathern 1991.

27 For an insight into the most important patrons of powerful networks around the mid-1990s see Dudwick 1997: 90-91.

28 Information on this subject is, to best of the author's knowledge, scarce (cf. Dudwick 1997: 91 on the amounts to be paid for exemption of active service in Armenia). The author's information is therefore not representative – it was gathered in a number of informal conversations with (former and active) conscripts and their families. It is a fact, though, that even international employers in negotiating the salary with their local staff are sometimes taking these considerable and regularly paid 'health-insurance taxes' into consideration.

29 As a Baku based officer related to the author off the record in late 2000, referring to the better-off field commanders: 'Do you believe they would allow anyone else to collect money from their soldiers?'.

30 In September 2000 Aliev's health-politics became known as the 'Cleveland games' when the president chose to unexpectedly for the public and, as it seemed, most of his own team, prolong his US visit and have a check-up in a favourite Cleveland hospital. When fresh pictures were absent for some days and a Russian newspaper reported the death of Aliev even the diplomatic corps was getting a little nervous. A well informed high-ranking diplomat related to the author that it is possible that only the Minister of Defence, Head of Presidential Administration and Aliev's son knew exactly what was going on, in order to enable the President to check on the loyalty and faith of the rest of his men (cf. Lelyveld 2000).

31 Commenting on the preoccupation of international observers with formal and rather superficial indicators of democratisation Nora Dudwick observes for Armenia: '[…] for its own citizens, life in Armenia has become a disturbing mixture of chaos and authoritarianism' (Dudwick 1997: 69). This assessment would be as accurate for the situation in Azerbaijan with the qualification that the Azerbaijani Ministry of Foreign Affairs is putting less effort and resources into selling a story of genuine democratic achievements to western politicians and observers.

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