Franziska Smolnik

Secessionist Rule

Protracted Conflict and Configurations of Non-state Authority

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Secessionist Rule

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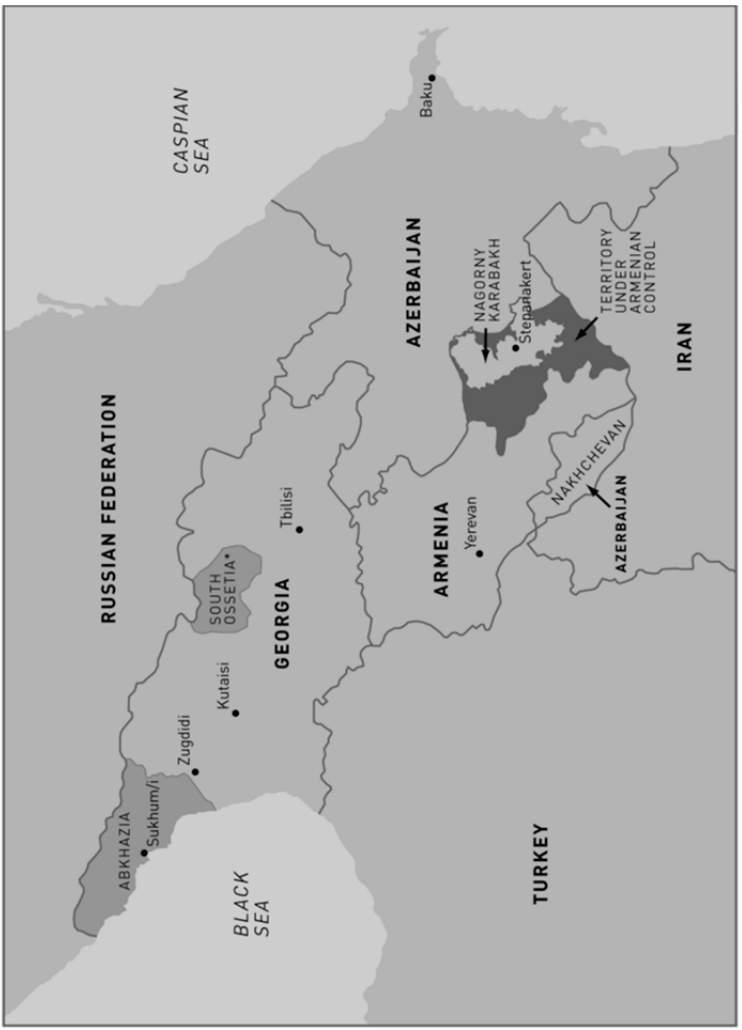
Map 1: The South Caucasus[1]



1 Taken from the website of Conciliation Resources (http://www.c-r.org/our-work/south-caucasus). Since borders in the South Caucasus are contested, all maps included in this book serve but illustrative purposes. They explicitly do not imply any claims on legal status or delimitation of territorial boundaries. Their labels may not correspond to the geographical terminology used here.

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1 Introduction

To adopt the words of Jean-François Bayart (Bayart 2000, 229–30), the South Caucasus

> "political societies are duplicated between, on the one hand, a pays légal, a legal structure, which is the focus of attention for multilateral donors and Western states, and on the other hand, a pays réel where real power is wielded".

This research focuses on the *pays réel*, on political authority beyond or convoluted with the trappings of legal-rational bureaucracy. In the cases that lie at the heart of this study the situation, however, is still more complex: Officially, a *pays légal* does not exist. While the South Caucasus self-proclaimed but internationally (largely) unrecognized states Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh exist *de facto*, they do not *de jure*.

1.1 *De facto* state or rebel region?

Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh constituted autonomous entities within the federal framework of the Soviet Union. The Autonomous Region of Nagorno-Karabakh with an ethnic Armenian majority was integrated in the Union Republic of Azerbaijan; the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia with its Abkhaz titular nation was located within the confines of the Union Republic of Georgia.[1] In the context of the Soviet demise, both in the Union Republics and the subordinated autonomous entities movements

1 I use '(the) Abkhaz' to refer to the titular ethnic group in Abkhazia. In contrast, I employ the notion 'Abkhazian' when referring to the entity as such. I use the notion '(Nagorno) Karabakh Armenian' to separate the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh from those of the Republic of Armenia or the Diaspora as well as, in particular when referring to the Soviet period, to distinguish them from the (now displaced) Azerbaijani population of the region.

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for independence emerged, which came into conflict with one another: Georgia's agenda conflicted with the striving of the Abkhaz for independence; the secessionist aspirations of Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenians conflicted with the Azerbaijani national project.[2] Ultimately, these contradicting trajectories led to open warfare. Large-scale hostilities were ended by ceasefire agreements in the mid-1990s, yet, the violent conflicts between 'secessionist entities' and 'metropolitan states' have been persistent and peace agreements remain outstanding. Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia embarked upon developing separate institutions and declared themselves independent. Until today, however, their status remains in limbo. The former is not recognized by any country world-wide; the independence of the latter was officially endorsed by Russia and a couple of smaller states in the aftermath of the *Russian-Georgian War* of 2008, but comprehensive recognition is lacking.

The secessionists have sought to justify their position by stressing the right to self-determination. While except for the context of de-colonization, this principle has been construed as 'internal self-determination' within an existing state in form of cultural and ethnic rights, representtatives of Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh have claimed a territorial dimension. They have focused on 'external self-determination' and interpreted it as a right to secession.[3] Self-determination, however, collides with another central principle of international law, that of territorial integrity. The 'metropolitan states' Georgia and Azerbaijan have (largely) successfully enforced the latter's supremacy. The great majority of states has withheld recognition and thus corroborated the "sanctity of recognized boundaries" (Pegg 2004, 36). The literature on secession differentiates between successful and unsuccessful ones: Either independence of the secessionist entity is endorsed by other states or international recognition is not extended (cf. Pavković and Radan 2007, 5). From such a perspective the secessions of Abkhazia and even more so Nagorno-Karabakh have been unsuccessful. *De jure* the territories they claim belong to the Republics of Georgia and Azerbaijan. Yet, lack of juridical statehood notwithstanding, *de facto* control over a particular territory and population for over two

2 The Georgian national movement also conflicted with the striving for independence of South Ossetia. This third South Caucasus *de facto* state is not dealt with in this study, however.

3 On the issue of self-determination, cf. Borgen 2007; Pavković and Radan 2007, 19pp.

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decades, the development of political institutions, and the claim to independent sovereignty challenge the picture of failed secession.

The resulting ambiguity has qualified Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh as unrecognized states.[4] Further notions used to address the entities reflect this duality. Alongside unrecognized state, the term *de facto* state is prevalent; somewhat less common is the notion of 'informal state'. After Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the third South Caucasus *de facto* state, the term partially/partly recognized state has gained in significance.[5] Others refer to the entities as quasi-states, para-states, or pseudo-states. These terms are more contested, however, as they are equally employed to address recognized states that scholars and peace-building practitioners have classified as 'failed', that is, states that possess external sovereignty but are considered to lack internal state capacity.[6] Not all notions focus on a lack of recognition combined with empirical statehood, though. Others, such as secessionist entity, renegade or breakaway region, put emphasis on the challenged territorial integrity of the parent states and thus do not imply 'creation' but disintegration. Terms such as warlord republic or rebel territory evoke more negative connotations and indicate illegitimacy and lack of order.[7] Similarly to widespread images of the entities such as 'black holes', which for long have been also prominent in academia, these notions reflect the violent formation of

4 According to Caspersen (2012, 11) entities constitute unrecognized states if they meet the following criteria: *De facto* independence, intention to further develop empirical statehood and expression of legitimacy by its authorities, pursued yet unachieved international recognition, and a minimum existence of two years. Kingston and Spears (2004) introduce the notion states-within-state. It differs from the above and similar definitions, however, in that the non-state entities do not necessarily have to pursue recognized sovereignty.

5 For a discussion of the term '*de facto* state', cf. Lynch 2004, 15pp; for a delimitation of the term 'unrecognized state', cf. Caspersen 2012, 8pp; on 'informal state', cf. Isachenko 2012, 19; for a legal perspective on the term '*de facto* regime', cf. Borgen 2007. Harvey (2010, 188pp) decidedly criticizes the notion '*de facto* state' for its politicized sub-text – a critique that basically extends to all concepts that include the term 'state'. According to him, it either rather reflects the secessionists' rhetorical ambitions than political reality or it readily assumes the objective of secession and external sovereignty, without that being necessarily the case. He therefore introduces the notion 'unrecognized entity' as a term with less political baggage.

6 Cf. Kolstø 2006, 723; for a definition of quasi-state, cf. Jackson 1990, 21; on para-states, cf. Klute and Trotha (2004, 110).

7 Both used by King 2007; cf. also Stanislawski 2008. For a general overview on terminology, cf. Steinsdorff and Fruhstorfer 2012, 118.

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Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh. In policy circles, too, the secessionist projects have been predominantly considered in terms of the potential of a re-escalation into large-scale war. Accordingly, policy-makers have treated the unrecognized entities as security risks for the South Caucasus but also with respect to stability of the wider region such as the European Union (cf. European Council 2003, 2008).

1.2 Unresolved conflict

As in the majority of secessions, the (*de facto*) ones of Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh have been violent. Open warfare in the early 1990s caused thousands of deaths, hundreds of thousands of people were and remain displaced; damage to livelihood opportunities was immense. The signing of ceasefires ended large-scale hostilities. Yet, while the mode of violent conflict changed, the conflicts have been persistent. In the case of the conflict on Nagorno-Karabakh, the post-ceasefire period is charaterized by static warfare at the heavily fortified *line of contact* that separates the conflict parties and more recently also at the state border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Even though the name *line of contact* may indicate otherwise, contact between the populations has been basically reduced to zero. In the case of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, the ceasefire agreement entailed the deployment of a peacekeeping force and the establishment of a demilitarized zone. In particular until the *August War* of 2008, the *administrative boundary line* between Abkhazia and Georgia 'proper' was open for crossing. The development of fortifications with combat-ready armies facing each other as in the former case has thus been prevented. Instead, the conflict has been manifest in a highly volatile situation, particularly in the Abkhaz-claimed area adjacent to the *administrative boundary line*, which is home to the majority of Abkhazia's ethnic Georgian population. Despite a constant exchange of sniper-fire in the conflict on Nagorno-Karabakh, respectively a continuing precarious situation on the ground in the Georgian-Abkhazian case, prominent conflict databases that operate with quantitative definitions of violent conflict largely do not capture the South Caucasus conflicts in their post-ceasefire periods. According to their prime indicator, the number of battle-related deaths, the level of physical violence is too low to include them. For most of the post-ceasefire periods, indeed,

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severe escalations or a renewed outbreak of open warfare has been avoided. One central assumption of this research, however, is that the exclusive emphasis placed on direct physical violence may only grasp one particular dimension of violent conflict. Especially for capturing prolonged conflicts, an understanding of violent conflict that rests solely on the number of battle-caused casualties is too narrow and therefore inadequate. Qualitative approaches to violent conflict, in contrast, also channel attention to mediate effects and a symbolic dimension of violence as well as to how violent conflict is embedded in local orders of knowledge. In line with such qualitative conceptualizations, this research approaches the violent conflicts on Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh through the prism of social condition (cf. also Lubkemann 2008; Richards 2005).

1.3 Research interest

Qualitative approaches to violent conflict distinguish themselves from quantitative ones through a more inclusive analytical lens. At the same time, they reflect a significant departure from previous assessments, prevalent in particular in political science and International Relations (IR), that (intra-state) violent conflict represents nothing but destruction. More recently, one strand of research has turned to considering the social condition of violent conflict as situated on one continuum with the social condition of peace. Instead of assuming breakdown, it is the social condition of violent conflict against which social processes unfold and social transformation takes place. While still under-developed, such a re-orientation in the social sciences opened up avenues to explore those alternative social, economic, or political (non-state) orders that emerge in areas affected by violent conflict (cf. Duffield 1998). Despite a recent increase of such analyses, notably relations between violent (intra-state) conflict and political order have thus far received insufficient attention (cf. Kalyvas, Shapiro, and Masoud 2008). Widely accepted presuppositions that equate violent conflict with disorder have certainly constrained the exploration of alternative political orders. In addition, such investigations have been inhibited by the prevalent nexus in political science and IR that links political authority with the ideal-type of the modern Western (nation) state. This general trend is echoed by research on the South Caucasus *de facto*

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states. Long neglected, these, too, have only in recent years been 'discovered' by social science scholars. Such a shift of attention has only selectively entailed a reflection on the implications of the ongoing violent conflicts for social processes within the entities, however, and the breakaway regions, too, have been predominantly approached with concepts that reflect liberal democracy and the Weberian bureaucratic ideal-type.

This research ties into the limited, albeit important theoretical discussion on (inter-)relations between (political) order and violent conflict and adds to the small but growing literature that engages with the South Caucasus unrecognized entities. The key interest is to explore the organization and (re-)production of political authority in conditions of violent conflict.[8] The *de facto* states Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh in their post-ceasefire periods constitute the empirical basis.

The disputed status of the entities and their emergence from secession provides the general background of such an investigation. Aspects of (incomeplete) institution-building and (flawed) democratization, which the literature on internal dynamics of the unrecognized states has particularly reflected upon, are accordingly touched upon as well. Yet, even though this research may deepen our knowledge of these and related issues, the combination of context-sensitive concepts to capture political authority with unorthodox approaches from the field of conflict research promoted here particularly aims at generating strongly empirically-grounded theoretical insight that adds to an emerging (political) sociology of violent conflict.

1.4 Composition

The book begins with a literature review (chapter 2) that presents both the state of theoretical reflection on (inter-)relations between political order and violent (intrastate) conflict as well as on the state of research on the

8 I use authority as the English equivalent to the German sociological notion of *Herrschaft* (accordingly: political authority as *politische Herrschaft*). 'Rule' and 'domination' are considered synonyms to authority and used interchangeably throughout the book (on the difficulty of translation, cf.Beetham 1991). The analytical concept of authority (as well as the related notion of legitimacy) may be applied to both state and non-state contexts and does not imply any judgment on the contested legal status of the here analyzed entities.

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South Caucasus unrecognized entities. Reflecting upon achievements as well as shortcomings of these two fields, I formulate the central research question that aims at yielding added value on both an empirical and theoretical level. In the following chapter on the conflicts on Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh (chapter 3) I introduce the empirical cases. I trace the pre-histories of both secessionist entities and I outline the violent conflicts in their pre-and post-ceasefire periods. This descriptive introduction is complemented by a theoretical discussion where I contrast quantitative with qualitative perspectives on violent conflict. I argue that the latter offers a more comprehensive and also more suitable approach. While this chapter presents the conceptualization of violent conflict as social condition, which constitutes the overall angle of the research, chapter 4 develops a heuristic-conceptual framework to explore political authority and takes up the issue of implementation. Notably Bourdieu's notions of field of power and capital (resources) constitute the conceptual linchpins of the analysis. Following Bourdieu, I conceive of societies as being structured by the unequal distribution of different as well as differently valued resources and a corresponding division of actors into dominant and dominated. It is the field of power where dominant actors express their differently justified claims to rule and defend these against those of their competitors. Legal-rational bureaucracy, or here the *de facto pays légal*, may provide actors influential resources and effective strategies of self-justification. Yet, this is not necessarily and not exclusively the case. The Bourdieu-informed approach thus challenges taken-for-granted understandings of legal-rational rule, for here the '*(de facto)* state' may be one authority claim among several others. Such a flexible perspective, the attempt to spotlight the fields of power of Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh, allows me to generate context-specific knowledge of political authority in the conflict-affected entities. I close the chapter by outlining the interpretive-qualitative perspective, introducing in particular the comparative interpretive case-study method and grounded theory applied in this research. Moreover, both for Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh I discuss the selection of each three crisis situations for in-depth investigation. The analysis of controversies in particular lends themselves to my research objective, since these are likely to bring power distributions to the surface.

In the empirical chapters (5 and 6) I present snapshots of the fields of power of Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Each chapter comprises an introduction to the case, an outline of the field of power based on the

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analysis of each three episodes, and a discussion of changes to the fields of power over time. The empirical analysis reveals that both explored breakaways have engaged in state-building efforts. They have developed politico-administrative institutions separate from their 'metropolitan states' which have emulated the blueprint of the democratic, legal-rational state. Yet, in neither Abkhazia nor Nagorno-Karabakh impersonal, bureaucratic rule has conclusively taken root. While the *de facto* state structures have provided the struggle for political power within the contested regions with a particular framework and political leadership positions have been competed for, political power has not been administered by formal procedures and institutions only. Rather, alongside engaging the *de facto* state as a claim to (local) domination, actors in both entities have employed different forms of capital and a variety of self-justifications to secure political power. These alternatives have not always conformed to legal-rational rule and in particular the persistent violent conflicts have been important for actors' empowerment and disempowerment. 'Conflict-related' assets make up one of each four umbrella categories that classify effective resources and strategies in Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh. While on the level of individual assets differences between the cases exist, the established categories show considerable overlap: In the case of the latter, further categories are 'the *de facto* state structures and Soviet legacies', "external' support', as well as 'social relations and social networks'. In the former, the resources and strategies of dominant actors can be further linked to 'the *de facto* state structures and Soviet legacies', 'Abkhaz 'traditional' or informal institutions', and also "external' support'. A comparative and theoretical discussion of my findings (chapter 7) demonstrates that even though in the two cases the exertion and experience of physical violence has been contained and violent conflict has been differently manifest at the respective 'frontlines', the conflicts have influenced the distribution and valuation of resources as well as its justification in both entities. The Bourdieu-informed approach is thus not only fruitful for shedding light on the (*de facto*) *pays réel* but at the same time it lays bare the protractedness of the violent conflicts by revealing their entrenchment in the organization and (re-)production of political authority. Indeed, this entrenchment lets me suggest that violent conflict, at the least the conflict divide, is itself (discursively) reproduced. I conclude this book (chapter 8) with recapitulating and critically reviewing my findings. I indicate their transferability to other regions and beyond the particular phenomena of *de facto* states and

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outline promising avenues for future research. Lastly, I summarize added value of my findings on both a theoretical and empirical level as well as possible benefit for policy-makers.

1.5 On terminology

The contested nature of Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh is not only reflected in the different notions used to address the entities. Terminology in general constitutes a lexical minefield. I wish to make clear from the outset that my choice of terminology is guided by pragmatic concerns only. It is informed by those approaches common in the respective scientific literature and the language used in reports by international NGOs working in and on the region. Explicitly my choice does not entail any claim on the legal status of Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

With respect to terminology three main points merit clarification: The use of geographical names, references to features of empirical statehood, and foreign language transliteration. First, place names in Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh are highly disputed. Commonly, for each entity both Georgian and Abkhaz, respectively Azerbaijani and Armenian versions exist. While the former stress *de jure* control of the 'metropolitan states' over the regions, the latter reflect the claim of the unrecognized entities on these territories, which they (largely) control *de facto*. In the case of Abkhazia, Georgian and Abkhaz versions relate to districts and cities that for the most part have not changed from Soviet to post-Soviet times. In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh the situation is more complicated. The Armenian capture of Azerbaijani territory, which during Soviet times lay outside the confines of the Autonomous Region of Nagorno-Karabakh as well as district reforms and renaming of places, respectively distinct transliteration of names implemented by both sides have rendered comparisons difficult (cf. Rowland 2004; Broers and Toal 2013).[9] Given that for Abkhazia Georgian and Abkhaz names refer to the same localities,

9 As noted by Saparov (2012, 283): "After the conflict of the 1990s both sides renamed the 'enemy' toponyms in the disputed area (…) and as a result it became almost impossible to understand the location of towns and villages. We now have four layers of place-names in the disputed territory: those of the Tsarist era were replaced by Soviet toponyms and two layers of post-conflict Armenian and Azerbaijani place-names."

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I use both variants of geographical names for this case. This does not obstruct reading much as the Georgian version generally differs only in one additional letter. Accordingly, I write Sukhum/i for the 'capital' of Abkhazia or of the Gal/i region. In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh correlations between Azerbaijani and Armenian versions are far more difficult to draw. Given this difficulty as well as my research focus on the *de facto* state I have adopted a more flexible handling. When first mentioned, I introduce the Azerbaijani names alongside the Armenian versions. Yet, I use Stepanakert when referring to the 'capital' of Nagorno-Karabakh, its name also during the Soviet period, instead of the Azerbaijani version Khankendi, which also was in use in the pre-Soviet period. I use both variants in Shusha/i, however, Nagorno-Karabakh's historical capital, which during the Soviet time was predominantly Azerbaijani populated. Lastly, I keep the Soviet era names when referring to the now Armenian controlled territories outside the former autonomous *oblast'*.

Geographical names are one issue. The other is how to refer to those instances of 'empirical statehood' that have developed in the entities. Some authors use inverted commas throughout their accounts ('president', 'parliament', 'presidential elections') to indicate that even though separate political institutions have been established and representatives elected, these are not recognized *de jure*. Others combine every such notion with the prefix '*de facto*' or 'unrecognized'. As these structures feature prominently in this research, I decided against a strict adherence to any of the variants to facilitate readability. This said, whenever reference is made to the entities, even if not made explicit, their unrecognized (Nagorno-Karabakh) or partly recognized (Abkhazia) status is being implied. To denote Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh as such, I primarily make use of the notions of *de facto*/unrecognized state/entity as well as secessionist entity, breakaways or contested territories to avoid repetition. I acknowledge the particular connotations of these notions yet think of these as rather appropriate to address Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh in the framework of this study. Again, such pragmatism shall not be confused with claims on legal status.

Lastly, pragmatism also guided my approach to transliteration. I employ the commonly used English variants when available: Thus, I speak of Nagorno-Karabakh instead of using the Russian-derived version Nagorny-

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Karabakh.[10] While similarly I use Abkhazia to denote the *de facto* state, I use the transliterated version in 'Edinaya Abkhaziya', the proper Russian name of a local political party, instead of making use of the English translation ('United Abkhazia'). Indeed, in both cases with respect to political parties, movements, etc. commonly Russian and local, i.e. Abkhaz and Armenian, versions of their names exist. Except for when the latter variants are significantly more prevalent, I refer to them by their Russian (transliterated) or English (translated) names. In general, romanization of Russian words follows the BGN/PCGN system (United States Board on Geographic Names and Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use).

10 The only exception I make is when using proper names that include alternative notions, such as in the *Democratic Party of Artsakh* where Artsakh is the Armenian name for Nagorno-Karabakh. For a discussion of the different names for Nagorno-Karabakh, cf. Broers and Toal 2013, 34.

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2 Protracted conflict and political authority: state of research

Social science research on violent conflict and here notably on civil wars has been a prolific field of research. The debate on 'new wars' or the 'greed vs. grievance' controversy on root causes of violent conflict in particular sparked a plethora of literature.[1] While more recently dynamics within violent conflicts have also attracted attention, root causes have remained a preferred topic for investigation and have dominated the debate (cf. Veit, Barolsky, and Pillay 2011, 18; Taylor and Botea 2008, 32). Given this imbalance, i.e. a preoccupation with those dynamics that lead to the outbreak of violent conflict at the expense of engaging with dynamics in violent conflict, Cramer (2006, 21–2) suggests that "violence and war are more central principles for understanding institutions, politics and economic development than is typically acknowledged"– and accordingly more than has been explored. Indeed, notably in the fields of political science and International Relations surprisingly little research connects violent conflict with questions of (political) order; theorizing is still in its infancy or rather characterized by a certain lopsidedness with literature on so-called state failure dominating the field (cf. Kalyvas, Shapiro, and Masoud 2008).

2.1 Violent conflict and political order

For long, scholars in IR and political science have found it odd to combine the study of (intra-state) violent conflict with the study of order. Such a combination has been complicated by disciplinary compartmentalization.

1 On new wars, cf. Kaldor 1999; for a synopsis, cf. Mello 2010; on the 'greed vs. grievance'-debate, cf. Berdal and Malone 2000, and here in particular Collier; also Collier and Hoeffner 2001. For a recent synopsis of the debate, cf. Keen 2012.

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Yet, it has also been linked to a prevalent view of (intra-state) violent conflict as being equivalent to chaos and thus as inevitably in opposition to order. When scholars have engaged with these issues, they thus have strongly focused on so-called failed or fragile states, the central characteristic of which has been the seeming presence of uncontrolled violence and lack of order. State failure, understood as a lack of a state's administrative capacity, was commonly considered "both a cause and a consequence of violence" (Brock et al. 2012, 47; cf. also Rotberg 2004).[2] The assessment of states as failed or fragile derived from assessing political order in areas outside the OECD-world against the Weberian legal-bureaucratic ideal-type: Scholars applied the ready-made template of the modern Western (nation) state for 'measuring' congruity or rather deviance.

Scholarly treatment of failed states has been propelled by a general tenor, not least perpetuated by representatives of Western governments, that these states constitute sources of instability with a potential for contagion. Questions of (intra-state) violent conflict and order have thus been approached from a problem-solving or containment-perspective: The disorder needed to be cured; the risk defused (cf. Bliesemann Guevara 2010, 114; Kraxberger 2007, 1055). To prevent a further spread of related security threats, international organizations and Western governments have engaged in external state-building initiatives, which have largely become synonymous with peace-building (cf. Hagmann and Höhne 2009, 46). Again, both the blueprint for such interventions and the envisaged outcome has been democratic, legal-bureaucratic statehood that echoes the Western ideal-type, considered part and parcel of a 'liberal peace'. Scholars accompanied these processes with the evaluation and the formulation of precepts for improvement.

The literature on external interventions is vast and usually when the term state-building is used, external intervention is meant (cf. Lambach and Debiel 2010).[3] In contrast, studies that assess contemporary (intra-state) violent conflicts as processes of state-formation *sui generis*, not entirely dissimilar from the bloody historical experience of the development of

2 Similar notions are failing or weak states. While I acknowledge the differences between the terms, for simplicity I use the term failed states as common denominator.

3 For an example of such a conflation, cf. Sutter and Raue 2009. For a critique, cf. Bliesemann Guevara 2010, who reminds us that not only Western countries or Western-dominated international institutions are engaged in state-building. For a literature review on peacebuilding, statebuilding, and governance, cf. Peace Research Institute Oslo 2011.

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nation-states in Europe, are clearly inferior with respect to quantity (cf. Taylor and Botea 2008, 28).[4] Usually, such studies take recourse to Charles Tilly's (1982) famous dictum of 'war-making as state-making'. There has been controversial appraisal, however, whether Tilly's interpretation of European history can be fruitfully applied to account for developments in the contemporaneous, non-European world. In particular, a completely changed international environment and a much greater integration of states and non-state actors in global processes have been put forward as reasons against easy transferability (cf. Leander 2004; Schlichte 2003).

Despite research that favors a state-formation over a state-building perspective, the literature in political science and IR still mainly refers to violent conflicts as destructive phenomena, as equivalent to chaos and disorder. Scholars have sought to arrive at recommendations of how to 'fix' these failed states and how to suppress the 'reigning chaos' by external engineering or how to adjust external engineering for optimizing the outcomes. The dominance of such, to great extent normatively charged approaches to the study of violent conflict and (political) order seems to have three underlying causes: First, a Western-dominated scholarly and practitioners' community is only slowly coming around to conceding that Western-centric concepts might not hold for universal applicability (cf. Tickner 2003). Secondly, in particular in political science and International Relations, which conventionally have been pre-occupied with 'the state', scholars have only reluctantly turned to considering other forms of political authority as well, which are not entirely commensurate with Western ideal-types of legal-rational state-rule (cf. Hagmann and Höhne 2009, 45). And, as already argued, third, violent conflict has been viewed as the 'evil other', which by definition does not fit with order but disorder (cf. Imbusch and Bonacker 1999, 150pp; Mampilly 2011, 7).

While far from constituting the mainstream in political science and IR, some academics have recently been challenging these 'barriers' (cf. Bøås and Dunn 2007, 4). Thus, scholars have increasingly critically engaged with the literature on failed and fragile states and dismissed the approach for its "ethnocentric and hegemonic political agenda aimed at de-legitimizing states that fail to conform to the worldview of dominant states"(Newman

4 For the differentiation of state-building as an organized activity with a linear, projected trajectory and state-formation as uncontrolled and even contradictory historical development, cf. Bliesemann Guevara 2010.

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2009b, 425).[5] Such and similar critique has triggered attempts to develop alternative approaches to explore political rule in the non-OECD world. The concept of 'hybrid political orders' (cf. Boege et al. 2009a, Boege et al. 2009b; Kraushaar and Lambach 2009) for example aims at capturing political orders that exist alongside and intermingled with those of the state, instead of assessing failed or fragile states as deviations of a Western-liberal ideal-type. Proponents of 'hybrid peace' or 'hybrid peace governance' take a similar perspective (cf. the respective special issue of *Global Governance*, 18/2012). While these approaches offer a welcome correction, they, too, have been criticized by peer-review for remaining schematic and thus for being of only limited use as analytical lenses that allow for portraying dynamics and complexity (cf. Trotha 2009). Such shortcomings might be linked to the continuous emphasis that these approaches put on external state-building. Often, they concentrate on 'hybrids' that evolve between 'local' political authority and externally-induced 'good governance', thereby paying insufficient attention to the various sources, manifestations, and actors involved in political authority in the regions under investigation. Even fewer scholars in political science and IR have turned more decidedly away from assessing 'what is lacking' in comparison to the ideal-type of the legal-rational state, to investigating 'what is there', thus exploring the "empirical emanations of statehood within and beyond the nation-state" (Hagmann and Höhne 2009, 53; cf. also Bakonyi and Bliesemann Guevara 2009).

Neither the debate of state failure with its remedy-approach, nor its critical counterpart necessarily engages with the issue of violent conflict. Given the above-cited linkage between state failure and lack of control of physical force, however, both fields are commonly closely connected. A critical discussion of the literature on failed or fragile states has thus been related to and cross-fertilized by a change of perspective on violent conflict. Instead of considering violent conflict as an extraordinary intrusion into the normalcy of peaceful (co-)existence, respective scholars have emphasized a continuum between war and peace. They have repudiated a strict opposition between peace, as ordered, productive, healthy on the one hand, and violent conflict, as disordered, destructive, diseased, on the other. Instead of highlighting differences and assuming breakdown of order with respect to the latter, these scholars have sensitized research(ers)

5 For a critical assessment, cf. also Ayers 2012; Hagmann and Höhne 2009; Schlichte 2005.

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to look for similarities between the condition of peace and violent conflict (cf. Bakonyi and Bliesemann Guevara 2009; Duffield 1998; Jabri 1996; Lubkemann 2008; Richards 2005).[6]

Only such a rather fundamental change of approach, an "epistemological revolution" (Koloma Beck 2012, 16), has allowed scholars to fo-cus on the functional aspects of violent conflict, on its influence upon social processes and practices. Indeed, only this re-definition has attracted scholars to put those social, political, and economic orders in the center of interest that emerge in conditions of violent conflict; to analyze these not as deviations but as "alternative system[s] of profit and power" (Keen 1996, 14), and as "new and innovative ways of projecting political power" (Duffield 1998, 66). With respect to disseminating such a rather 'unorthodox' approach within political science and IR, research on war-economies has been particularly important (cf. for example Elwert 2003; Reno 1999; Rufin 1999). While acknowledging the insights of such research, Bakonyi and Stuvoy (2005, 363) also point out, however, that the preoccupation with economic issues has limited research into other aspects of these alternative (non-state) orders. Moreover, the prevalent concern with economic facets has promoted approaches that have rather narrowly assumed the instrumental rationality of actors and the generation of economic rents as their key driving force. This in turn consolidated a simplistic picture of these alternative orders and enforced their classification as purely criminal formations (cf. Mampilly 2011, 6).

Such shortcomings notwithstanding, of research on violent conflict and order in general as well as on alternative economic orders in particular, there have been important and intriguing investigations into the interdependencies of violent conflict and political authority that my research ties into and that have served as inspiration.[7] Thus, Gentschel and Schlichte (1997) point to transformations that societies affected by violent conflict undergo. They highlight that violent conflict may both 'push' and 'obstruct' careers; therefore it likely causes changes in the social structure. Depending on a boosted or a spoiled career, actors are likely to have vested interests in either prolonging or ending violent conflict. Schlichte (2004) later proposes to use Bourdieu's concepts of field and capital to

6 The issue of how to conceptualize and approach violent conflict is also picked up in chapter 3.

7 The studies referred to here are but a few examples. I discuss further work in the following chapters.

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analyze these transformations by exploring the particular resources of war winners and war losers. Hensell and Gerdes (2012) take up this suggestion when they focus on how rebels convert or fail to convert into political elites in a post-war context. Among other theoretical input, they, too, draw on Bourdieu and the concept of capital. However, just as Schlichte's proposal for future research, Hensell and Gerdes, too, limit the analysis to three basic forms of capital, which, as I shall argue below, unnecessarily constricts the analysis. Also decidedly focusing on elites, Ismail (2008) likewise traces changes in the power elite through pre-war, war, and post-war reconstruction. He draws on another important elite theorist, namely C. Wright Mills whose work he adapts to render it viable for an African context. Ismail emphasizes the potential of violent conflict to bring about changes of the power elite of conflict-affected countries but likewise cautions against regarding it as a phenomenon that causes the breakdown of all existent structures. He (2008, 260) makes the important point that "it is imperative to consider, in reciprocal terms, how civil wars constitute a source of change, continuity and contradiction in relation to the power elite class". Raeymaekers, Menkhaus, and Vlassenroot (2008), too, distance themselves from a perspective of (intra-state) violent conflict as chaotic or anarchic and their edited issue explores how violent conflict may re-configure African socio-political realities. With their central focus on non-state governance they try to investigate manifestations of political authority without narrowing the analytical lens to features of legal-rational statehood.

While the overall research linking violent conflict to questions of political order is limited, these issues have come to play an increasingly important role in studies that focus on Israel and aspects of militarization (cf. Kimmerling 1993, 198). Rather opposite to the literature on failed states, research on Israel for long presupposed a Western liberal democracy that has functioned unaffected by persistent violent conflict. Thus, when scholars started to depart from such premises and engaged questions of militarism, the question of order nonetheless retained a prominent position. Scholars have focused more narrowly on civil-military relations and on militarized policy networks in the context of protracted conflict (cf. Barak and Sheffer 2006). Others have scrutinized the impact of persistent conflict on the Israeli social structure more generally. Ehrlich (1987) for example stresses that conflict cannot be reduced to the 'all out big war'. Interested in how violent conflict may re-configure societies, he traces its manifestations in Israeli society in seemingly 'routine' times, that is, those

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periods in-between conflict escalation. According to Ehrlich (1987, 121) the "formative effect" of violent conflict has created a "permanent war-society". Kimmerling (1993), too, puts emphasis on the effect of violent conflict on the socio-political organization. He traced its reflection in a particular collective identity, a siege mentality, as well as its manifestation in diverse social systems such as politics and the economy. These and related insights are important beyond the case of Israel. Yet, for this case has largely been considered unique and not easily reconcilable with others, they have hardly been integrated in the general debate of conflict research and have been insufficiently drawn on for furthering our understanding of political order and violent conflict (cf. also Klein 2002).

So far, the literature cited has largely focused on entire societies or the higher (political) echelons of (recognized) states and their possible transformation in and by violent conflict. A particular strand of research, which, even though limited, has received considerable upswing in the last years, focuses more narrowly on so-called violent or armed non-state actors.[8] These comprise a diverse range of figurations, from separatist movements, insurgents, over warlords and criminal networks to private militias. Bakonyi and Stuvoy (2005) introduce a typology of these social orders of violence to classify them according to institutionalization: Their proposed continuum is marked by 'warlord figurations' and 'quasi-states' on either end.[9] Among other issues, violent non-state actors have been analyzed with respect to their formation, organization, or external relations. Mampilly (2011, 238–9), however, notes that there is rather little research on aspects related to political order. Again, he traces this neglect to the state-bias of political science and IR, which has constrained the analysis of non-state actors with respect to political authority. Mampilly therefore calls for additional research that particularly engages with those figurations of actors that develop in areas not controlled by internationally recognized states.

8 Cf. for example Davis 2009; Mampilly 2011; the edited volumes by Dunn and Bøås (2007) as well as Mulaj (2010); the special issue edited by Krause and Miliken (2009); as well as the work of the research group *Micropolitics of Armed Groups*, headed by Klaus Schlichte (also Schlichte 2009).

9 The term quasi-state echoes the notion of *de facto* state or unrecognized state. On terminological differentiation, see the introduction.

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2.2 The South Caucasus *de facto* states

Concerning violent non-state actors, Krause and Miliken (2009, 204) point out that, when addressed at all, particularly those actors that control a specific territory and possess a somewhat advanced level of organization have been targeted by scholarly research. The "traditional concept of armed groups […] is associated with notions of armed groups as 'proto-states' or 'states-in-formation'", that is, those social orders that figure on the 'quasi-state'-end of the continuum introduced by Bakonyi and Stuvoy. While still under-studied, these have also been more likely approached with respect to questions of political order (cf. Kingston and Spears 2004).

As regards the South Caucasus secessionist entities, however, these and even more so their internal organization have until recently not garnered much scholarly attention (cf. Caspersen 2012, 21; Matsuzato 2008, 95; Steinsdorff 2012, 201). Instead, scholars have predominantly focused on the periods of large-scale hostilities between 'parent states' and 'autonomous entities' before the signing of ceasefires in the early 1990s. These have indeed been extensively covered.[10] With a view to the post-ceasefire periods of the persistent violent conflicts attention has often been limited to efforts of (externally driven) conflict mediation and reconciliation. Moreover, a substantial number of studies has employed a geo-political or geo-strategic perspective and treated the conflicts in the context of superpower rivalry (cf. Broers 2015, De Waal 2010b; Merlin and Serrano 2010, who criticize such lopsided considerations).[11] Even though studies on reconciliation or geopolitics centrally deal with the secessionist conflicts, they largely do not pay attention to the *de facto* states and the local dynamics within. The secessionist entities have been treated as objects of the conflicts, rather than as centrally involved subjects that warrant separate treatment (cf. Broers 2012a).

Research on the South Caucasus *de facto* states has certainly also been restrained by the above-mentioned bias, namely to channel attention to

10 To name but a few, cf. Coppieters 1996; Cornell 2002; Croissant 1998; De Waal 2003; Goldenberg 1994; Kaufman 2001; Koehler and Zürcher 2003; Suny 1992. Further references are given in the subsequent chapter, which outlines the secessionist conflicts both in their pre- and post-ceasefire periods.

11 Studies with a geo-strategic perspective often assume the unfolding of a new *Great Game* in the region. Analyses that focus on conflict mediation or geopolitics include Dehdashti 2000; German 2007; Jafarova 2011; Markedonov 2009; cf. also the edited issue of *International Negotiation* (Volume 15, Issue 1, 2010).

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recognized states and state-rule. The emphasis that governments of recognized states have put on territorial integrity has been emulated by social science research, which thereby has contributed to the reproduction of the Westphalian system. Reflecting this political priority, the South Caucasus secessionist entities have been readily dismissed as safe havens or strongholds of reckless and criminal profiteers whose economic incentives were seen as a reason for the persistence of these shadow entities (cf. Cornell 2002; Kemp 2004; King 2001, 2007).

Only more recently have scholars started to approach the *de facto* states as entities *sui generis*.[12] They renounced the presumption of a criminalized nature and instead of (pre)judging them as rebel refuges or black holes respective studies, leaving the question of legal status of these entities aside, apply standard political science and IR vocabulary when analyzing their political systems. A notable contribution to the state of research is the work of Nina Caspersen who covers the South Caucasus unrecognized entities within the framework of the research project *The Politics of Unrecognized States: Democratization, Self-Determination and Contested Identities*.[13] Several articles and entries to edited volumes were the outcome, which cover a range of topics from the quest of the *de facto* states for international recognition, over their relations to external 'patron states', to aspects of democratization and state-building in the entities. A summary outline of research results is provided in the monograph *Unrecognized States* from 2012. Alongside Caspersen, Kolstø and Blakkisrud have published on several aspects of the unrecognized entities of the South Caucasus as well as Transnistria. Kolstø (2006) set out with covering them in the framework of analyzing the phenomenon of unrecognized states more broadly. Later, together with Blakkisrud (2008) he takes a separate look at the post-Soviet entities and their state-building efforts. Applying a functional definition of the state, the state as provider of security, infrastructure, and welfare, they classify the entities under investigation as weak economies with weak state structures. A more recent study (Kolsto and Blakkisrud 2012) deals with the political representation of Abkhazia's different ethnic groups. This topic has also been investigated by Matsuzato (2011) as well as Trier,

12 While the following overview lists the most prominent authors on the South Caucasus *de facto* states whose interest goes beyond the provision of descriptive accounts I have only included a selection of their respective research.

13 Beyond analyses by researchers from the region, Lynch (2004), however, was one of the earliest who showed enhanced interest in the internal dynamics of the entities.

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Lohm, and Szakonyi (2010). Earlier, Matsuzato (2008) explored domestic developments in Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Transnistria by paying particular attention to aspects of democratization. Berg and Mölder (2012, 528), too, investigate instances of democracy in Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh by applying concepts derived from the Western experience. They draw upon "legitimacy criteria that are widely accepted for liberal democratic societies".[14] Except for Berg and Mölder whose study is based on focus group data all others primarily base their analyses on interview data and secondary sources. Researchers around principal investigator John O'Loughlin that cooperate in the research project *The Dynamics of Secessionist Regions: Eurasian Unrecognized Quasi-States after Kosovo's Independence* constitute a notable exception. The project comprised the implementation representtative surveys in in the *de facto* states, which is one of the very few available sources for transparent survey results. The project has yielded several publications by different author constellations. Bakke, O'Loughlin, and Ward (2012) for example investigate internal legitimacy in Abkhazia by focusing on the legitimacy belief on part of its population. They scrutinize local perceptions with respect to "democracy, public provision of welfare and material well-being, collective solidarity, and individual security" (Bakke, O'Loughlin, and Ward 2012, 11). Kolossov and O'Loughlin (2011) look at migratory potential in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while Toal and Frichova Grono (2011) compare survey results for Georgia 'proper' and Abkhazia with respect to experiences of displacement, local stances towards the IDP question, and the ambivalent status of the latter's Gal/i region. An overview of survey results for Abkhazia is provided in O'Loughlin, Kolossov, and Toal (2011).

In addition to the cited authors, Sergey Markedonov (among others, 2012a) has showed a long-standing interest in the unrecognized states. While less engaged with theoretical issues linked to *de facto* statehood, his studies provide valuable empirical data on the internal developments of the unrecognized entities. The same holds true for David Petrosyan, who has regularly covered developments in the South Caucasus *de facto* states in the yearbooks of the Yerevan-based Caucasus Institute. It must be highlighted, moreover, that in particular with respect to Abkhazia, in additional to academic research valuable studies have been prepared by or in cooperation with locally active international, non-governmental organiza-

14 This publication is part of a greater research project titled *De facto Statehood in Question*.

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tions who often engaged with local scholars. The London-based *International Alert*, *Conciliation Resources*, and *Saferworld,* as well as the Brussels-based *International Crisis Group* are among the most active and reputable ones.

2.3 Research question

As regards research on violent conflict and political order many blank spots remain as "[l]ittle attention has been paid to social processes of civil war – the transformation of social actors, structures, norms, and practices" (Wood 2008, 539). Only in recent years have scholars turned to analyzing alternative orders that have developed in areas affected by violent conflict and thus have challenged the state-bias with respect to political authority that still prevails in political science and IR. Often such analyses have focused on economic issues, however, while aspects related to political order or political authority have gained less attention. As regards the secessionist entities of the South Caucasus, the increase in scholarly engagement constitutes a valuable development. Nonetheless there are two aspects which necessitate further analysis or where a re-orientation of research could provide further constructive insights: First, investigations into the internal dynamics of the secessionist entities which focused on processes of democratization or state-building produced important knowledge. However, the largely Western-centric concepts adopted are not unconditionally suitable for understanding the workings of non-OECD regions, including the South Caucasus. Echoing the literature that criticizes the debate on state failure for its narrow analytical lenses, with respect to analyzing the South Caucasus *de facto* states, too, I regard it fruitful to move beyond conventional political science and IR approaches that reflect Weber's legal-rational ideal-type of the state when exploring political authority. Second, the turn towards an exploration of the internal developments of the *de facto* states has been accompanied by a certain marginalization of the ongoing conflicts in such analyses. The post-ceasefire periods have largely been analyzed as post-war periods.[15]

15 Bakke (2011) is one of the very few who particularly engages with the exertion of physical violence in the *de facto* state's post-ceasefire periods. While she acknowledges that a clear division between war and post-war is difficult to draw, she nonetheless

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Seemingly due to a (considered too) low-level of physical violence after the signing of ceasefires, the persistent violent conflicts have stayed below the academic radar screen. Scholars turned from focusing on the secessionist conflicts and their pre-ceasefire dynamics and started to shed light on the hitherto largely neglected domestic developments of the secessionist entities. At the same time, however, scholarly attention has been reduced as regards the impact that the persistent violent conflicts have had on these processes. While scholars identified single issues such as prevalent enemy images, largely these have not been considered as indicators of the persistence of the violent conflicts.

In the framework of this study, I retain the emphasis on internal developments of the South Caucasus *de facto* states but employ an analytical lens that is inspired by the above-mentioned critical literature on political authority in a non-OECD context. Moreover, I (re-)connect research on these secessionist entities with conflict research by placing the analysis in the still under-researched field of violent conflict and political order. The question 'How is political authority organized and (re-)produced in conditions of violent conflict?' centrally guides this exploration.[16]Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh are the cases drawn on to provide the necessary empirical basis. It follows that on the one hand I aim at advancing knowledge on the functioning of unrecognized entities. Specifically, I provide thick descriptions of domestic dynamics within the selected cases. On the other hand, I aim at contributing to shedding light on the interrelations between violent conflict and (practices of) political authority on a more conceptual level. The latter objective therefore relates to feeding back my findings into and thereby enriching the theoretical-conceptual debate on order and violent conflict with empirically grounded insight.

approaches such violence as a repercussion of armed struggle that was ended by ceasefires rather than as indicator of another mode of ongoing violent conflict.

16 I specifically take up the notion of political authority for it constitutes a less presupposing concept than the popular notion of governance, the underlying assumptions of which still reflect a particular Western-centric bias of statehood – recognized or unrecognized (for a critique of the concept of governance, cf. Koehler 2012).

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3 The conflicts on Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh

Both breakaway Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh were part of the Soviet Union as autonomous entities and both seceded from their 'parent state' Georgia, respectively Azerbaijan, in the end of the 1980s, the beginning of the 1990s. The secessions were accompanied by large scale hostilities. While ceasefire agreements ended open warfare, in both cases peace agreements remain to be signed. In this chapter, I introduce the two conflicts by briefly outlining historical references, the developments during the Soviet period, escalation into open warfare, as well as the post-ceasefire situation. Given that the analytical interest here lies in political authority in Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia, a particular focus is on the autonomous, respectively secessionist entities. In the preceding chapter I noted that the post-ceasefire periods of the secessionist conflicts have been somewhat neglected by conflict research. Popular conflict databases, too, have not listed them for most of their post-ceasefire existence. This overview, however, indicates that the conflicts have been persistent also after 1994. I expound this point in the second part of this chapter where I switch from description to theoretical discussion. Contrasting quantitative and qualitative perspectives on violent conflict I demonstrate that the neglect echoes quantitative approaches that focus on the exertion of direct physical violence. Qualitative perspectives, in contrast, offer a more holistic angle and approach violent conflict as social condition. This entails that alongside the exertion of direct physical violence, mediate effects or a symbolic dimension of violence is taken into consideration, as well as particular meaning-systems. It is the perspective of violent conflict as a social condition that constitutes the overall frame throughout this research.

This chapter serves two objectives: Firstly, I provide a brief presentation of the secessionist conflicts, respectively the secessionist entities and prepare the ground for the empirical analysis. Secondly, I present the particular understanding of violent conflict, namely violent conflict as social

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condition that constitutes this study's overarching angle. Not only do I build upon these theoretical explanations in the subsequent chapter on conceptual vantage points. Drawing on insights of the empirical analysis, in chapter 7 I also revisit the discussion and offer a particular conceptual extension.

3.1 Pre-history, escalation, and post-ceasefire period[1]

The conflicts on Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh erupted in the context of a disintegrating Soviet Union and resulted in the establishment of separate structures of empirical statehood in the secessionist entities. In the context of both conflicts, however, all of the involved parties have referred to earlier history for strengthening their positions; to 'justify' their 'entitlement' to the particular regions. Before I outline the developments in the Soviet Union as well as the in the post-ceasefire period, I briefly sketch these historical points of reference.[2]

3.1.1 Pointers on history

In the context of the conflict on Abkhazia, both the Georgian and the Abkhaz side have presented historical 'evidence' to bolster their claims on the region: The former has depicted Abkhazia as historically a part of Georgia; the latter in contrast emphasized its autochthony to the region and a separate development. As Zverev (1996, 15) argues, each side picked those periods most "suitable" to underline its argument –"[A]ntiquity and the Middle Ages for the Georgians, the Middle Ages and the Soviet period, when Abkhazia nominally had autonomy, for the Abkhaz". There have been different degrees of rejecting the other side's position, however, and Georgians have usually acknowledged the Abkhaz' claim to some form of

1 This section provides only a short introduction. Given its brevity, the account of both conflicts' histories inevitably stays incomplete. I pick up and treat in more detail individual aspects in the empirical chapters.

2 While the conflict parties heavily draw on historical 'evidence' to bolster their claims, I side with Laitin and Suny (1999) who, in contrast, to statements of primordial conflict or ancient roots argue for understanding the (post-) Soviet conflicts as developments strongly linked to the late 19th century national awakening and 20th century dynamics.

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autonomy, even if they have excluded separation. Despite this general approach, an extreme and rather successfully disseminated position was published in Georgia in the end of the 1950s when a Georgian historian classified all Abkhaz as newcomers to the region. The thesis of the Abkhaz as emigrants from the North Caucasus quickly nurtured statements of Georgia being the benevolent host to its minority-guests (cf. Coppieters 2002, 93; Cornell 2002, 174; Kaufman 2001, 93–4).

I will not trace each party's distinct interpretation of history.[3] Suffice it to mention that throughout the centuries Abkhaz and Georgians featured long histories of different forms of 'statehood' that were often intertwined and the entire region was for long periods subjected to and thus controlled by greater empires (cf. also Kaufman 2001, 88). By the mid-19th century Tsarist Russia subjugated both the territories of contemporary Georgia and the current *de facto* state of Abkhazia. In particular the Abkhaz protested the Tsarist policies of *Russification*. From the beginning up until the middle of the 19th century, these resulted in the (partly forced) emigration of great numbers of Abkhaz to the Ottoman Empire, known as *Makhadzhirstvo* (cf. Marshall 2010, 18–9).[4] *Russification* also entailed the settlement of Russian peasants in Abkhazia and Christianization of a people that was largely either pagan or Muslim due to earlier Ottoman rule (cf. Goldenberg 1994, 103).[5]

Representatives of Abkhazia and Georgia employed and still employ opposing interpretations of earlier history to legitimize their respective claims on the region. Notably policies of the Soviet period, however, have been referred to and cited as major causes for and the aggravation of inter-communal tensions that ultimately escalated into violence. As holds true for the case of Nagorno-Karabakh as well, the status of Abkhazia was a contested one right from the Soviet Union's creation. Similar to its South Caucasus neighbors Armenia and Azerbaijan, Georgia became an indepen-

3 For an outline of largely opposing Abkhaz and Georgian 'national mythologies', cf. Kaufman 2001.

4 The notion of *Makhadzhirstvo* is a russified version referring back to the notion of *muhajir* (emigré from the Arab *hijra* – exile). The large-scale emigration divided Abkhazia into two parts, as only two areas with compact Abkhaz settlement remained. This depopulation in particular affected present-day Gagra, Sukhum/i, and Gulripsh/i districts of Abkhazia, as well as Adler district of Russia's southern Krasnodar region.

5 Religion, however, has not played a significant role in the conflict. A much more decisive marker that distinguished Abkhaz from Georgians has been their different languages, which are mutually unintelligible.

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dent republic in the early 20th century, namely in May 1918. Two months later one group of an internally divided Abkhazia agreed upon uniting it with Georgia and upon Abkhazian autonomy. Owing to local protests, the decision was revoked shortly thereafter (cf. Cornell 2002, 175; Welt 2013). Georgia and Abkhazia continued to fight over their status and their mutual relations until both were incorporated into the Soviet framework.

Georgia's independence of 1918 was short-lived and Georgia was conquered by the Red Army in 1921. As a union republic, it became a constituent of the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, which itself was included in the federal framework of the Soviet Union. Abkhazia, in turn, was declared an independent union republic in March of 1921. It enjoyed this status only little more than half a year, however, as in December it was associated to Georgia on the basis of a treaty of union (cf. Kaufman 2001, 89; Zverev 1996, 39; for a detailed treatment, cf. Welt 2013). Again, Abkhaz and Georgians have interpreted these events differently (cf. Cornell, 2002: 175). Whereas the former have depicted the union with Georgia as one between equals and argued that Abkhazia was only later forcefully incorporated into Georgia, Georgian voices maintain that the region has been part of the Georgian union republic since 1921. More unambiguous was the entity's status since the 1930s: In 1931, Abkhazia was relegated to the level of an autonomous republic within the confines of the union republic of Georgia.

Similar to the conflict on Abkhazia and arguably even more pronouncedly, in the context of the conflict on Nagorno-Karabakh the conflict parties have refuted each other's 'historically justified' right on the region. To prove one's autochthonous claim to the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and thus to bolster one's expressed entitlements, an eager historiography on either side of the conflict divide has traced each 'nation's' settlement in the region to time immemorial. As Croissant (1998, 12; also 10pp) emphasizes:

"The willingness of Armenian and Azerbaijani scholars to depict a clear ethnic history of the region where none exists is indicative of the passion attached to the Karabakh issue by both sides."[6]

6 On the utilization of history and the conduct of 'history war', cf. also De Waal 2010a, 106–8; Yoshimura 2007; Minasyan 2009; Shafiev 2007, Gamaghelyan and Rumyantsev 2013.

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Not only has each side extended its historical ownership of the region to far away times. Enmity between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, too, has been given by some a primordial character. Kaufman (2001, 50), for example, dates the beginning of the conflict's "modern history" at 1813. It was then that under the *Treaty of Gulistan* the area of Nagorno-Karabakh changed from Persian to Russian subjection. Repeatedly representatives of the conflict parties but also third party commentators have presented the violent conflict of today as a (temporary) endpoint of a teleological trajectory, thereby directly linking past and present. Again, I do not intend to reproduce the competing interpretations on the conflict's alleged ancient roots. Nonetheless, it shall be emphasized that when violent conflict erupted in the end of the 1980s, people could indeed discursively draw upon and evoke a connection to passed bloodshed between both communities. In the 19th century, the Caucasus saw socio-economic upheavals, rather drastic ethno-demographic changes, political turmoil and political re-alignment, as well as a national awakening among the different communities. These developments did not go by without tensions between the different groups. In the case of the local Muslim[7] and Armenian populations, tensions escalated into several and partly extremely brutal clashes with a tremendous death toll.[8] The area of Nagorno-Karabakh was not the only arena of such conflict, nor was it spared the bloodshed (cf. Goldenberg 1994, 158–9). Between the late 19th century and the subjugation of Armenia and Azerbaijan, including Nagorno-Karabakh, under Soviet rule, violence peaked in the mid-1890s, in 1905 (known as the Tartar-Armenian

7 National identities in the modern sense emerged in the 19th century. Still, Armenians had possessed a specific identity even earlier based particularly upon a centuries old distinct church and script. As concerns the Azerbaijanis, until the early 20th century "the people of what would become the Soviet republic of Azerbaijan were referred to variously as Turks, Tatars and Caucasian Muslims" (Goldenberg 1994, 11). When speaking about earlier times, however, one should be careful to conflate them neither with Ottoman Turks nor with Persian Muslims (cf. also Marshall 2010, 36pp).

8 In contrast to those who advocate primordial enmity, Croissant (1998, 8) links an emerging hostility between the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities to Tsarist policies of the Russian Empire. Socio-economic and political changes at the end of the 19th century resulted in the division of Armenians and Azerbaijanis along class lines. While the former, largely urban, profited from economic developments, the latter who predominantly populated the countryside lagged considerably behind. These socio-economic cleavages quickly grew into community-based antagonisms (cf. also Marshall 2010, 36pp).

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War), and 1918-20 (cf. Marshall 2010, 42, 89pp, 141).[9] The most deadly events, however, date to the years 1915–17 when hundreds of thousands of Armenians were killed in the Ottoman Empire (cf. Croissant 1998, 5pp; Yamskov 1991, 656; Kaufman 2001, 50). While the Ottoman Turkish government was accountable for the atrocities, Armenians have often not distinguished between Ottoman Turks of the last century and Azerbaijan's contemporary Azerbaijani population. Instead, they have drawn a direct line from these early 20th century mass killings to the escalation of violence between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan many decades later.[10] Both sides, indeed, have interpreted history selectively to underline their respective claims, respectively to emphasize their grievances.

Both 'Armenians' and 'Muslim Turks' had for long populated the area of Nagorno-Karabakh. The latter largely lived a nomadic lifestyle as herdsmen until well into the Soviet period and used the pastures only during the summer months – a circumstance usually not reflected by population counts, which were conducted in winter (cf. Yamskov 1991, 650–1).[11] Not only today do the conflict parties hotly debate questions of ethnic belonging and records of historical settlement. These also marked a central line of argument when Nagorno-Karabakh's status within the Soviet system was being determined. The short-lived independent Republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia, which only lasted for two years, were both conquered by Soviet forces in 1920 (April and December, respectively). The region of Nagorno-Karabakh came under Soviet rule as well. While claimed by both newly created Soviet republics, it was ultimately given the status of an autonomous region (*oblast'*) within Azerbaijan.

3.1.2 Excursus: Soviet nationality policy

To understand the conflicts' particular pre-histories, the relationship between autonomous entities and superior federal subjects of the Soviet Union, as well as the escalation into violent conflict in the context of the

9 Yamskov (1991, 656) states that during the violent conflict of 1918–1919 alone, Nagorno-Karabakh's population was reduced by about 20 percent. In 1920 Nagorno-Karabakh's then capital Shusha was destroyed.

10 Baghdasaryan (2013) points out that the current populations of Azerbaijan and Turkey, too, are (linguistically) conflated by the (Nagorno-Karabakh) Armenians.

11 For population data for the pre- and early Soviet period, cf. Yamskov 1991.

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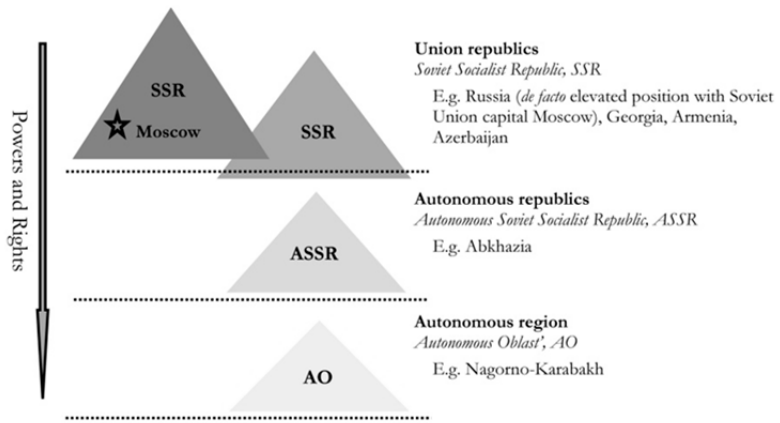
Soviet Union's disintegration, a few words on the Soviet system and nationality policies are in order. In this excursus I briefly outline how Soviet policies and the Soviet federal system shaped nationalities and promoted the development of nationalized elites. Indeed, both facilitated a channeling of discord along national cleavages.

The Soviet Union was designed as a federal system and embodied a multitude of territorial-administrative units that were granted different statuses.[12] According to their statuses, these units enjoyed specific, graduated sets of (nominal) rights. The Soviet Union can be compared to a *matreshka* doll: Federal subjects of higher status comprised autonomous entities of lower rank within their borders (cf. Figure 1).

Figure 1: Federal system of the Soviet Union[13]



The today internationally recognized states of the South Caucasus Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan were among the 15 union republics (or Soviet Socialist Republics, SSR), which constituted the hierarchy's superior level. Abkhazia, since 1931, held the status of autonomous republic (Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, ASSR) within the Union Republic of

12 There were a total of 53 autonomous units; from higher to lower status these were: 15 union republics (since 1956), 20 autonomous republics, 8 autonomous regions, and 10 autonomous districts *(okrugi)*.

13 Figure: Created by the author.

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Georgia and thus represented the second highest level. The autonomous region (autonomous *oblast'*, AO) of Nagorno-Karabakh, placed within the confines of the Union Republic of Azerbaijan, was ranked even lower.

In general, the Soviet Union's federal subjects correlated with specific nations, which gave the entities their names (the titular nations).[14] The autonomous entities were crafted and rights were conferred based upon nationhood. Instead of overcoming sentiments of national belonging, contrary to official Soviet ideology such policies therefore indeed fostered national cohesiveness and an "image of a native land" (Yamskov 1991, 649).[15] They hardly mirrored the genuine concern of the Soviet leadership for national self-determination and national-self government of the people in the regions. Rather, the federal design provided the center with means to control the periphery – via a 'divide and conquer' strategy as well as by centrally manipulating and thus curbing potentials of nationalism. In many instances, the rights attributed to the autonomous entities were only nominal ones. In essence they were limited to cultural and language issues and ultimate decision-making stayed in Moscow (cf. also Cornell 1999; Roeder 1991).

The nation-based granting of rights facilitated the channeling of people's dissatisfaction along national cleavages, however.[16] Superior federal subjects that represented one particular majority-nationality exercised authority over another national minority, which came to interpret (perceived) shortcomings as the deliberate action of the upper level; as the attempt of higher-ranked units to curtail its (anyway limited) privileges. Soviet policies of nativization (*korenizatsiya* in Russian), moreover, contributed to the formation of nationalized administrative staff and national intellectual elites on all hierarchy levels.[17] These national, respectively nationalized elites came to play an important role in the advancement of

14 In the case of the five entities named above this held true for all but the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region. Indeed, Nagorno-Karabakh is one of the very few cases of the Soviet Union's federal system where the autonomous entity was not named after its majority population.

15 As Brubaker (1994, 49) emphasizes: "The Soviet state not only passively tolerated but actively institutionalized the existence of multiple nations and nationalities as constitutive elements of the state and its citizenry" (cf. also Suny 1989, 506).

16 Note that in the Soviet passport, the nationality of its holder was documented.

17 Nativization of the local administrative structures aimed at promoting acceptance of the *Communist Party's* authority at the local level as well as forcing industrialization, modernization, and collectivization (cf. Suny 1989, 507).

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national projects. The nation-based institutions, therefore, did not only provide a specific interpretative scheme but they also generated rather tangible national identities (cf. Brubaker 1994; Roeder 1991, 203pp). When central Soviet authority started to crumble in the 1980s, nationalism readily filled the ideological vacuum. This, however, posed serious problems as the national movements opposed each other. Nation-projects of the superior union republics, which sought to make use of their formal right to secede from the Soviet Union, ran counter to similar attempts by the people of lower-ranked entities that felt threatened in their own striving for sovereignty (cf. Zverev 1996, 13–4). As concerns the cases dealt with in this book and as is outlined subsequently, such development resulted in conflicting national movements. While Azerbaijan and Georgia strove for statehood independent of the Soviet Union together with those autonomous entities, which existed within their republican boundaries, Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh on their part aimed for seceding from their superior 'parent republics'.

The explanations on Soviet nationality policies and the federal system are important for the assessment of the developments during the Soviet period but also for understanding the particular institutional remnants of the later *de facto* states.

3.1.3 Soviet rule and escalation into open warfare

The Armenian population contested Nagorno-Karabakh's attachment to Azerbaijan throughout the Soviet Union's existence. It accused Baku of policies of suppression and argued for integration into Armenia. Abkhazia was attributed a higher status than Nagorno-Karabakh but, to the chagrin of the Abkhaz, was still subjected to control by Tbilisi. The Abkhaz, who represented the titular nation but were not the ethnic majority in Abkhazia, were fearful of Georgian predominance. With *glasnost* and *perestroika* their claim for greater autonomy grew ever more unrelenting. Tensions grew violent and open warfare led to Abkhazia's *de facto* secession. Even earlier conflict due to contradicting national projects in Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan grew violent. After clashes in the late 1980s, in the early 1990s these turned into large-scale hostilities and resulted in the *de facto* independence of the former.

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Since 1923, Nagorno-Karabakh was part of the Soviet Union as an autonomous region (*oblast'*) of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan. The decision to attach the former to the latter had a particular pre-history. On July 4, 1921, after toing and froing in the context of Bolshevik expansionism, the Bolshevik leaders of *Kavburo* had decided Nagorno-Karabakh's attachment to Armenia. The next day, however, the decision was revoked and the entity attributed to Azerbaijan. In 1923, the *Autonomous Oblast' of Nagorno-Karabakh* (AONK) was proclaimed and its borders settled; in 1937 the entity was re-named the *Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast'* (NKAO).[18] Since the early 19th century, Karabakh had been part of the Elizavetpol *guberniiya* (governorate) of Tsarist Russia. While the region's highlands had predominantly been populated by Armenians, in the lowlands Muslim Turks had constituted the majority. Not least due to geographical conditions, the highlands being easier accessible from the lowlands, highland Karabakh became administratively and economically integrated with what today is Azerbaijan (Malkasian 1996, 12; Saparov 2012, 287).[19]

The Armenians contested the 1921 decisions to attach both highland and lowland areas to Soviet Azerbaijan. Referring to historical population counts – according to which at that time ethnic Azerbaijanis made up only 7,400, that is, 5.6 percent of Nagorno-Karabakh's total population of 131,500, while Armenians constituted the great majority (cf. Yamskov 1991, 644; Marshall 2010, 143pp)[20] – the Armenian side interpreted the decision as deliberate anti-Armenian. To back the argument, they pointed out two further peculiarities of the NKAO's borders: They deplored that these had been delimited in such a way that the NKAO did not border the Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) of Armenia, which was separated by a narrow band of Azerbaijani land.[21] And they highlighted that the NKAO

18 In the following I use the more common abbreviation NKAO instead of changing between AONK and NKAO. On the establishment of the NKAO, cf. in particular Saparaov 2012; also Altstadt 1988; Derlugian 2005, 185–8; Zverev 1996, 17–9.

19 At the same time, Saparov (2012, 287–289) stresses that the entire region was characterized by ethnic heterogeneity and that internal boundaries in the South Caucasus then were anything but permanently fixed.

20 Note, however, that (historical) population counts, too, are prone to being politicized. They vary according to the particular territory/population polled and do not reflect population changes, such as through migration and displacement.

21 From 1923 until 1929, this area formed the Kurdistan *uezd*, known as Red or Soviet Kurdistan. The administrative unit comprised Kelbajar, Lachin, Qubatly as well as parts of Cebrayil districts. While it constituted a distinct administrative entity, no particular

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was also delimited from neighboring Shaumyan (Azerbaijani: Goranboi) and Getashen (Khanlar) districts of the Azerbaijani SSR. These regions, too, featured a numerically dominant ethnic Armenian population (cf. Suny 1992, 478, also Starovoitova 1997, 23). The actual reasons for the final decision on Nagorno-Karabakh remain shrouded, though. While some see it as evidence of Soviet divide-and-rule-policy, De Waal (2003, 131) rather sees a principle of "combine-and-rule" at work, arguing that the Soviet authorties' objective was to create economically sustainable units. Saparov's explanations (2012), in turn, suggest a situational and rather tactical decision given the imbroglio of that time, thus altogether countering the narrative of a Soviet or else's master plan.

The status of autonomous region gained its ethnic Armenian majority certain privileges. According to Soviet legislation, however, the granting of these largely depended upon the leadership in Baku. Even though the Soviet Union's constitution of 1936 mentioned the unit of autonomous *oblast'*, no specification of the powers that went with it were made and the powers of the NKAO were inscribed in the constitution of the higher-ranking SSR (cf. Laitin and Suny 1999, 151).[22] These legal constraints notwithstanding, the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh did enjoy specific language and cultural rights. They comprised schooling in Armenian, Armenian language radio broadcasting, as well as certain influence upon local staffing decisions. For local self-administration the NKAO possessed its own Regional Soviet – a body that seemed to have stayed without much actual authority though (cf. also Cornell 1999, 187; Yamskov 1991, 642pp).

The Armenians not only questioned the NKAO's very creation and its attachment to Azerbaijan but also came to bemoan a withholding of the foreseen privileges. Such complaints were notably voiced by representatives of the intelligentsia and especially since the 1970s, when republican level oversight was tightened. They pointed out neglect of Armenian cultural monuments in the region, a denial of Armenian history education, they protested the lack of Armenian-language secondary education, and criticized that the only Armenian language television available was that produced in the entity itself (cf. De Waal 2003, 141; Goldenberg 1994, 161; Suny 1992, 487). The Karabakh Armenians linked this latter issue to an allegedly

autonomy rights went with it. It was abolished in the context of an all-Union policy (cf. Yilmaz 2014).

22 In contrast to the next higher autonomy level of autonomous republic, autonomous regions did not dispose of their own (local) constitution.

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