

Land for Peace in Nagorny Karabakh? Political Geographies and Public Attitudes Inside a Contested De Facto State

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ABSTRACT Discussions of the territorial conflict over Nagorny Karabakh often fail to convey the multiple political geographies at play in the dispute. This paper outlines six distinct political geographies—territorial regimes and geographical imaginations—that are important in understanding Armenian perspectives on the conflict only (Azerbaijani perspectives are the subject of ongoing research). It presents the results of a 2011 social survey in Nagorny Karabakh that measures the extent of support these contending spatial visions have among local Armenian residents of the area. The survey finds widespread support for the territorial maximalist conceptions. These results underscore an important chasm between international diplomatic conceptions of Nagorny Karabakh and the everyday spatial attitudes and perceptions of residents in these disputed territories.

EXTRACTO En los debates sobre el conflicto territorial de Nagorny Karabakh muchas veces no se comunican las diferentes geografías políticas en juego. En este artículo se describen seis geografías políticas distintas—régimenes territoriales e imaginaciones geográficas—que son importantes solamente para entender las perspectivas armenias acerca del conflicto (las perspectivas azerbaiyanas siguen siendo objeto de investigación). Se presentan los resultados de un estudio social de 2011 en Nagorny Karabakh en el que se mide el nivel de apoyo que tienen estas visiones espaciales en pugna entre los residentes armenios de la zona. En la encuesta se observa un apoyo generalizado a las concepciones territoriales más maximalistas. Estos resultados ponen de relieve un importante abismo entre las concepciones diplomáticas internacionales de Nagorny Karabakh y las actitudes y percepciones espaciales diarias de los residentes en estos territorios en disputa.

摘要 有关纳戈尔诺—卡拉巴赫 (Nagorny Karabakh) 领土冲突的探讨, 经常无法传达在该争议中作用的多重政治地理。本文概述理解亚美尼亚人看待冲突的观点时, 相当重要的六个显著政治地理——领土政权以及地理想像 (有关阿塞拜疆的观点, 则为正在研究中的主题)。本文呈现2011年在纳戈尔诺—卡拉巴赫所进行的社会调查, 此一调查测量该地区的在地亚美尼亚居民对于这些相互竞争的空间想像的支持度。该调查发现了对于领土最大化概念的普遍支持。此一调查结果, 凸显了国际外交对纳戈尔诺—卡拉巴赫的概念, 和生活在这些具有争议的领土上的居民的每日空间态度与感知之间, 存在着重大的分裂。

RÉSUMÉ Souvent les discussions sur le conflit territorial pour le Haut-Karabakh ne rendent pas fidèlement compte des géographies politiques multiples en jeu. Cet article esquisse six géographies politiques distinctes—des régimes territoriales et des géographies imaginaires—qui sont importantes pour ne comprendre que les perspectives arméniennes sur le conflit (les perspectives

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azerbaïdjanaises faisant actuellement l'objet de recherches). On présente les résultats d'une enquête sociale menée en 2011 en Haut-Karabakh qui évalue l'importance du soutien qu'ont reçu ces visions géographiques opposées parmi les autochtones de la région de l'Arménie en question. À partir de l'enquête il s'avère un grand soutien en faveur des conceptions maximalistes les plus territoriales. Ces résultats soulignent le gouffre qui sépare les conceptions diplomatiques internationales du Haut-Karabakh et les mentalités et les perspectives géographiques de tous les jours des habitants de ces territoires contestés.

KEYWORDS Nagorny Karabakh territorial preferences political geographies de facto sovereignty

INTRODUCTION

It is hardly news that Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) is a fiercely contested territory. The Line of Contact between Azerbaijani and Armenian forces is ungoverned by anyone beyond the armies themselves, and sniper fire across it regularly claims lives. But it is not always appreciated by outside observers and non-specialists of this seemingly intractable conflict that the term 'Nagorno-Karabakh' does not have a stable territorial referent. Commentary on the conflict tends to assume by default that the term has a recognized meaning. It is rare to find detailed discussion of just how complex and contested the territorial referents are in this case.

This is more than simply a semantic issue. The most common English language term for the region is Nagorny Karabakh (sometimes spelled 'Nagorno-Karabagh'), which DE WAAL (2013, p. x) notes is an awkward ungrammatical rendition of the Russian term, Mountainous Karabakh, the latter term a Turkish and Persian blended word meaning 'black garden.' He suggests Nagorny Karabakh as an alternative, and we use it here. But this is not how current Armenian residents of the territory predominantly know the region. For them, it is Artsakh, and indeed in recent years some have sought to insist that this term be used instead of Nagorny Karabakh in international forums and discussions about the territory. Former residents of the region now living in Azerbaijan term it *Daglıq Qarabag* (meaning 'mountainous Karabakh').

Occluded by these seemingly simple territorial signifiers are cumulative territorial regimes that pose important questions for those interested in conflict resolution, in this case through the pursuit of a 'land for peace' formula. This notion, although not publicly framed as such, is one conceptual pillar of the Madrid Principles, the working framework of principles upon which Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group negotiators are seeking agreement upon from Azerbaijani and Armenian governments (for discussions of the international negotiation process surrounding the Nagorny Karabakh conflict see DE WAAL, 2010; CORNELL, 2011, pp. 126–161 and essays in KAMBECK and GHAZARYAN, 2013). What, for example, is the relationship of Nagorny Karabakh to Artsakh, to the Soviet-era Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) within the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan, to the unilaterally proclaimed 1991 Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR), to the territorial arrangement at the cease-fire of 1994, to the revised constitution of the de facto NKR in 2006, to broader territorial imaginations in Armenian geopolitical culture, and to the ongoing Armenian-Azerbaijani territorial standoff?¹ What are the NKR's claimed and contested boundaries? Here one opens a Pandora's box of competing conceptions of borders that are fiercely contested not only beyond the NKR but inside it as well.

The goals of this paper are two fold. First, it seeks to provide a clear elucidation of six distinct political geographies that are relevant to an understanding of the NK conflict

though only *from the Armenian perspective*. We hope that our future research will examine relevant Azerbaijani conceptions in depth. Nevertheless, here, it is important to briefly note the general Azerbaijani perspective. As far as the Azerbaijani government is concerned, all of the area currently under the control of the NKR is 'occupied territory' of Azerbaijan, an area that comprises 13.62% of the landmass of the state according to De Waal but which is regularly described as '20%' of the country in Azerbaijan (DE WAAL, 2013, p. 328). Officials from the US government and other Euro-Atlantic states tend to use the phrase 'Nagorno-Karabakh and the occupied territories' which registers a distinction between the entity (undefined but presumably based on the NKAO) and the surrounding Azerbaijani territories that are occupied. The government of Armenia relies on the phrase 'disputed territories' to describe all the Armenian-controlled territories while fudging on the status of the territories surrounding NK, allowing informally for their return to Azerbaijani jurisdiction if other conditions are met.

These descriptors are consequential. They are, for example, at the heart of the ongoing dispute over the opening of the Nagorny Karabakh airport, and whether the Convention on International Civil Aviation, also known as the Chicago Convention, applies or not. This airport is located close to the site of a massacre of hundreds of Azerbaijani civilians on the night of 25–26 February 1992, an incident that has been the subject of high profile public relations campaigns in international capitals by Azerbaijani organizations for several years. The current Azerbaijani government has threatened to shoot down any aircraft that attempts to fly to an airport it sees as under its jurisdiction.

As a contribution to thinking through the complexity of Nagorny Karabakh as a territorial referent, this paper isolates and discusses six distinct political geographies that are relevant to Armenian perceptions of the conflict. The geographies comprise historical and contemporary *territorial regimes*, material orders of territory, politics and governance, and *geopolitical imaginations*, symbolic orders of territory, politics and cultural systems (MURPHY 2002; AGNEW and MUSCARÀ, 2012). Second, it then presents and analyzes the results of a public opinion survey conducted in the NKR in 2011 that asked respondents about their relative support for these various political geographies. These results provide some insight into the geopolitical imaginations at work amongst residents of the contemporary NKR. It is not our argument that public opinion in NK is the source of the conflict or that public opinion in Armenia and Azerbaijan is unimportant. Instead, we suggest that the NK results are an important aspect of this complex territorial conflict because they have significant implications for how a peace settlement involving 'land for peace' could be constructed between the conflicting parties if there is a collective will to do so. Geopolitical visions within NK matter because these are the views of those currently residing on the very ground of the conflict.

SIX POLITICAL GEOGRAPHIES

Critical scholarship within the discipline of Geography over the last decade has underscored how foundational materialist concepts like 'geography' and 'territory' are bound up with particular historical regimes of power, sovereignty, population, discourse and the technical mastery of space (AGNEW, 2009; ELDEN, 2013). Throughout history power centers put together machineries of governance in speculative attempts to conquer surrounding spaces and acquire dominance over their populations. Many of the centers that prove successful in accumulating great power and mastering space define distinct orders of territory, identity and power for themselves and acquire recognition as states in an international order of states. Some, however, do not. In certain cases, local regimes of power acquire mastery over a distinct space and population but

fail to achieve widespread recognition for this achievement of domination. A not unfamiliar phenomenon historically, today these cases are termed ‘unrecognized’ or ‘partially recognized’ states (PEGG, 1998; CASPERSEN, 2011; CASPERSEN and STANSFIELD, 2011). Other terms, like ‘quasi-states’ or ‘pseudo-states’, have also been used (KOLSTO, 2006). The term ‘de facto state’ is used by scholars for these places in recognition of their achievement of ‘internal sovereignty’ over a given territory and population—de facto control—but their lack of ‘external sovereignty’ or widespread legal acknowledgement of the legitimacy of this control—de jure recognition—by the international community of states and attendant organizations. De facto states are particularly interesting research sites for the study of territory, politics and governance as these questions are fiercely contested, manifestly unbundled, and raw in such places, rather than smoothed over, naturalized and occluded.

The intensity of disputes over most de facto states, however, makes them difficult places to access and challenging to study in an objective manner. In June 2011 we travelled to the NK, negotiating the instrumentalities of control established by the Armenian state and the NKR to get there. Once there we conducted a series of elite interviews and sought advice on the possibility of conducting a public opinion survey in the region as part of our broader De Facto State Research Project. Upon our return from NK we made more detailed plans for such a survey upon learning it was possible to conduct one in Yerevan (capital of Armenia).

For first time non-Armenian visitors to the region there are a series of disjunctive experiences that are instructive insights into the local terms of the NK conflict. The first is the divergence between the official state name of the region, the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, and the preferred term used by residents to describe it, Artsakh. A second is the existence of a tourist infrastructure organized around visiting Armenian monasteries, churches and archeological sites in the region (a feature of Armenia also). What the NKR wants to show its few tourists, the majority of whom are members of the Armenian diaspora, are the sites that situate it within a broader religious homeland of Armenia and Armenians. A third experience is what the NKR does not want to show, namely the ruins of the cities destroyed in fighting between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces in the early 1990s. The ghost cities of Agdam (renamed Akna by the NKR) and Fizuli (renamed Varanda), in particular, are off bounds for tourists (see Figure 1 for these and other locations). So, understandably enough are the multiple defensive lines and concrete trenches of fortifications near the Line of Contact. There is no official or semi-official ‘war tourism’ in Nagorny Karabakh: it is a war zone. Finally, there is the disjuncture between international or ‘outside’ Western maps of the region, which cite the NKAO as a fundamental territorial referent, and ‘inside’ maps of the region (printed in Armenia in Armenian and English, including *Atlas of the Nagorno-Karabagh Republic* [hereafter *NKR Atlas*], published in 2012 in Stepanakert) where the NKAO is absent and the NKR’s cartographic visions of the lands under its control are presented (VARDANYAN, 2010; BROERS and TOAL, 2013).

To understand the contested territoriality of contemporary Nagorny Karabakh, one needs to grasp six distinct ‘political geographies’ relevant to the past and present of the conflict. Figure 1 provides a visual display of the different territorial components that play in four of the six geographies, as well as key places mentioned in the text.

An Ancient Cradle of the Armenian Nation: Artsakh

Today, most Armenians use the term Artsakh interchangeably with the term Karabakh in Armenian, Russian and English. The terms are not mutually exclusive nor necessarily



Figure 1. Locations of the contested borders and key places mentioned in the text.

in a zero-sum competition (though this can and does occur). The official English language name of the territory is the 'Nagorno-Karabakh Republic' and this adorns the website of its de facto president, its international offices, and the business cards of its officials.² But the term 'Artsakh' is a powerful and appealing alternative, one with its own distinctive political and ideological significance. Users understand it as the 'original' ancient name for the region from pre-Christian times. Disused for centuries, it was reintroduced in the nineteenth century as part of an Armenian cultural and literary movement. The geopolitical significance of the term is three-fold. First, it is held to be a true and authentic Armenian name for the territory, one that (re)connects the modern territory to a genealogy of ancient Armenian polities. With the term comes a claim to the territory according to the doctrine of *prior tempore, prior jure* (first in point of time, first by right). Second, the term is used as an act of purported purification. The name 'Karabakh' is held as somewhat imperfect because it implicitly signifies Persian and Turkic influences upon the territory. Traces of three languages, and empires, are found in the name 'Nagorny Karabakh,' none of them Armenian. In using the term, users are implicitly engaging in an act of purifying the territory of

these 'foreign' influences, and consciously asserting Armenian over other languages. Such a gesture, of course, depends upon an imagined linguistic separatism that is often difficult to achieve in regions of cultural and linguistic heterogeneity where many words are borrowed and blended (FOSTER, 2009). Third, the term is associated with a revivalist agenda and project, an imagined 'return to an original identity' after history of foreign capture and repression. Multiple metaphorical conceits are at work here. There is foreign loss/native return but there is also enduring essentialized Armenian identity. This is conjured by the metaphorical magic of mountains as unchanging strongholds. The National Anthem of Artsakh, for example, describes it as 'our home-fortress,' 'an unassailable fortress, a holy peak, a noble name, a blessing divine, we are made eternal through you' (VARDANYAN, 2010).³ Popular in NK and Armenia is the imagery of the Tatik-Papik ('Grandma-Grandpa') monument just outside Stepanakert which many in NK describe as symbolizing an inalienable connection of these two Armenian archetypes to the earth, the busts symbolizing two hidden full length bodies politic bound to the same soil.

Artsakh was a province of the ancient Kingdom of Armenia between the second-century B.C.E. and the fourth century of the Common Era. Armenian historians link the name to 'Ardakh', 'Urdekhe' and 'Atakhuni' found in Urartian cuneiform writing dating from the sixth-century B.C.E. Lang suggested that Artsakh may be related to the name of the second-century B.C.E. Armenian King Artashes (Artaxias) I (LANG, 1981, p. x). In the first-century B.C.E., King Tigran II of Armenia is believed to have built one of many cities associated with him (Tigranakerts) in ancient Artsakh. Excavation of an archeological site in the Armenian-controlled portion of the Agdam district of Azerbaijan from 2005 has been dubbed by local officials as 'Tigranakert' and is featured in site detail in the *NKR Atlas* (VARDANYAN, 2010, p. 31).

To the ancient kingdom imagination of the territory is added early Christian citations and narratives. In the fourth century, St. Gregory Lusavorich (The Illuminator), a Christian who was credited with 'baptizing Armenia' and became its first Catholicos, travelled to Artsakh. St. Gregory's grandson, St. Grigoris became the archbishop of the neighboring Caucasian Albania, and was subsequently 'martyred' and buried at Amaras, in the present-day Martuni district of NK. The church at this site is part of the contemporary 'tourist trail' for visiting Armenians. While the provinces of the ancient Armenian Kingdom were not mapped, Artsakh is believed to have straddled the eastern slopes of the highlands from the Araxes River in the south to east and north of Lake Sevan, and was located south of the province of Utik, west of Paytarakan and east of Syunik. The *NKR Atlas* represents it and Utik as the 'Eastern Armenian Lands,' describing Artsakh and the surrounding areas as 'an essential part of the cradle of the Armenian nation's ethnogenesis' (VARDANYAN, 2010, p. 46). A series of graphic and textual plates in this volume present a 'Great Armenia' on the map at this time but do not delineate any borders for Artsakh.⁴

The term Karabakh came into use following the Mongol and Turkic invasions of the region in subsequent centuries. The first known usage is by the Germanic adventurer Johann Schiltberger, who in the fifteenth century was taken prisoner by the Ottomans and then by a series of other rulers. Karabakh became the prevailing name for the region in the mid-eighteenth century when the semi-independent Karabakh Khanate was established under Persian suzerainty. This incorporated a previous administrative order that over time featured five Karabakh melikdoms within a medieval polity known in Armenian historiography as the Principality of Khachen. By the 1830s the Karabakh Khanate was incorporated into the Russian empire and administratively ruled as a

regional *guberniya* centered on the city of Elizavetpol' (in Russian Елизаветполь, *Yelizavetpol* and now the Azerbaijani city of Ganja). This was made up of seven sub-provinces (*uezds*). A 1866 rural survey put the population of the *guberniya* at 728,943, inhabiting 1524 villages that were grouped into 434 rural communities (SAPAROV, 2012; see Figure 1, p. 288).

The late nineteenth century saw the development of an Armenian nationalist movement that had various forms. One was a literary-based national consciousness movement. Two publications, the *Meliks of Khamsa* by Raffi (TIFLIS, 1881) and *Artsakh* by Bishop Markar Barkhudariants (BAKU, 1895) cultivated interest in the region as part of an idealized Armenian homeland space. In these books, Artsakh–Karabakh is celebrated as an Armenian stronghold that continued to withstand foreign invasions long after most other areas of historic Armenia lost their Armenian leaders and population. Armenian nationalists have tended to use the terms Artsakh and Karabakh interchangeably since. Neither has a stable territorial referent. The term Karabakh is often differentiated into a mountainous and lowland valley zone. The former typically referred to the NKAO *plus* the relatively mountainous regions of Lachin, Kelbajar and Shaumian (see Figure 1 for locations). Lower or Valley Karabakh referred to the former Azerbaijani populated districts adjacent to the Araxes river and all areas west of Kura river and east of the former NKAO.

A Soviet Political Geography: The NKAO

The conquest of both Azerbaijan and Armenia by the Red Army (in April and November 1920, respectively) left the status of the territories in dispute between both polities in question and in need of resolution. These were three: Karabakh, Nakhichevan and Zangezur. Preparing a spring campaign against Armenian forces in Zangezur in March 1920, Azerbaijan found its troop garrisons and troop transportation attacked by Armenian forces in Karabakh. In a response that would be long remembered, Azerbaijani soldiers attacked and destroyed the Armenian section of Shusha, expelling its surviving inhabitants (MKRTCHIAN and DAVTIAN, 1999). Azerbaijani forces controlled the main Agdam–Askeran–Shusha road through Nagorny Karabakh but Armenian armed formations were in control of highland areas. Pacifying and assimilating both forces, and maneuvering in a fluid regional geopolitical environment, was a major challenge for the Red Army and Bolshevik leadership. Both Armenian and Azerbaijani local leadership continued to pursue national goals within the new prevailing communist ideological framework (SAPAROV, 2012, p. 299).

After a series of deliberations, the body empowered by Soviet rule, the Caucasus Bureau (*Kavburo*) on 3 June 1921 recommended that the Armenian government should declare Nagorny Karabakh part of Armenia, an action that the Soviet Armenian government readily took nine days later. A Border Commission established to delimit borders, however, became a forum for the implacable opposition to this by Azerbaijani Bolshevik delegates. Instrumentalizing the language of communist modernity, Azerbaijani Bolsheviks publicly defied this decision, charging that economic rationales and administrative efficiency should prevail, and NK thus integrated within emergent Soviet Azerbaijan. A plenum of the *Kavburo* in July 1921 took up the matter and, after initially voting for the inclusion of NK within Armenia, reversed itself and awarded NK to Soviet Azerbaijan while granting it wide regional autonomy (SAPAROV, 2012, p. 312). Beyond the appeal of the economic rationale was Bolshevik interest in cultivating the new Ataturk regime in Turkey and the defeat of Armenian rebels in Zangezur as explanations of this reversal. In both countries, however, its

dramatic nature fed conspiratorial visions of a 'divide and rule' strategy by Stalin, who was present at the Kavburo's deliberations but a non-voting member.

The NKAO was one of the few in the Soviet ethnofederalist system that did not explicitly state the ethnicity for which it was formed. However, administrative divisions within the NKAO were given Armenian names. A new capital, Stepanakert was named after the noted Armenian communist Stepan Shaumyan while Mardakert, Hadrut and Martuni were Armenian names. Smaller settlements officially retained their Turkic names (FOSTER, 2009, p. 430). The autonomy's borders were not finalized until the 1930s after so-called 'Red Kurdistan' was first established and then abolished (MÜLLER, 2000). Initially the NKAO shared a short border with Soviet Armenia but by the 1930s that link was eliminated, and the NKAO became an enclave with a majority Armenian population surrounded by Azerbaijani territory. Nested within the NKAO, in the manner of a Russian Matryoshka doll, was the former capital, Shusha (Shushi to Armenians), a city with an Azerbaijani majority within an Armenian majority oblast within an Azerbaijani majority Soviet Republic.

A Unilateral Self-Deterministic Political Geography: The NKR of 1991

The conflict over the status of Nagorny Karabakh was never confined to the NKAO but encompassed towns and villages across the territory of both Soviet Armenia and Azerbaijan. The launch of the policies of perestroika and glasnost by General Secretary Gorbachev created space for protests that quickly took on an ethno-territorial character in the Baltics and Caucasus. In 1987, protests by Armenians in the village of Chardakhli in northwestern Azerbaijan against an Azerbaijani Sovkhoz (state farm) director led to reprisals that forced local Armenians to flee. This episode and other instances of forced displacement were interpreted darkly by politicians on both sides as efforts to refashion the demography of local territories and the region as a whole. Suspensions in this regard ran deep throughout the Soviet period. Mobilization and counter-mobilization around displacement and status questions unleashed an escalating cycle of group insecurity that was felt acutely in multiethnic spaces like Karabakh, Baku (capital of Azerbaijan) and Yerevan, as well as beyond in rural communities where largely monoethnic settlements existed but often in close proximity to each other. Demonstrations in Stepanakert and Yerevan, as well as a meeting in Moscow between Gorbachev and two members of the Karakakh Committee agitating for the transfer of the NKAO to Soviet Armenia, sparked rumors that this action was imminent, and that Azerbaijanis were dying at the hands of Armenians (neither were true). Forcing the issue, on 20 February 1988, the regional Soviet in Stepanakert voted to request the transfer of NKAO from Azerbaijan to Armenia. A counter-mobilization of Azerbaijanis from Agdam on 22 February 1988 led to a clash with Armenian villagers and Armenian and Azerbaijani police units in the NKAO border town of Askeran and the first deaths (two Azerbaijanis) and wounded in the conflict. News of these deaths sparked what came to be known to Armenians as the 'Sumgait massacre', an 'ethnic riot' against local Armenians that left at least 32 dead (26 Armenians and 6 Azerbaijanis). Thereafter, the Soviet and local authorities struggled to contain the escalation of fear, insecurity and ethnicized violence. On 15 June 1988, the Armenian Supreme Soviet voted to accept NKAO into Armenia, a move rejected by the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet who reaffirmed it as part of Azerbaijan two days later.

Seeking a way forward, in January 1989, Moscow imposed direct control over Karabakh and established its own special administration to run the NKAO. To its north, Armenians in the Shaumian district began to form village militias, something happening increasingly across the region. By the summer the situation inside the NKAO was

deteriorating badly as now rival ethnic communities armed themselves and sought protection. In late November 1989, Moscow decided that its special administrative governance was not working and reverted control to Azerbaijan, which immediately imposed military rule. In response, the Armenian Supreme Soviet, on 1 December 1989, declared that the NKAO was now incorporated into the Armenian republic. Inter-ethnic tensions in Baku exploded into violent pogroms directed against the city's remaining Armenian residents (many had fled earlier in the year after losing their jobs and suffering harassment). More than 90 people died and most all of the remaining Armenians fled the city (DE WAAL, 2013).

In April 1991, Azerbaijani and Soviet forces launched Operation Ring to expel the Armenian militias operating in the Shaumian district. Low intensity warfare had characterized the region since January 1990. The campaign, which involved helicopters and armored personnel carriers, had the effect of driving the Armenian population from these villages—Erkech, Manashid and Buzlukh (DE WAAL, 2013, p. 119)—into Armenia and the NKAO. Already linked by historic ties and family, thereafter their land and cause was the same as that of NKAO Karabakhi Armenians. The NKAO's political geography was becoming increasingly irrelevant as conflict engulfed the wider region. This found expression more than a year and a half later when a NKR was proclaimed amidst a wave of similar declarations after the collapse of the hardline coup against Mikhail Gorbachev in August 1991. On 30 August President Mutalibov of Azerbaijan declared Azerbaijan independent. Immediately thereafter, on 2 September 1991, a joint meeting of the legislative councils of the NKAO and adjacent Shaumian district declared a NKR within the current boundaries of the NK autonomous region *and* the adjacent Shaumian district (Figure 1). The declaration cited:

the laws of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which, upon the secession of a union republic from the USSR, allow the peoples of autonomous formations and coexisting ethnic groups the right to self-determination of its national-legal status.⁵

This secessionist move was designed to preempt widespread international recognition following the principle of *uti possidetis* of Soviet Azerbaijan's borders as the legitimate borders of a new independent state of Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijanis Soviet Assembly responded by abolishing the NKAO on 26 November 1991.

The NKR of 1991 was a political geography conjured from the mythology of a 'right to self-determination' (illegal secession from Azerbaijan's perspective). A 'people' were purportedly declaring a natural right and, in keeping with the perceived requirements of self-determination norms (which were enjoying a very public revival in Eurasia at the time),⁶ a referendum was organized on the declaration and held on 10 December 1991. With only Karabakhi Armenians participating, the result was foreordained, with 99.8% of the vote (108,615–24) recorded in favor (DE WAAL, 2013, p. 175). A new territorial polity, a self-proclaimed self-determination unit, had been speculatively asserted. Even on its own terms, serious questions were left unanswered by this move. First, to what extent was it possible to speak of Karabakhi Armenians as a separate people with a right to self-determination? Unity with Armenia, after all, had been the proclaimed goal previous to this (the slogan of the early phases of the Karabakh movement was *miatsum*, 'unification'), and an annexationist policy endorsed by the Soviet Armenian parliament. Second, the territory of the proclaimed NKR was aspirational. While local ethnic militias had forces on the ground around charismatic leaders, it was not under the military control of Karabakh forces. Furthermore, it did not involve any

claim to a corridor linking NK to Armenia, a link that would become a military necessity in the fighting to come.

A Political Geography of Conquest: Territories Controlled by the NKR in 1994

If NKR 1991 was a political geography conjured by codes of aspirational legality, the NKR created on the ground thereafter was a political geography made by prevailing military security logics and force of arms. In this process large swaths of the human settlement geography of western Azerbaijan were laid to waste. From the outset, the NKR project had two major security vulnerabilities. The first was the fact that it was territorially surrounded by Azerbaijan, with the mountainside town of Lachin adjacent to the border of Armenia a vital strategic location blocking the only viable ground route for material aid to flow to the NKR's defenders. The high mountain district of Kelbajar, an area of historic Kurdish communities, was a lesser route, and also firmly controlled by Azerbaijan. The second vulnerability was to the largest city in the region, and capital of the new NKR, Stepanakert. Located on the foothills as mountainous Karabakh gave way to the lower Karabakh valley, Stepanakert was exposed to military attack from the heights of Shusha, the historic capital of the region that was adjacent to the city, from its surrounding ethnic Azerbaijani villages, and from the road east which linked it to Askeran and beyond that, the city of Agdam. In confronting and eventually eliminating all of these potential military threats, the NKR's defenders re-made the human geography of the larger Karabakh region, seized uncontested Azerbaijani territory to which they had made no initial claim, and displaced upwards of half a million people from their homes (for these locations, see Figure 1).

The military logic that drove these actions was the desire for 'defensible frontiers'—Karabakh's first Armenian leader, Artur Mkrtchian, laid out such a vision which was similar to that eventually achieved on the battlefield (DE WAAL, 2003, p. 240)—and to 'reduce the line of the front' as then Armenian military commander and current Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian put it (DE WAAL, 2003, p. 179). Early in 1992 Armenian militia forces began to break out of Stepanakert and attack surrounding Azerbaijani villages, expelling hundreds. In late February most residents of the town of Khojali fled the fighting. Hundreds of these civilians were subsequently killed in the surrounding hills in deeply controversial circumstances. By this time, Stepanakert was under sustained attack by Grad missiles launched from Shusha. Disorganized and disintegrating, however, the Azerbaijani military formations largely failed in the face of motivated and organized Armenian forces. Shusha fell in early May, and by mid-month Lachin had also fallen. Azerbaijani homes in both locations were looted, burned and destroyed. Azerbaijani forces recovered by mid-1992 but a counter-offensive that saw them re-take Armenian villages in Shaumian and most of northern Karabakh was halted by year's end. The following year proved decisive for the NKR forces as mismanagement and political infighting in Baku undermined Azerbaijan's war effort. NKR affiliated forces seized lightly defended Kelbajar in April, and recaptured Mardakert and almost all of northern Karabakh (though not the Armenian villages beyond it in Shaumian). In July they had further success, driving Azerbaijani forces out of the major towns of Agdam and in August—Fizuli, Jebrail and Kubatly. In October they captured the Zengelan region and the railroad junction at Horadiz, all south of the NKAO and north of the Araxes River that marked the border with Iran. NKR's southern front was thereby shortened from 130 to 22 kilometers (DE WAAL, 2013, p. 239). Most of the NKAO was under the control of the NKR forces. So also was almost 5000 square kilometers beyond it across multiple provinces of Azerbaijan (DE WAAL, 2013, p. 227).

The war was not over, though. It entered a final bloody phase between December 1993 and May 1994. Azerbaijani forces, supplemented by Afghan and Russian mercenaries, attacked along the entire Line of Contact from Kelbajar to Fizuli. In January 1994 they managed to retake Horadiz railroad station and about a dozen villages around it in the Fizuli district before their progress was halted. In February Azerbaijanis lost an estimated 2000 soldiers in a Kelbajar operation—the bloodiest episode of the entire war. In April to May, Armenian forces counterattacked taking more territory in Agdam and Mardakert districts and threatening to take more when Azerbaijan finally agreed to a cease-fire.

The collapse of the Azerbaijani military forces and a finalized cease-fire in May 1994 left the NKR forces with territory that was never claimed as part of the NKR. Military logic had re-made the region but the resultant territorial holdings posed many challenges. Large Azerbaijani towns like Agdam and Fizuli were depopulated, their residents driven into internal exile. Few Armenians lived in these settlements, and none wished to re-build them. Newly empowered Armenian commanders like Samvel Babayan treated what remained as war booty. The surrounding land was agriculturally rich but cultivated irregularly by those Kolkoz members and machines still working in the area. The prevailing conception at the time was that the southern and easternmost territories at least were 'bargaining chips' in any negotiated final settlement. They were military buffer zones, a *cordon sanitaire* that protected Karabakh proper from long-range artillery or a breakthrough of Azerbaijani forces. Over the next decade, however, the negotiated settlement never materialized and the prevailing meaning of these territories changed.

A Modernizing De Facto State's Political Geography: The NKR of 2006

Fifteen years after its first independence referendum, on 10 December 2006, the NKR passed a referendum on its new constitution. The Constitution's Article 142 (last article of the basic law) stated: 'Till the restoration of the state territorial integrity of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic and the adjustment of its borders public authority is exercised on the territory under factual jurisdiction of the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh.'⁷

In the intervening 15 years, the conception of the territories seized from Azerbaijani forces beyond the NKAO underwent a transformation. Debate on these territories within Armenian political life can be organized along a spectrum. At one end is recognition of these as 'occupied territories'; at the opposite end is the conviction that these are 'liberated territories.' Immediate post-war conceptions of them as chips in a negotiation game assumed a moment when the leaders of both Armenia and Azerbaijan were ready to make peace, and a deal could be struck. The first arrived but the second proved elusive. As time passed Armenian forces built elaborate trench fortifications along the Line of Contact while politicians in Karabakh began to talk more openly about the seized territories beyond the NKAO as 'liberated territories'. To a certain extent the terminology was itself part of a mimetic game played between the two sides. To Azerbaijan, all of the territory lost to NKR forces, known as the 'seven provinces' were 'occupied territories' while the small sections of the NKAO in Azerbaijani hands were 'liberated territories'. Armenians inverted this terminology to describe these regions, and the Shaumian district. On most Armenian maps they are marked: 'territories currently occupied by Azerbaijan'. One side's liberated territory was the other side's occupied territory, the key difference being that Azerbaijan had lost a great deal more territory.

It would be misleading to suggest that the emergent popularity of the terminology of 'liberated territories' and the relative decline of a seemingly pragmatic military

terminology—buffer zone, negotiating card, etc.—signals the triumph of nationalist ideology over military logic. Instead, at issue are historical fusions of both, with an older conception now replaced by an emergent modernized vision of security and territory. We got some sense of this shift from an interview with David Babayan, an advisor to the current president of the NKR.⁸ Babayan explained how the NKR's current security vision began to develop in the last years of the twentieth century:

In the late 1990s you could still see even in our official statements that we were hopeful of achieving a compromise settlement with Azerbaijan, that we could give back certain territories or even all territories in exchange for status. In 1999 we began to think in terms of state-building.

To Babayan the latter mode of reasoning meant thinking only in terms of security 'rather than in terms of our passion, historical lands, justice, all of that is OK. But fortunately or unfortunately the only thing that is understood in the world is security'. Thinking in terms of security means forgetting who has the better historical or contemporary claim to a territory but instead about its actual and potential significance in preserving and sustaining the state.

So when Azerbaijan tells us: give us back all the territories and then we will see, of course that is not acceptable to us. Because we have to have a solid foundation for a mutual compromise, let's say some territories instead of status, for example, but they don't say that. But there are some territories that we would never give back, never ever. Not because of passion or history, but because of our present-day concerns. One of these is Lachin that connects NK to Armenia. But I consider Kelbajar even more important and this relates to my scientific input to our state building. Why? Because this is the hydro-donor of Karabakh and Armenia. Kelbajar is kind of like Golan Heights for Israel. 85 percent of former NKAO water resources originated in Kelbajar. Two main rivers that feed Lake Sevan, the Arpa and Vorotan [originate here]. In Soviet times Lake Sevan water was used for irrigation so that water levels in it were reduced, and [if that continued] it would have been an ecological catastrophe in Armenia, and not just ecological, but economic and political as well. Sevan is probably as important to Armenia as Karabakh is. It accounts for 80 percent of Armenia's water resources. Today, Lake Sevan's water level is increasing. And the rivers that originate [in Kelbajar] play a crucial role in Sevan, with water brought in by Vorotan-Arpa canal.

Babayan's identification of a new security concept for NKR resonates with the initial cause célèbre of Armenian intellectuals in the pre-perestroika period, namely the ecological status of Lake Sevan. It also offers a language to re-code territories previously unclaimed by the NKR as now vital because of the imperatives of 'ecological security.' These territories have been 'liberated' to serve as elements in the building of stronger and more sustainable Armenian states, both Armenia itself and its ecological security partner, the NKR. In this vision, the territory controlled by the NKR is an ecological security structure (Figure 1).

The effort to assimilate the seized territories beyond the NKAO by the NKR takes a number of controversial forms. The administrative districts of NKR now encompass territories within and beyond the NKAO without distinction. NKR has seven administrative districts: Shaumian in the northwest, Martakert in the northeast, Askeran directly south of it (excluding Stapanakert which has its own elected mayor), Shushi in the center, Kashatagh in the southwest, Martuni in the mid-east and Hadrut in the southeast. NKR maps show these in distinct colors, and have no lines representing the borders of

the NKAO (BROERS and TOAL, 2013). Many places, regions, districts and settlements have also been systematically renamed with 'Armenian' names. The historically strategic town of Lachin is just one of many examples; it is now called Berdzor by the NKR. Finally, there has also been a tepid effort to incentivize ethnic Armenians to move to strategic locations like Lachin/Berdzor. For the most part, however, these efforts have yielded little.⁹ Large sections of the territories beyond the NKAO are uninhabited or sparsely so, though good agricultural land is generally tended and harvested.

A Sacred Artifactual Political Geography: The Greater Armenian Homeland

Those modern nationalisms that have used a religious identity as the basis for their definition and demarcation of community tend to also use religious monuments and sites as markers of their claim to homeland territories. The problems with such strategies are well known to scholars of nationalism. Ecclesiastical space and spatiality has historically been very different from the exclusivist spatiality associated with modern nationalism. Religious communities and dominions overlapped and co-existed with other communities that themselves became the basis for subsequent nationalist movements and projects. Furthermore, religious monuments are never simply religious but entangled with dynastic power structures and patrimonies. As one of the oldest Christian creeds, the Armenian Church has a long and complicated geographical footprint across the Middle East, Anatolia and Caucasus. The Armenian Apostolic Church was established in the fourth-century C.E. after the conversion of an Armenian ruler to the new creed of Christianity by, as we have already noted, the local evangelist later canonized as Saint Gregory the Illuminator. The city of Etchmiadzin, to the west of Yerevan, became the founding seat of the Catholicoi of the church that thrived as the official creed of Armenian dynastic rulers in subsequent centuries.

The manifest discontinuities between this complicated historical footprint and modern nationalist territoriality has not, however, prevented nationalist activists from seeking to instrumentalize religious sites and markers in polemics with rival nationalist projects. Ingrained Soviet concepts of 'ethnogenesis' and nationhood as a list of 'objective' attributes shape such projects. In such campaigns, churches, graveyards and religious stones are taken as evidence of original ownership of territories under dispute and the basis for making claims to territories that may not otherwise be under dispute. Such discourses seek to imagine territory as sacred space, sacred not simply for its religious meaning but more broadly as the ancient patrimony of the modern nation. Working within, yet at odds with, the scientific practice of archeology, particularly architectural archeology, they promote what might be termed an *ecclesio-topographical gaze* upon the landscape that easily endorses an exclusivist territorialism.

The leading Armenian activist in promoting such a vision is Samvel Karapetian. A historian, archivist and preservation activist, he is currently head of a non-governmental organization in Armenia called Research on Armenian Architecture, which has contributors across Armenia and Karabakh as well as branches overseas.¹⁰ Karapetian has written numerous books, some appearing with Armenian, Russian and English language text. Some, such as *Armenian Cultural Monuments in the Region of Karabakh*, are published exclusively in English. In his portrait of Karapetian, DE WAAL (2013, p. 162) notes how within his vision 'the past eclipsed the present' and evidence of ancient historic ruins superseded the claims of relatively recently displaced Azeris and Kurdish residents. Nowhere is this more in evidence than at Tigranakert, the archeological site developed about 8 kilometers north of the destroyed city of Agdam. With these ruins on the horizon and the destroyed houses of those displaced in 1994 on the surrounding

fields, the site is dedicated to unearthing the ancient ruins of a city from the first-century B.C.E. A former Azerbaijani restaurant has been converted into an archeological museum to display findings from the site, and contextualize it within a broader sweep of ancient Armenian lands. The reopening in 1994 and restoration (in 2004–2005), after alleged destruction by Azerbaijani policy, of the Dadivank monastery serves a similar ideological purpose for the Armenian settlement in Kelbajar (renamed Karavachar by the NKR). In Lachin (renamed Berdzor), the nearby-restored Tzitzernavank Monastery underscores the Armenian claim to this strategic town.

The geopolitical imagination conjured by an ecclesio-topographical gaze, thus, serves an important legitimization function across contemporary Karabakh. Tigranakert, Dadivank, Tzitzernavank and other sites beyond the NKAO are part of a ‘rediscovered’ and ‘rehabilitated’ seamless palimpsest of monasteries, churches and archeological sites stretching across Armenia, Karabakh and adjacent states. The museum of the NKR in Stepanakert features a series of maps produced by Research on Armenian Architecture on its walls showing Armenian religious sites in contemporary Azerbaijan. It also offers Karapetian’s books for sale in English. In the imagination of many Armenians, the stone footprints of the Armenian Church, and of ‘ancient Armenia’ before it, are the underlying authentic Armenian homeland. Tigranakert is only one of the many ‘battlefields’ in a ‘war of monuments’ being waged by heritage activists within the Armenian and Azerbaijani states over sensitive locations in Yerevan, Nakhichevan, Baku and elsewhere.¹¹

POLITICAL GEOGRAPHIES AND PUBLIC OPINION IN NAGORNY KARABAKH

While maps and atlases contain historical depictions of the evolution of state borders, and as we have indicated for Nagorny Karabakh a great deal of insecurity surrounds its current borders due to territorial claims and counter-claims, it is unclear to what extent these cartographic representations resonate in the consciousness of citizens of the republic. A 2010 survey of attitudes in NK documented attitudes toward conflict and peace but did not address geopolitical images (COOPER and MORRIS, 2013). We have earlier probed the geo-visions of Russians with respect to the perceptions of their state in a post-911 world, in which relatively abstract geopolitical images were used as prompts in the large national survey (O’LOUGHLIN *et al.*, 2004). In this instance, we report the support of adult residents of NKR for the various political geographies elaborated above.

The survey was conducted, at our direction, in NK between 26 November and 4 December 2011 by a group of interviewers supervised by Professor Gevork Pogonian of the Sociological Research Center at the Armenian Academy of Sciences in Yerevan. With extensive survey experience in sampling design and questionnaire design, such as for the World Values Survey, the interview team followed a standard procedure for accessing potential respondents by a route quota method. Using the figures from the most recent census in the republic from 2005 (available from www.stat-nkr.am), the total sample of 800 was proportionately distributed across the 8 districts and cities—Stepanakert 300, Askeran 95, Martuni 135, Martakert 108, Hadrut 67, Karavachar (Kelbajar) 15, Shushi (Shusha) 25 and Berdzor (Lachin) 55. (See Figure 1 for these locations). Using the principle of route quota, in each city, 3–20 starting points (schools, petrol stations, squares, museums, etc.) were chosen. The interviewer chose the crossing street and then picked the first apartment building and then each following fifth building, and in the case of single-family houses, every third one. The response rate after two visits was 93.1%. Supervisors from Yerevan checked 30% of the interviews

either through home visits or by telephone; the interviewers were graduate students in sociology from Artsakh State University in Stepanakert. All interviews were in Armenian and took 35 minutes on average to complete.

To study the resonance of the various political geographies above, respondents were verbally prompted thus with the statement: 'Many people have different understandings of the territorial extent of Nagorny Karabakh. What is your view? To what extent do you agree with the following statements?' They were then presented with six different verbal descriptions of the territorial meanings of Nagorny Karabakh corresponding to the above definitions. It is our assumption that the questions did not pose difficulties as only a small percentage of respondents (1–3%) did not answer the respective questions (all questions were first vetted by the Sociological Research Center and a pilot survey conducted beforehand). The English language text of the questions was the following:

-
1. Nagorny Karabakh and Artsakh mean the same thing to me
 2. Nagorny Karabakh is the territory of the former NKAO of Azerbaijan only
 3. Nagorny Karabakh is the territory of the NKR proclaimed in December 1991 (NKAO and Shaumian rayon)
 4. Nagorny Karabakh is all the territories now controlled by the NKR
 5. Nagorny Karabakh is all the territories controlled by the NKR plus those areas still occupied by Azerbaijan
 6. All places in this region that have historic Armenian churches and settlements are part of Nagorny Karabakh/Artsakh
-

Summary statistics of the respondent characteristics showed marked ethnic homogeneity, a reflection of the war's outcome and the almost complete forced displacement of the Azerbaijani population. All 800 respondents identified themselves as Armenian, and 85% used Armenian as the language of the home (13% Russian). Almost all identified themselves as members of the Armenian Apostolic Church, though church attendance is highly variable. Slightly more women (52%) took part in the survey and nearly all interviews were with the respondent alone (87%). Unlike comparable surveys that we have conducted in other post-Soviet unrecognized de facto states (Transdnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia), the Karabakh survey is noteworthy for the very low number of respondents who gave a 'don't know' or 'refuse to answer' response. This likely reflects the ethnically homogeneous setting and relative trust of fellow Karabakhi interviewers, something absent from contexts, like the Gali District in Abkhazia, where these scores are high (O'LOUGHLIN *et al.*, 2011). By the ratings of the interviewers after the survey was completed, only 7% gave somewhat evasive answers, a much lower rate than in the similar scoring by interviewers in the other republics.

Our comparable surveys in other post-Soviet de facto states (Abkhazia and Transnistria with mixed-ethnic populations and South Ossetia with a nearly homogenous one) yielded more diversity of responses than is the case in the NKR (O'LOUGHLIN *et al.*, 2011, 2013; TOAL and O'LOUGHLIN, 2013). In other words, across the typical four-option response (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree), there is a greater variation elsewhere than in Nagorny Karabakh where for most questions, two-thirds or more of the respondents selected the same answer. Such uniformity of opinion obviously is related to the ethnic homogeneity of the population but it is also formed to a large extent, especially on sensitive questions, by the intensity of the fighting in a small area, the large numbers of killed (about 25,000–30,000 estimated) and displaced, the ongoing tensions along the front-lines, and the omnipresence of memorials, destroyed and damaged buildings, and personal testimonies of suffering. One of the most startling statistics in the survey is that 71% of respondents affirmed that they or close family

members had witnessed an act of violence that resulted in injury or death, the highest ratio on this question in surveys that we have conducted in the Balkans and the Caucasus in the past decade. Rooted in the local social structures and cultural values of Nagorny Karabakh, questions such as attitudes toward other populations, the strength of feelings and lack of trust in other groups is remarkably uniform compared to the other post-war contexts.

Within the scope of the narrower range of responses than is typical in public opinion surveys, some significant differences emerge if one looks past the usual socio-demographic predictors (age, gender, occupation, education, etc.). Ideological beliefs about the character of the republic's governance, concerns about family economic security, high distrust of outsiders (especially of the Azerbaijani government), and ethnic pride in the group are significant in explaining the varying responses. But in another important difference with comparative studies, the main predictors tend to change for each question. In other words, there are relatively few consistent predictors across the questions.

Among the visions posed, three are territorially expansive. The first and last are also potentially territorially expansive but they do not have precise geographic locations on the current political map though they connect to the sense of identity and territorial claims of the population of NKR (Figure 2). More than 75% of respondents strongly agree or agree that NKR 'has the same meaning' as Artsakh. As noted, the boundaries of Artsakh were never definitively demarcated and for most NKR residents the signifier instantaneously prompts a sense of connection to a glorious historical entity. Similarly, the other question without precise geographic lines, that NK 'includes all places in this region with historic Armenian churches and settlements' has very high support, with over 70% in agreement with the statement. These high ratios, for what are geographical imaginations fostered by Armenian national(ist) traditions are essentially vague geographical claims based on archaeological and textual traditions, garner the most support of any option, partly a result of the lack of clarity and the widely recognized tradition for maximalist claims by competing nations that pervade regions of territorial disputes. The most precisely defined, in contemporary territorial terms, of the maximalist visions is number five: 'Nagorny Karabkh is the currently controlled territory plus those parts of adjoining territory "still occupied" by Azerbaijan (in the Shaumian rayon, in the eastern part of Martakert rayon and in the eastern part of Martuni rayon)'.

Comparing the middle four geographical definitions of the NKR allows us to clarify what popular opinion is likely to support in the event that international negotiations were to progress to a discussion of NKR and Azerbaijani claims and counter-claims.

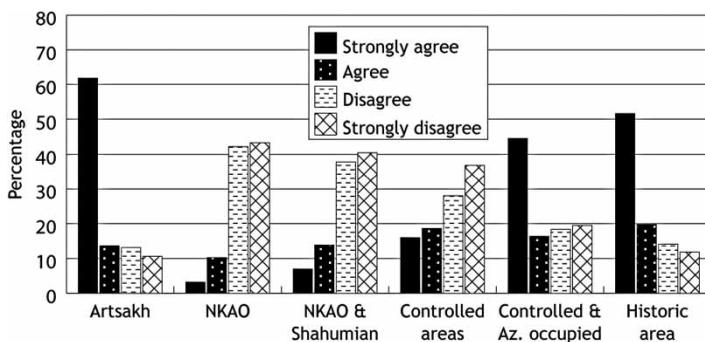


Figure 2. Distribution of the overall survey responses for each of the questions on the political geographies of Nagorny Karabakh.

If a respondent supported a 'minimalist' definition of the NKR as equivalent to the pre-1991 NKAO lines, it would be expected that this respondent would oppose a definition that corresponds to the enlarged NKR territory of the present, and vice versa. This is indeed the case, with only a handful of respondents showing inconsistent positioning. The two 'minimalist' territorial descriptions (the NKAO or NKR 1991) have little popular support: less than 20% of respondents for either option. Even the current territory of the NKR ('controlled areas') shows a wide range of responses with only 35% agreeing that it corresponds to Nagorny Karabakh's legitimate territorial body. Instead, 44% of respondents strongly agree and another 16% agree that the republic should expand its territorial control to incorporate the small adjoining areas constructed as 'occupied' by Azerbaijan.

The fact that over 60% support the 'maximalist' specific territorial position (number five) testifies to the hardline attitudes about territorial compromise evident in the republic. We use responses to this question as the basis for the analysis that follows since it reflects the predominant hardline territorial vision of most current Karabakhi residents *but it also generates significant opposition* (18% disagree and another 19% strongly disagree). While we did not examine the specific reasons underlying this disagreement (it could be a concern about the likelihood of renewed war with Azerbaijan if it were pursued), we can probe the responses by the characteristics of the proponents and opponents of these expansive borders. By summarizing these camps by the characteristics of the respondents, we highlight the nature of geopolitical division within the NKR and simultaneously, we can detect the prospects for any 'land for peace' compromise.

While the population of the NKR is uniform in ethnicity, it varies according to income and other family dimensions. We present two important explanations of the territorial preferences in Figure 3. Like all the data presented in these and the following graphs, the differences between the categories are significant at the 95th percentile as indicated in chi-square analyses. For all questions, we drop the few people who did not answer or were unable to give a response to the questions. Since the numbers are tiny, typically 4–5 out of 800 respondents, they do not affect the overall results and conclusions.

The first set of analyses considered the differences in support for the 'maximalist' position by socio-demographic characteristics. As is the case for almost all ethnic groups, and

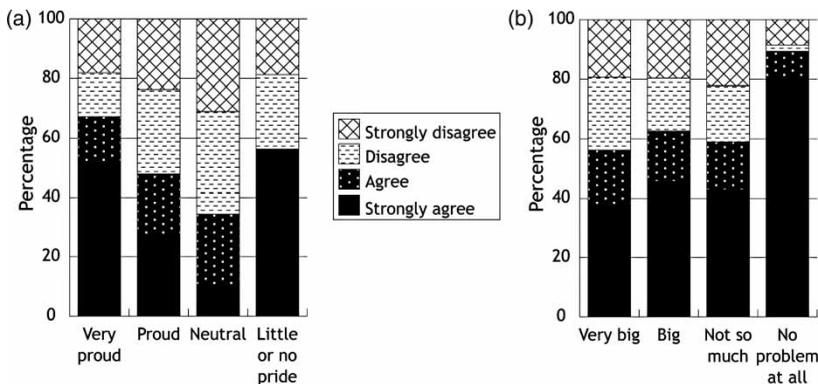


Figure 3. Responses to the prompt that Nagorny Karabakh consists of the territories currently controlled and those areas currently 'occupied' by Azerbaijan—(a) by level of pride in the ethnic group and (b) by concerns about the state of the economy in the entity.

as we have seen elsewhere in the Caucasus and Balkans, Karabakhis have a high level of pride in the group, indicating both a strong group-identity attachment and a sense of pride in its historical and contemporary achievements. Overall, 73% of respondents say that they are 'very proud' of their identity with another 21% describing themselves as 'proud'. Our expectation that those who identify most closely to the group would be less willing to compromise on territorial claims is borne out by the cumulative bar-graphs in Figure 3(a). Leaving aside the bar for the 'little or no pride' category (the numbers total only to 18 respondents), there is an evident correspondence between support for the maximal territorial extent of the NKR and high levels of pride (and attachment) to the group. This result is apparent in other contexts of competing territorial claims and generally falls in line with modernization theory that

treats ethnic identification as premodern, provincial, traditional, and particularistic. According to this theory, ethnic identification's structural basis is the village; its structural support is the persistence of a cultural, political and economic way of life.' (HODSON *et al.*, 1994, p. 1536)

This approach provides an explanation of ethnic relations and competing prerogatives in hostile environments, such as in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina (O'LOUGHLIN, 2010). The more 'ethnic' a respondent's identity is, the more unlikely he/she is to claim that the NKR border includes the lands beyond the NKAO that are currently controlled by the NKR as a result of its military successes in the early 1990s.

Like other 'de facto' republics in the former Soviet Union, economic challenges are prominent in the lives of most citizens, even when the risk of war with the parent state remains a strong possibility. Relatively isolated, separated from traditional markets and encountering restrictions on economic trading due to boycotts, closed borders and blockades, the material status of most residents is relatively lower than during Soviet times (KOLOSSOV and O'LOUGHLIN, 2011). Large numbers look nostalgically to a Soviet past of economic security and peaceful relations between nationalities, though in the NKR, the ratio (43%) that believes that the end of the Soviet Union was a 'bad move' is lower than in the other three de facto republics. While undoubtedly there are some individuals who are benefitting from the new capitalist options in the republic, especially with Armenia, most individuals believe that the lack of economic development is either a very big (20%) or big problem (39%).

In line with expectations from 'modernization theories' of ethnic divisions, we would expect that significant differences by economic status would emerge on secure borders for Nagorny Karabakh with those most concerned about economic matters less accommodating in relations with other nationalities. This relationship has appeared in earlier work we completed in Bosnia-Herzegovina where the poorest respondents were most inclined to support separatist solutions for the ethnicities there (O'LOUGHLIN and Ó TUATHAIL, 2009). These expectations do not materialize in the NKR. A reverse effect is evident, with those least concerned about the economy most strongly in favor of the expansionist territorial body claimed by the NKR that includes the NKAO, the controlled territories and three small regions beyond the Line of Control. While the numbers who are not worried about the economy are small, their support (strongly agree and agree) at over 90% for the maximalist position is substantially higher than other economic groups (less than 60%). An obvious explanation for this high level of support is that the well-off have prospered in post-war NKR, with a political economy tied to Armenia, and are invested in a NKR regime legitimizing itself though expansive territorial visions.

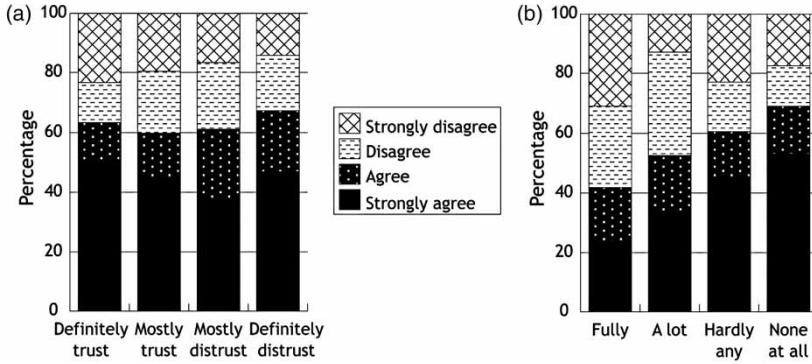


Figure 4. Responses to the prompt that Nagorny Karabakh consists of the territories currently controlled and those areas currently 'occupied' by Azerbaijan—(a) by level of trust in the president and (b) by perceived level of influence in the affairs of the republic.

Are attitudes about the optimal borders for NKR related to attitudes about its leadership and political openness? We might expect that differences would emerge between those who trust the current government, especially the President Bako Sahakyan, and those less trusting. Similarly, we might expect differences to emerge on the basis of beliefs about the ability to have a voice in domestic political affairs, with those feeling excluded more likely expressing disagreement with the current status quo. In Figure 4, we see mixed support for these expectations about the relationship between domestic political life and border definition visions. While there are no large differences between those who trust and distrust the president (the distrustful are slightly more expansionist in Figure 4(a)), there is a strong relationship with the self-perceived effectiveness about political influence. Those who report no ability to influence matters are significantly more likely to support expansive borders (Figure 4(b)). Since the President was elected with 85% of votes in 2007 and re-elected in 2012 with significantly fewer votes (67%), we can conclude that opposition to the government is increasing and a minority segment of the population are dissatisfied about the direction of the state. From another question in the survey, this view is confirmed with 63% stating that the republic is 'heading in the right direction' and 29% choosing the option of the 'wrong direction'. Because the current borders do not include the areas controlled by Azerbaijan, the regime is implicated in the status quo.

We would have expected to see the clearest differences in the support for expanded borders between groups of Karabakhis divided according to their attitudes toward the Azerbaijani state, their war experiences, and their interest in the international discussions around the Karabakh issue. The pie charts in Figure 5 are somewhat inconsistent. One might conjecture that those who answered affirmatively to the question of whether they or a close family member witnessed a violent act in the course of the conflict with Azerbaijan would be less compromising about the borders, preferring an extended territory. This expectation does not appear in the responses in Figure 5(a) where those who did not answer affirmatively to the question about violence (28% of the sample) in fact opt for the expanded territorial option. In a parallel study in the North Caucasus region of Russia, we have also seen this unanticipated finding where those who witnessed violence are more conciliatory than their neighbors who did not (BAKKE *et al.*, 2009). Other works in post-conflict zones (BARAKAT, 2005; STAUB, 2005) also indicate that the intuitive expectation that people who were the victims of violence would be more hostile to

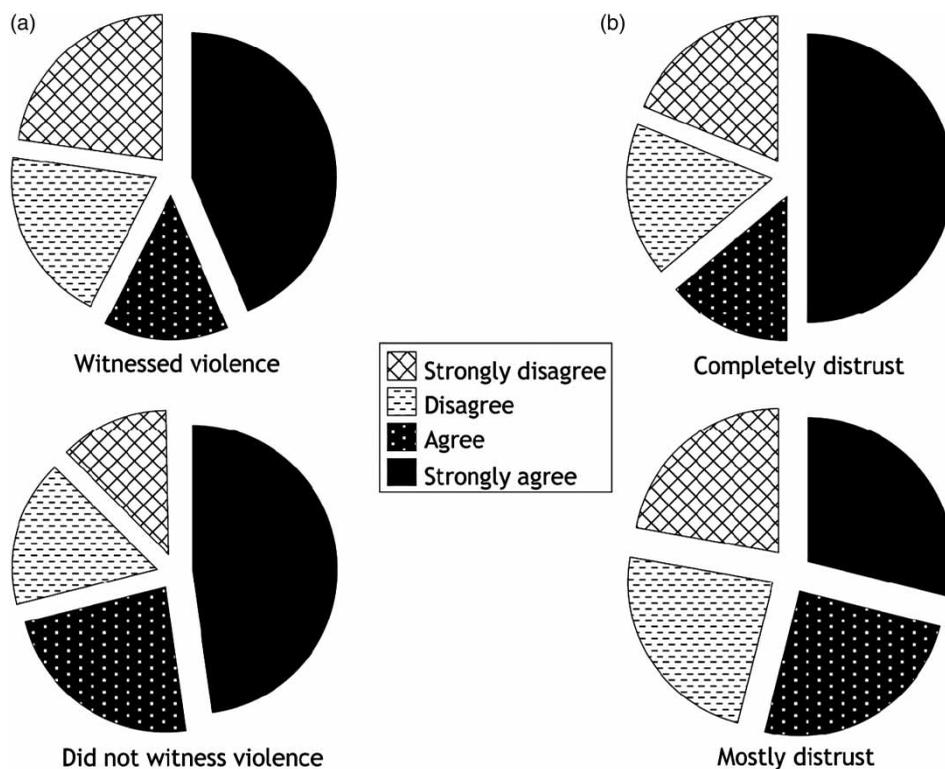


Figure 5. Responses to the prompt that Nagorny Karabakh consists of the territories currently controlled and those areas currently 'occupied' by Azerbaijan—(a) by whether the respondent witnessed violence and (b) by distrust of the Azerbaijani government.

the perpetrators of that violence and our results are in line with these confounding expectations that war experiences naturally lead to irreconcilable attitudes that prevent compromise and a more permanent peace arrangement. By contrast with the war experience predictor, the differences between those who 'mostly distrust' and those who 'strongly distrust' the Azerbaijani leadership are plainly marked in Figure 5(b). (No respondent indicated any level of trust in the Azerbaijani leadership). The most distrustful respondents prefer a maximalist definition of the NKR territory, in fact, taking even more territory from Azerbaijani control.

A specific test of this correlation of concern about Azerbaijani intentions and support for 'defense in depth' through control of a larger territory is reported in Figure 6(a). Here the question asked about whether the respondent was worried about a (putative) Azerbaijani military build-up, a concern expressed by 63% of respondents and highly correlated with worries about a possible new war (59% express these worries). A belief in 'defense in depth' through control of a larger area would presumably ensure a likely successful defense in the event of an Azerbaijani attack. This hypothesis is not supported by the charts in Figure 6(a) where those *not as* concerned about the increased military spending in Azerbaijan are more likely to support the expanded NKR territory. While 30% are not worried about the military build-up of their neighboring foe, the majority of the population do not share this confidence. Though there is general dissatisfaction with the exclusion of the NKR from international discussions about the future

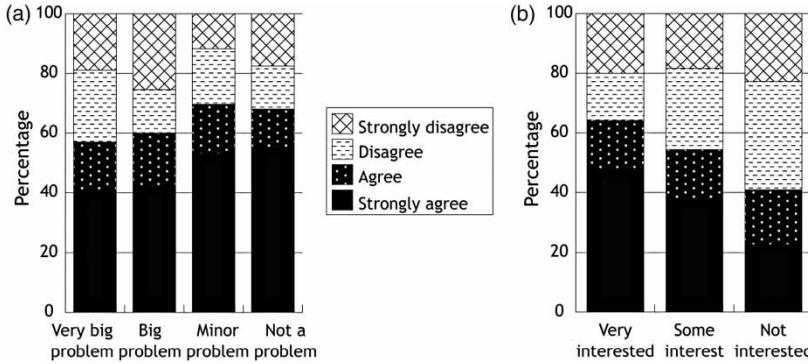


Figure 6. Responses to the prompt that Nagorno Karabakh consists of the territories currently controlled and those areas currently ‘occupied’ by Azerbaijan—(a) by whether the level of concern about Azerbaijani military build-up and (b) by level of interest in the international dimensions of the NKR situation.

of the republic (89% believe it should be a party to the Minsk Group discussions), there is a sizeable group (22%) who do not take much interest in the international dimension. In general, those with less interest in the geopolitical dimension to the territorial question are less supportive of the expansive territorial lines (Figure 6(b)).

On the vexed question of a possible peace arrangement with Azerbaijan, opinion in the NKR is quite mixed. Only 26% agree (strongly or mostly) with the proposition that the NKR should be willing to compromise on the territorial issue by ceding ‘land for peace’ with over just under half of the sample strongly disagreeing with this proposition. Those most intransigent on this subject are naturally most strongly in support of the greatest territorial extent for the republic (Figure 7(a)) with a gradual increase in the support for these borders with decreasing support for trading land for peace. As in many other questions in the survey, the results show a high degree of support for uncompromising positions and undermine the argument that there is an opening for

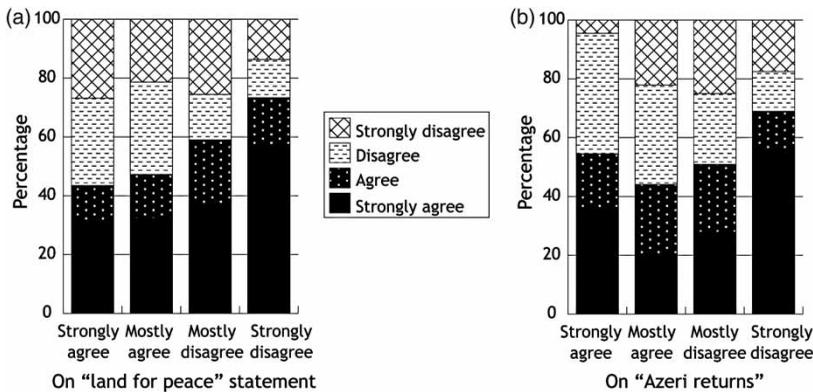


Figure 7. Responses to the prompt that Nagorno Karabakh consists of the territories currently controlled and those areas currently ‘occupied’ by Azerbaijan—(a) by whether the respondent is willing to trade land for peace and (b) by position on the possible return of Azerbaijanis displaced by the war of the early 1990s.

movement on discussions with Azerbaijan on a peace settlement. Further pessimism on these dimensions can be discerned from the graphics in Figure 7(b) where those most opposed to the return of Azerbaijanis after any peace settlement are most supportive of the maximalist territorial regime option.

Within the republic, as the majority remain suspicious of the intentions of the Azerbaijani state, there exists a significant minority of about one-third to one-quarter of the population who are strongly oppositional to any arrangements for a more stable border regime and a rapprochement with Baku. These views, of course, are differences of opinion within a uniform belief that the NKR has no future as part of the Azerbaijani state. While one would not expect conformity across different definitions of the republic's boundaries, the results reported in Figure 2 are surprisingly consistent, indicating a strong awareness of the nature of the territorial debate and the consistent advocacy by the state authorities of a 'defensible line'. After 20 years of the current on-the-ground effective jurisdiction, the lines and controls are becoming more ossified on the ground and fixed in the minds of Armenian Karabakhis.

CONCLUSION

There is a significant disjuncture between the territorial preferences of residents of NKR and the Basic Principles or Madrid Principles under discussion within the OSCE Minsk Group (not to mention the oppositional attitudes held by ordinary Azerbaijanis). These principles express six points among which are three specific territorial provisions based conceptually on a 'land for peace' tradeoff: return of the territories surrounding the NKAO to Azerbaijani control, a corridor linking the NKAO and Armenia, and interim status for the NKAO pending future determination of its final legal status through a legally binding expression of will. While such a disjuncture is not unusual with *de facto* states, which are often quite successful in having residents live in a self-serving micro-world of their own making, it does have serious implications for the potentiality for war and peace in dangerously poised conflict. Over-inflated conceptions of one's own territorial rights, and refusal to concede any to one's opponent, are conditions that favor warfare over negotiation. Conceptual blindness to the claims of others, and deficient empathy for their alternative experience and perspectives, can induce dangerous complacency and hubris. If negotiations are to be deepened, any 'land for peace' principles will face considerable difficulties in establishing 'local ownership' among NKR residents. Put simply, they have, for too long, had no political check or 'reality constraint' on their most expansive territorial visions. This disposition is likely enabled by the fact that their leaders are not a party to the OSCE Minsk Group negotiations (CHETERIAN, 2012). A fundamental danger with contemporary international efforts to negotiate an end to the Nagorny Karabakh conflict is that NKR residents are outside the process yet destined to be at the center of any ground-level conflict resolution process. Given current attitudes, it seems likely that they will adopt the position of 'local spoilers' to any international effort to transform the status quo for there is no distinction made between Armenian community settlements within the former NKAO and beyond it in places like Kelbajar/Karavatchar and Lachin/Berdzor.

However, attitudes are not set in stone and our research results reveal only what NK residents think about the territorial extent of their entity when prompted in a social survey. The sometime surprising aspect of these results reveals the need for further research using alternative and supplemental methods. Yet they nevertheless underscore

how intractable territorial conflicts require engagement with expansive territorial visions if conflict mitigation and peace building are to stand any chance of success.

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NOTES

1. For writing convenience we do not propose to use the qualifier 'de facto' every time the NKR is cited in this paper. We use it here and assume it hereafter. Its absence should not be taken as evidence of any denial of this de facto status or legitimating of this contested entity. The same disclaimer applies to place names used in the text as we use the best known monikers outside the region.
2. See <http://www.president.nkr.am/> and <http://www.nkrusa.org/>
3. Whether and how the territorial signifiers 'Judea and Samaria' function in opposition to the West Bank' in the Israel/Palestinian context is similar to how 'Artsakh' functions relative to 'Nagorny Karabakh' is a question that deserves further research as part of a broader scholarly investigation of 'sacral geographies' and 'spiritual geopolitics' (see YIFTACHEL, 2006; TOAL and DAHLMAN, 2011).
4. Reflecting the way the name now works in modern nationalist discourse, two cartographic representations of Artsakh as a definable territory are featured on its Wikipedia entry. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artsakh>
5. For the translated text of this declaration see: http://www.nkrusa.org/nk_conflict/declaration_independence.shtml
6. In November 1991 the ethnonationalist Serbian Democratic Party in Bosnia-Herzegovina organized a referendum that was worked to constitute Bosnian Serbs as a distinct collective people, with a right to their own ethnoterritorial homeland.
7. For the full text see <http://www.nkr.am/en/constitution/9/>
8. The following citations are from an interview with David Babayan, 30 June 2011, in Stepanakert.
9. A glimpse into the realities of life in the Lachin corridor in the late 2000s can be seen in the short film 'Swept Away by Life', produced in the framework of the Armenian-Azerbaijani film-making project *Dialogue Through Film*, supported by Conciliation Resources and available at www.vimeo.com/channels/df
10. Their website is <http://www.raa-am.com/>
11. For example, in late 2005 videos emerged of Azerbaijani troops attacking the UNESCO-protected Armenian gravestones in an ancient Armenian cemetery near Djulfa in Nakhichevan. These actions elicited condemnation from the European Parliament.

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