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Post-War Spectres: The Ghosts that Haunt Armenia in the Aftermath of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabagh War

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Abstract

As the 2020 war came to a ceasefire agreement on November 10, 2020, through which Armenia made massive territorial concessions, feelings of grief and anger emerged to haunt Armenia through two spectres: soldiers who are missing or who have died in action and the old political economic elite who now threaten to regain power. The Nagorno-Karabagh conflict has had a major impact on the workings of political power in Armenia since the early 1990s, one that now threatens the democratic possibilities that were already fragile prior to the war. In this article, I discuss the affective connections between these two spectres and the political implications of national trauma on Armenia's post-war futures.

Introduction

During the first week of December 2020, Arev, a friend of mine in Armenia, had just returned home from Vahan's funeral. "All of the graves were so fresh. There are at least four or five funerals a day in that graveyard," she wrote into our Skype chat box. This was an update. A month before, Vahan had been missing in action for a week. His sister, Susanna, had not eaten or slept in that week, calling every hospital and every office in Armenia and Karabagh to inquire about her brother. Susanna was a friend of mine and I was worried about her. I did not know Vahan, but at the time when Arev found out that he was now presumed dead, we happened to be talking about the logistics of a fund for Nagorno-Karabagh refugees in Armenia. Although the military had not yet found Vahan's body, the group that he was supposed to have been with at the time he went missing had been confirmed dead. "He was supposed to be in a group that was hit from a plane [by a bomb, presumably, although she did not clarify] and if so his body is in pieces and they might not be able to identify him. They are 90% sure he is dead," Arev told me. Arev's mother had found out about Vahan's death first and Arev, in her state of grief, had the responsibility of now relaying this information to Susanna. Discussions of Vahan, the fate of his body, the turmoil and grief of his family, and the uncertainty and the inability to properly grieve without a body and burial framed my discussions with Arev for over a month. In the meantime, the war had ended and political battles on the domestic front were being waged.

About a week before the funeral, Arev notified me that they had found Vahan's body. After the burial was done, we continued to reflect on the impossibility of logic, of rationality, and of language when it comes to the catastrophic loss that war creates. In these times of trauma, various spectres haunt Armenia's domestic political space. In this article, I take up two of these spec-

tres. The first is the silent one of dead or missing soldiers, who themselves do not speak but speech in whose name has cultivated a relentless anger within public and private domains of everyday life. The second spectre, that of the pre-2018 political economic elite, is less silent. The oligarchs and sovereign authoritarians, who were previously on trial, out on bail, or in exile following the "Velvet Revolution" now threaten to return to the political landscape. Making an opportunity of loss and anger, they haunt the possibilities of the nation's post-war futures.

My approach to these two spectres—which I have selected for analytic purposes as ones I see as most affectively vexed—is an ethnographic one. While there are other critical public discussions taking place in everyday political discourse, especially the role of Russia and its attempt at forming a new empire through its presence as "peacekeeper" in the region, affective emphasis within everyday discussions amongst leftists and progressive activists in Armenia most frequently revolves around the loss of loved ones as well as the loss of democratic possibilities. In regard to the latter, my leftist interlocutors, whose voice is frequently missing from discussions of political analysis in national as well as international mediascapes, emphasize democracy as the necessary pathway in forming an Armenia that works to serve its people rather than larger geopolitical interests. The question of democracy is thus one of sovereignty. In taking up the spectre of the old guard—rather than focusing on Russia's new role as "humanitarian peace police" (as some of my interlocutors have referred to it)—my aim is to highlight how political discussions are charged with accusations of Armenian elites whose return is not only propped up by Russian interests, but would also fail to govern in a way that takes Armenian citizens' needs, security, and futures into consideration.

Ethnography—a form of “writing culture”—emphasizes literary approaches to making sense of the world; that representation is always interpretation that can only ever form “partial truths,” not because of ethnography’s own deficiency, but because all other forms of representation are also partial without reflexive attention to their partiality (Clifford 1986). Ethnography, furthermore, does not seek to hide emotions, attachments to particular spaces of intervention, and the situated positionality of the writer that led to a particular analysis and interpretation, but accepts all of these as parts of the analytic process (Povinelli 2006, Probyn 1996, Besteman 2015, Ali 2015). As such, what follows is my own interpretation of how progressive and leftist activists, amongst whom my participatory research in Armenia has been situated over the last decade, as well as some others make sense of a precarious emergent post-war politics in Armenia.

The Silent Spectre of Dead and Missing Soldiers

By official counts, as of February 13, 2021, 3,577 Armenian soldiers died during the war, while 428 samples continued to be in the process of undergoing DNA examination, bringing the total loss to 4,005 (News.am 2020). Each of these soldiers had a mother, a father, a sister or brother, friends, relatives, and neighbours and others who loved him. Each dead and now-silent soldier has produced a cacophony of grief. The dead haunt Armenia. But Armenians are also haunted by other silent soldiers—those who are missing, those who have been captured, and those who continue to remain at the front by way of military order. During the war and continuously thereafter, videos of Armenian soldiers as well as civilians being beheaded and executed at the hands of Azerbaijani soldiers have circulated online. Each time one of these videos is released, my Armenian Facebook is abuzz with condemnations of any Armenian who shares them. “Don’t you understand that each one of these people has family? Out of respect for their family, stop reposting these videos!” reminds one Facebook acquaintance. Another one comments on the necropolitical violence these videos were made to produce: “The Azeris want

to degrade us and you are just helping them when you repost the video.” It would be important here to note that international human rights organizations—such as Amnesty International (2020)—as well as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (2020) have pointed out that war crimes were committed by both sides of the conflict. Furthermore, both Armenian¹ as well as Azerbaijani activists² have condemned the war as well as violence against prisoners of war in their own countries.

While these videos themselves are traumatizing, the violence they evoke goes far beyond the images captured on the screen. As hundreds of soldiers continue to be missing, these videos remind the families and loved ones of missing soldiers that their son, brother, or friend might have been violated in the same manner. Parents of missing soldiers staged protests almost daily between November and January at the Ministry of Defense in Yerevan, calling on the Armenian government as well as Russia to do more to find their children (Asbares 2020b). A deafening and haunting silence is further heard from soldiers who continue to remain at the front by military order. Parents continue to protest, calling on the military to return their conscript sons back to Armenia (Caucasian Knot 2020). The burials of dead soldiers, as well as stories and images of captured soldiers, haunt their imaginations. Remaining in Nagorno-Karabagh means that their sons might also, at any instant, become victims to a war that is now over. These silent soldiers—the living and the dead—speak and speak incessantly in their state of absence.

On November 12, 2020, two days after signing the “notorious agreement” with Azerbaijan and Russia, through which Armenia forfeited the war as well as many of the territories gained in the 1990s, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan addressed the Armenian public. It was clear that Pashinyan was aware of this anger fomenting within the hearts of his people, the anger of the parents and other loved ones of the soldiers who had died. He was also aware of the larger anger regarding the loss of lands. Pashinyan justified his decision to sign the agreement with this anger as well as the spectre of the silent dead in mind:

1 See for instance the following statements against the war authored by Armenian activists: “Common Land: Anti-War Statement [Yndanur hogh. Hakapaderazmakan haydararutyun].” *Epress.am*. October 19, 2020. Available from https://epress.am/2020/10/19/common_land_karabakh_1501.html?fbclid=IwAR0Fz_ZXTesRcTHxRwf6N2nxRpt6YnslsNX4xaLCUkvy0EHRZdwLAr8-6s8 (accessed on October 19, 2020); “Against War in *Artsakh/Qarabag*: Decolonial, Antifascist and Ecofeminist Statement from Armenia.” *Medium*. October 13, 2020. Available from <https://medium.com/sev-bibar/against-war-in-%D5%A1%D6%80%D6%81%D5%A1%D5%AD-qaraba%C4%9F-2baaecfbad5e> (accessed on October 20, 2020).

2 See for instance the following statements against the war as well as against violence against prisoners of war: “Anti-War Statement of Azerbaijani Leftist Youth.” September 30, 2020. *LeftEast*. Available from <https://lefteast.org/anti-war-statement-of-azerbaijani-leftist-youth/?fbclid=IwAR0N19yCEYAiLatVSZfzlgfH4r3DRFKedVHxUyGRnu6nwsxqJuppX4UynKg> (accessed on September 30, 2020).; Bahruz Samadov (2020) “Opinion: To stand for peace, in spite of everything.” October 2, 2020. *OC Media*. Available from https://oc-media.org/opinions/opinion-to-stand-for-peace-in-spite-of-everything/?fbclid=IwAR228CMh08vE_IOML36CgY4cxK_2zhs-tANJZEfySkVLbr84oa0yCXgqyqg (accessed on October 2, 2020); Zaur Shiriyev’s Twitter thread, calling for investigations of violations of humanitarian law, posted on October 20, 2020, available from <https://twitter.com/ZaurShiriyev/status/1322101876129751040> (accessed on March 23, 2020).

“when I signed that document, I realized that I was facing the threat of my personal death, not only in a political but also in a physical sense. But the lives of 25,000 soldiers were more important, I think, for you too. Under threat were the lives of our soldiers who had rendered full service to the homeland... [T]herefore, it was time for the commander to risk his own life for the sake of these soldiers, both physically and politically. It was time for the homeland to make sacrifices for those soldiers who spared nothing for the sake of the homeland, and I signed that document with this in mind.” (Asbares 2020a)

These comments did little to appease the anger growing through the silence of dead and missing soldiers. As one friend in Armenia, who had been advocating for peace since the beginning of the war in September put it, “I am not mad at Pashinyan for signing the agreement. I am mad at him for not having signed an agreement a month ago.” During the war, Pashinyan, Armenian Defense Ministry Representative Artsrun Hovhannisyan and Artsakh President Arayik Harutunyan gave daily updates assuring the Armenian people that they would win and that they were making great territorial gains. It became clear after the signing of the ceasefire that victory had not been as attainable as the authorities claimed and that these updates had been lies constructed to give false hope, to produce more willing soldiers, more willing parents, and to put off an anger that would inevitably emerge. As another friend reasoned, “He was afraid that he might die so he continued to send soldiers to die in a war that he knew they were not going to win? This is how he justifies his actions now? He could have prevented this by just signing an agreement in September and then fleeing the country.”

While Arev and many of my other interlocutors and friends in Armenia feel a sense of relief that the war is over, the war’s lack of rationale, its senselessness and purposelessness, has produced a catastrophic mourning. On the day of the funeral, Arev tells me that Vahan’s mother was enraged, screaming as her son was being buried, trying to make sense of a nonsensical phenomenon. “Do you realize what is going on here?” she had wailed, “Old men are burying young children, lowering them into the ground. Do you see this? Do you understand?” What does it mean that hundreds of parents a day are involved in lowering their sons’ bodies into the ground? Arev also told me that during Vahan’s wake, his uncle called for a toast and began by saying that “To be honest, none of us understands why our Vahan died.” For what did Vahan and thousands of others die? These questions permeate everyday life in post-war Armenia, inspired by the spectre of the dead’s silence. These ruptures in rationality and

a catastrophic mourning have become fertile ground for the return of the old guard.

The Spectre of the Old Guard

Within a few hours after Pashinyan had signed the agreement—on the early morning of November 10, 2020—protesters had gathered in front of the National Assembly (NA) building to demand that the Prime Minister resign, some entering the building and breaking into Pashinyan’s office as well as a conference room in the building, where they began throwing furniture out of rage. Some of these protesters were angry that their loved ones had died only for the war to be forfeited and for the nation to lose its lands. Some wanted to continue the war, and demanded that Armenia break the ceasefire agreement, organizing themselves around the hard-line ideology of “not one inch” of land to be conceded. During these protests, as the President of the NA, Ararat Mirzoyan, was stepping out of a car in front of the NA building, he was dragged into a crowd and beaten, sustaining massive injuries.

The protest itself had been organized by a union of 17 political parties, likely headed by Robert Kocharyan, Armenia’s second president, who is facing charges of overthrowing the constitutional order of Armenia in 2008, when he ordered the military to fire on civilians during protests. In June 2020, Kocharyan was released on a \$4 million bail bond. After two years in office, Pashinyan had made many attempts at systemic change and to bring the old guard to justice, only to be constantly thwarted by internal governmental sabotage by those who remained loyal to the old guard or who had otherwise been bribed or threatened by them. The signing of the concession and the post-war context of rage and grief now threatens to be the last nail in the coffin of an emergent democratic possibility. The old guard, which has continued to haunt Armenia’s political landscape since 2018, has now transformed a tragic turn of events into an opportunity to make a play for power. Since November 10, 2020, rallies, political statements, and petitions have called for Pashinyan to resign. Some of my interlocutors fear civil war or an armed coup if Pashinyan does not resign.

For many Armenians watching these events play out in real time—especially for my more progressive and leftist friends—there was much that made little sense. For one, these men who beat Mirzoyan and trashed the NA building wanted to fight and win a war, but they were in Yerevan and not at the front. While they could have been taking their rage out on those who had been stealing from the public as well as the military for years—hobbling Armenia’s chances to win the war—they were, instead, destroying the public property of the citizens of the nation. In 2018, through a popular social movement,

hundreds of thousands of Armenians had actively participated to successfully oust Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan from power and replace him with a more legitimate Nikol Pashinyan. After years of exploitation, corruption, and uncouth treatment of the people, the oligarch class that Sargsyan represented had become massively unpopular, even if tolerated through a prioritization of “national security” (through militarization) over democracy (Broers 2020). How was it that now people were joining with that very class, those very parties, to take down a government for which they had struggled?

Pashinyan has refused to resign, claiming only partial responsibility for having to sign the agreement. On November 10, 2020, as post-war protests were just beginning, Pashinyan addressed Armenians through a live video that wavered between an apology and a condemnation. A solemn Pashinyan said “I know that there are those who are the loved ones of our brothers who sacrificed their lives. I have said this and I will say it—that I am down on my knees in front of you...” followed quickly by an angry condemnation of those who demanded his resignation, who had abandoned their posts (especially in the key city of Shushi that eventually forced the concession) and who were now in Yerevan taking advantage of the fact that the police, National Security Services, and anyone else who would be able to enforce the law were at the front (Ruptly 2020). Pashinyan blamed the old guard for what happened in the war:

“For 25 years, we have gathered around tables raising toasts to our soldiers and our military, and that vodka, that wine served with bread... has been bought with stolen money. And we have known about this... We have eaten it with a great appetite. We have drunk with pleasure. We have drunk that toast to the soldier. And in the meantime, how have we fed the soldier? Excuse me for the expression, but we have kept soldiers on scraps; we have kept soldiers with weapons made in the 1980s. And our hope has been—you know, in a colloquial manner, let me say this, because today is that kind of day—that they will be our crutch.” (Ruptly 2020)

These words were meant to remind Armenians of their true enemies. Pashinyan’s emotions here reflect those of my leftist interlocutors as well as many others in Armenia, for whom the oligarchy is understood as the class of men who had sucked the nation dry, becoming wealthy by stealing from the commons and leaving the nation with little with which they could fight. Pashinyan’s words also recalled the 2018 National Security Service investigation of General Manvel Grigoryan’s homes in Etchmiadzin and Armavir, in which stockpiles pilfered from the military were found—including weapons (Asekose.am 2018). It was meant to remind Armenians of the 154 corruption

crimes in the armed forces found in a 2019 investigation (Mkrtichyan 2020). It was meant to remind Armenians of the many soldiers who had died in the military over the last three decades—not at the hands of Azerbaijan, but through mismanagement, corruption, and the abuse of power by the military elite (Civil Net 2020).

This condemnation of the old guard also corresponded with stories about the six weeks of war: generals abandoning battalions of young and untrained soldiers, sending soldiers into unknown terrain where they would have no chance of survival; theft of military, medical, and food supplies meant for soldiers at the front. As Arev corrected me once when I tried to comfort her after the war by saying that at least no one would die fighting anymore, “What war? This was not a war. When you talk to soldiers who were there you realize that there was very little fighting happening. There was no way to fight. They were just sent there to die.” This sentiment is echoed in Armenian Facebook, where popular dissent circulates around the fact that Armenia did not even fight in this war; they were sold out by their leadership as they were fired on by “terrorists, the second military of NATO, and Azerbaijan” (in Pashinyan’s words—Ruptly 2020). In these intensities of feelings regarding the war on Armenian Facebook, Armenia’s enemy was the “Turk,” a vituperative term used to characterize Azerbaijanis but made particularly resonant in this war as Armenia was not just at war with Azerbaijan but with Turkey as well. Some scholars suggest that in the post-Cold War moment, Turkey’s foreign policy has moved toward attempts to establish itself as a new world power through imperial modes and methods—pursuing a neo-Ottomanism (Alekseevich 2018) or a pan-Turkism (Murinson 2006) that reaches out to Russian borders, resurrecting an older and previously rejected will to unify the Turkic people of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Turkey’s alliance with Azerbaijan in this war might thus be a part of this larger and longer trajectory of a regional power grab. It is important here to note that while Azerbaijanis speak a Turkic language and have a close affinity with Turkey, Azerbaijan also has its own national identity distinct from Turkish identity (Ergun 2021). But all of this aside, for many Armenians, the enemy in this war was also the corrupt political and economic elite of Armenia.

I have previously described Armenia as a “nation-family,” through which the nation is not only imagined or metaphorized as a family, but is practiced as a family through public forms of intimate encounters (Shirinian 2018). As almost everyone in the country is now caught in a network of grief, loss, and suffering through the silence of the lost four thousand, this sense of nation-family is now reified through shared loss as well as shared anger, intensifying feelings of intimacy. If, as I have

shown elsewhere (Shirinian 2020), those in positions of authority are seen as father figures—whose responsibility is not only political but also paternal, caught up in senses of care for the people—Pashinyan’s blunders are not only within the realms of national political justice, but emotionally entangled with feelings of personal and familial betrayal.

Having lost lands in Nagorno-Karabagh through his military leadership and having sent thousands of young men to die for apparently no reason have placed what fragile legitimacy Pashinyan held earlier in 2020 in massive jeopardy. Whatever Sargsyan’s and the oligarchy’s irresponsibility and failures in political paternalism, these losses have unearthed national traumas that go much deeper than corruption and exploitation. While not everyone is on board with allowing a return of the old guard, intense affective connections amongst the body politic oriented against Pashinyan are, at this moment, deeper than the anger stemming from the illegitimate rule of Sargsyan and the old guard.

Before the war, in early September of 2020, it seemed unlikely that Armenians would ever accept the legitimacy of the old oligarchic horde which ruled over them for nearly three decades. That has now changed. The question of Nagorno-Karabagh has always been a breaking point in political discussions in Armenia. When it comes to the fate of Nagorno-Karabagh, in other words, legitimacy becomes equated with the path that promises to be most hard-line. “Not one inch” is a powerful rallying cry, a card that trumps all other political, economic, and social questions. With this rallying cry, a completely delegitimized old guard threatens to re-emerge to their old haunting grounds.

The Karabagh conflict is the chip with which the elites have been competing with one another for decades. Pashinyan and his own government are now a part of that competition as well. This, however, should not be mistaken for genuine political competition, as those in power all put on the same show, raising only the stakes. Aside from the Armenian National Congress, led by first Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosian, which advocated for peace toward the normalization of the Armenian state and for Karabagh to have what could be called a “multi-ethnic autonomy,” no other party with power in Armenia has taken a position that strays from the hard-line on the Karabagh conflict. Significantly, Ter-Petrosian was forced to resign in 1998. While this resignation came for various reasons—his association, for instance, with an emerging oligarchy—his stance on the Karabagh conflict was one of its major precipitants (Astourian 2000). But a new generation of activists and intellectuals are demanding something radically different. As historian Gayane Ayvazyan recently stated in a Facebook post:

“Even in the cemetery, the Nagorno-Karabagh issue pretends to be an instrument of an internal political race for power. The party members of the war were divided, some sitting in the state apparatus, others provoking riots in the squares and streets. Both promise a hot revanchism to create a stronger army, to be more vindictive, to bring Karabagh back. This is nonsense and marasmus... [W]e need to get out of this circle. Both the former and current authorities are in the historical past; what we see are their ghosts... It is necessary to find a way out of selfishness, intolerance, and revenge, toward the path of denazification and demilitarization.”

Ayvazyan’s reference to the cemetery here is both literal and figural, referring both to the actual cemeteries that have become central to everyday life as well as the nation itself as a cemetery, a space of grief and mourning. The path forward, leaving these ghosts of an old national reality behind, would be a turning point in Armenia.

On the Question of Sacrifice

Gna meri ari sirem (Go and die so that I may love you) is a popular colloquialism in Armenia, referencing the cultural value placed on sacrifice. The saying, however, is one filled with irony—a sort of commentary on the injustice of a moral economy that demands an absolute sacrifice to receive love. It is quite ironic that the same political players who were for years condemned for their mistreatment of soldiers are now the ones who ventriloquize their dead silence, valuing soldiers but only in their deaths. But, in this way, the sacrifices of this war continue to be made, threatening possibilities of the future.

Many Armenians—in my calculation, based on my acquaintances and familiarity with various groups, *most* Armenians—believe that Pashinyan should resign. However, it matters a great deal how this resignation happens. On February 25, 2021, the army demanded Pashinyan’s resignation, which Pashinyan has cast as a coup attempt. At the end of March 2021, Pashinyan declared that snap elections will be held on June 20, 2021. It is clear, however, that these elections risk bringing into power an authoritarian as well as highly militarized regime. The current candidate put forward by the opposition is Vazgen Manukian, who served as Defense Minister of Armenia during the First Nagorno-Karabagh War and whose most recent public statements call for Armenians and the Armenian government to stand by the army at all costs and urged the army to rebel after Pashinyan attempted to fire the chief of the army’s general staff.

To return Armenia to such an authoritarian situation would be a sacrifice of democratic possibilities. The hope now is that Armenians remember that the logic of sacrifice, in which the object of love can only be embraced

after it is dead, gone, and silent, is an unjust moral economy. Sacrificing democracy to work through feelings of loss and anger, only to long for democracy again in its absence, would be the ultimate tragedy. If democratization in Armenia prior to the 2020 war was precarious, these feelings of grief and loss, made use of by the old guard to push for political reactionism, place democratization in an even more precarious situation. Progressive

and leftist activists in Armenia urge us to think about how war, as well as the discourses around territorial gain and national security, are not only incommensurate with democracy, but are the antithesis of democracy. Armenia's sovereign and democratic future—within these leftist frameworks—can only be made possible through letting go of these attachments to ghostly pasts.

About the Author

Tamar Shirinian is a Postdoctoral Teaching Associate in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (U.S.). Her research interests lie in the intersections of spaces of intimacy and affect and political economy in postsocialist Armenia, where she is particularly concerned with how kinship, gender, and sexuality are caught up in and have major implications for larger national and geopolitical projects.

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Territorial Ambitions in Nagorno-Karabakh: Survey Results Before the 2020 War

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Abstract

Territory is central to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Borders and control of lands claimed by both Azerbaijan and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic have shifted dramatically since the end of the Soviet Union. Following up on a 2011 survey, we again asked a representative sample of Karabakhis in February 2020 about their territorial aspirations and the possibility of surrendering some lands to Azerbaijan. The results are somewhat contradictory. While about half of the sample were willing to compromise on territory with Azerbaijan—in the expectation of a more permanent and peaceful settlement to the conflict—a firm majority (85%) rejected any return to the smaller lands of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) of Soviet times. This result is highly consistent with the 2011 data. Even more respondents than in 2011 aspired to extend Nagorno-Karabakh’s territory to encompass all historical Armenian lands, a patently unrealistic option. While Karabakhi attitudes remained hardened against territorial compromise, the 2020 war changed the facts on the ground and reduced the Republic’s control to an area even smaller than the NKAO.

Introduction

The six-week war of Autumn 2020 has redrawn the map of the South Caucasus—yet again. On paper, of course, nothing has officially changed. Azerbaijan and Armenia still have the same internationally recognized borders. On the ground, however, the situation is dramatically different. The Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR), locally known as Artsakh, endures on a territorial template that is considerably reduced from what it once held. Given initial territorial form as the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) and controversially

situated within Soviet Azerbaijan, the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic was first proclaimed in 1991 amidst conflict over the region’s status. The NKAO and neighboring Shaumian region was the initial territorial template claimed at that time. Victory in the subsequent intense warfare expanded that template into seven surrounding provinces of Azerbaijan in 1994. As the territory under the control of the NKR grew, so also did its justifications for holding these territories, and for claiming other areas still ‘occupied’ by Azerbaijan. In the most self-aggrandizing Armenian-focused narrative, as