

**Anna Zhamakochyan, Zhanna Andreasyan,  
Sona Manusyan, and Arpy Manusyan (2016):  
##### (Quest for Change),  
Socioscope NGO**

Ishkanian, Armine

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Analyses regarding the effectiveness of specific movements seem to be untimely against this backdrop. The civic sector has yet to enable protests in society in their most general sense. It would be misleading to conclude, however, that ‘culture itself’ must be changed. From what we have observed so far, civic discourses and actions that target culture have triggered even more cultural resistance. Changing “activism itself” as if performing a program update also does not seem to be an effective approach. There is already an unnoticed subject shift in social research from problems that cause protests to protests as problems themselves. To add value, fur-

ther research on activism should also discuss what can be done to work toward change beyond activism. One junction among the various problems that are discussed above is the social agency that must be enhanced alongside individual agency. This approach puts two interconnected goals in perspective: to seek modes of collective action that make individual effort meaningful and to seek modes of individual agency that make collective action meaningful. Individual, social and political conditions are reciprocal and should be addressed in their interconnectedness through cross-disciplinary efforts.

#### *About the Author*

Sona Manusyan holds a doctoral degree in psychology and is an assistant professor at Yerevan State University Department of Personality Psychology. She teaches cultural psychology and qualitative methodology in psychology. Sona’s research interests center on identity questions, national subjectivity, the personal-public relationship, and online behavior. Her current research focuses on civic initiatives and larger societal processes in Armenia.

#### *Further Reading*

- Abrams, D., & Hogg, M. A. (2006). *Social identifications: A social psychology of intergroup relations and group processes*. Routledge.
- Johnston, H. (Ed.). (2009). *Culture, social movements, and protest*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.
- Stetsenko, A. (2012). Personhood: An activist project of historical becoming through collaborative pursuits of social transformation. *New Ideas in Psychology*, 30(1), 144–153.

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Anna Zhamakochyan, Zhanna Andreyan, Sona Manusyan, and Arpy Manusyan (2016): Փոփոխության Որոնումներ (Quest for Change), Socioscope NGO**

Reviewed by Armine Ishkanian, London

*Quest for Change*, written in Armenian, is a compact yet incredibly rich collection of essays. The main questions addressed by the collection of essays are: how to change the situation in Armenia; what does change in this context mean or entail; and what are the obstacles to change? Written from different perspectives and reflecting on recent movements (e.g., Electric Yerevan) and events (e.g., the April 2016 conflict; the Sasna Tsrer siege), the essays examine the current context, the politics and dynamics of activism and protest, and the obstacles to change in Armenia. The essays are written by researchers who, on the one hand are well-versed in the contemporary academic debates and literatures around sociological theories, but who on the other hand are also partic-

ipant observers of the unfolding processes which they describe and analyse. This positionality provides them with insights which may elude outside observers, yet I found that it did not prevent them from embracing a critical distance from which they analyse the unfolding processes and events. Overall, the essays provide an informed, critical, and incisive analysis of the current socio-political situation in Armenia and also offer new perspectives on some perennial issues and questions (e.g., the nature and impact of Armenian nationalism; the nature of the Armenian State, etc.).

The first essay, by Anna Zhamakochyan, examines the different and, at times, contradictory articulations of the discourse of “national unity” which emerged after

the four day war in April 2016 between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Zhamakochyan's analysis is based on her research which analyzed the discourses and practices of well-known and emerging civic initiatives and activist groups: "Facebook activists", political commentators and experts as well as independent or opposition media outlets. She describes how the nationalist, populist discourse of "national unity" is a common feature of the discourses of individuals and groups from across the political spectrum. In other words, Zhamakochyan contends, that the discourse of "national unity" is not only promoted by the ruling elite and individuals, groups, and media institutions that are loyal to it, but also by many self-professed independent experts, opposition politicians, and some activists who challenge the ruling regime on many other issues and fronts. She illustrates how when the conflict erupted in April 2016, even independent journalists and news outlets, advanced the need for "national unity". Her analysis is also grounded in and informed by the historical development and use of the discourse of national unity. By taking a long-term view, Zhamakochyan indicates the resilience of this discourse and asks: how does the persistence of the discourse "national unity" obstruct opportunities for socio-political change in Armenia? This question is just as pertinent today as it was a century ago.

The essay by Zhanna Andreasyan, which follows, is an excellent analysis of how justice is defined, conceptualized, and instrumentalised in Armenia by a range of actors. Analysing the public speeches, press releases, and articles of political leaders, activists, analysts, and even members of the Sasna Tsrer (Daredevils of Sassoon) group, she identifies two primary conceptualizations of justice and examines how these understandings and demands for justice are framed and articulated. The first iteration is the historical conceptualization of justice, by which Armenians demand justice from actors that are located external not only to the Republic of Armenia, but to the wider Armenian diasporic, global community. In this conceptualization of justice, all Armenians are framed as seekers and claimants for justice in response to the crime of genocide. Such demands for historical justice which are directed to external audiences are juxtaposed with the second conceptualization of social justice which targets internal audiences. Andreasyan analyses the ways in which these interpretations and conceptualizations of justice (and their myriad combinations) are deployed by different actors for different purposes. She argues that there is a hierarchy between these conceptualizations such that the internal/social demands "must be sacrificed" (պէտք է զոհվի) in favour of the primary, historical demands of justice (page 47). She maintains that while much is said about injustice, far

less is done to indicate who (i.e., which actors) and how (i.e., through which steps) those injustices can or should be remedied. Andreasyan's essay gives us much food for thought and it will be important to examine how these ideas and demands for justice will develop in the coming years. In particular, given the toxic legacy of state socialism which still makes it very difficult to formulate a progressive left discourse or critique of capitalism, how will movements frame and pursue social justice demands in Armenia?

Embracing a slightly different approach, Sona Manusyan's contribution draws on theories of culture and psychology as it focuses on the relationship between the personal, cultural, and political. She asks, why, despite the widespread discontent and the rise of specific social movements, participation in mobilizations and movements is not expanding to include a wider public in Armenia? Drawing on research conducted with focus groups, interviews with key actors, observations at protest rallies, and the analysis of relevant Facebook groups, Sona Manusyan analyses the different forms of coercion (internal and external to the individual) which shape and limit participation in protest activity and mobilizations. She examines the existing discursive tropes of national identity and mentality and how those shape understandings and behaviours, at times generating inner conflicts within individual actors. On page 69 she asks: "what is unique about protest in a country where there simultaneously exists desire to change the situation alongside fear of change?" Again and again she returns to this conundrum as she seeks to explain the absence of a widespread sense of active agency and willingness to participate in movements. At one point she refers to this as a "resistance against resistance" ("դիմադրություն դիմադրությանը"—p. 83). This is an excellent framing of the paradox, but in the end the essay never really provides an answer as to why there is so much "resistance against resistance". Instead, Sona Manusyan writes, that these are questions and issues which require further consideration. I sincerely hope Sona Manusyan will further pursue this question of why, despite the widespread discontent and demands for change, there is "resistance against resistance" in Armenia.

The volume is completed by Arpy Manusyan's insightful essay on Electric Yerevan. In the essay, Arpy Manusyan analyses the characteristics, discursive practices, and repertoires of action of Electric Yerevan and considers the movement's potential for social change. Drawing on first hand observations and qualitative interviews with participants, Arpy Manusyan asks: what was "new" and "unprecedented" about the Electric Yerevan movement? She argues that what was new and unprecedented was the occupation of a public space—Bagh-

ramyan Boulevard—by a large and diverse group of people. In other words, the repertoire of action (i.e., occupation) and the participation of new actors, beyond experienced activists, was what made Electric Yerevan new and unprecedented. Arpy Manusyan analyses what happened inside the movement during the occupation of Baghramyan Boulevard, examining the ideas and demands, as well as the dynamics and organisational practices emerging from that space. In doing so, she provides the reader with an incredibly detailed “thick description” of the movement. Rejecting a productivist approach, Arpy Manusyan acknowledges the impact Electric Yerevan had, particularly in widening the space for participation and introducing new modes and practices of mobilizing. However, she also recognises the obstacles to change, specifically the absence of a widespread sense of agency and empowered sub-

jectivity among the public. Similar to Sona Manusyan, Arpy Manusyan ends her essay by reflecting on the paradoxical situation in which there is a strong desire for social change that is coupled with the “conviction” (համոզվածություն) that the wider public/community is incapable of being an agent for change.

The book ends with Nazareth Karoyan’s translation of an interview with the French sociologist and philosopher Edgar Morin titled “The Time Has Come to Change Civilization”. The translated interview is beyond the scope of this review, but I found it helps to situate the issues discussed in the essays in a much broader context.

Overall, I believe this collection of essays makes a valuable contribution to the study of politics, activism, social movements, and civil society in Armenia. I highly recommend it to those who wish to understand the current socio-political situation in Armenia.

#### *About the Reviewer*

Dr. Armine Ishkanian is a Post-Major Review Tenured Assistant Professor and the Programme Director of the MSc in Social Policy & Development in the Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics (LSE). Her research examines the relationship between civil society, democracy, development and social transformation. She has published numerous academic articles on Armenia and is the author of two books, including *Democracy Building and Civil Society in Armenia* (2008).

## **Paturyan, Yevgenya Jenny and Gevorgyan, Valentina (2016): Civic Activism as a Novel Component of Armenian Civil Society, Turpanjian Center for Policy Analysis, American University of Armenia**

Reviewed by Karena Avedissian, Los Angeles, CA

Yevgenya Jenny Paturyan’s and Valentina Gevorgyan’s study aims to examine the evolving nature of contemporary Armenian civil society. The authors—well-established scholars of civil society in Armenia with a considerable body of work on the subject, do this expertly. They shed light on the growing significance of civic activism, the reassessed position of formal civil society organisations, and the tension between spontaneous activism and organised civil society. Importantly, the study sheds light on understudied aspects of civil society in Armenia—in particular, on the gender dimension of activism, the use of Internet Communication Technologies (ICTs), and the perceptions of individual activists and NGO representatives themselves.

The study is well organised and is divided into ten sections. It begins with theoretical and methodological considerations and a background. The subsequent sections are each dedicated to an element crucial to the

developing nature of civil society in Armenia. The discussions capture Armenian civil society as a dynamic, rather than static, phenomenon shaped by the prevailing political and social culture. The authors save a deeper discussion about social movement theory for the end.

The authors use primary and secondary sources and combine qualitative and quantitative analysis, allowing for a multidimensional account of Armenia’s political arena to then tease out the dynamics of Armenian civil society. This allows for a more detailed and contextualised inquiry into the case studies under examination. Because secondary sources about civil society in Armenia are so few, the research data provided in this study is absolutely invaluable for its up-to-date empirical data from Armenia. The inclusion of well integrated interview excerpts which support the authors’ arguments provide an even greater level of depth than found in most similar studies. In this way, the study goes beyond the

theoretically driven explanations for activism, while still maintaining a theoretically informed inquiry.

The study takes a fairly broad view of the subject of Armenian civil society, sometimes at the expense of depth. This structure however suits a descriptive study of this nature, elucidating the context in which Armenian civil society operates—an important contribution of this work to studies of post-Soviet and post-communist civil society. A novelty of the study is its combination of NGO- and social movement-oriented approaches to civil society in Armenia, which sees formal and informal structures of civil society as operating in one broad “ecosystem”. As such, this research is an example of the wealth of knowledge that can be uncovered by zooming in on one understudied context such as the Armenian case.

Those looking for an introduction to contemporary civil society in Armenia will find this study extremely useful as much for the definitions and conceptual clarifications offered as for the detailed yet concise information about the five chosen cases: The Save Teghut Initiative, Stop Changes in Maternity Leave Law, Dem Em, Let’s Preserve the Afrikyan Club Building, and Electric Yerevan. The inclusion of unsuccessful civic initiatives helps to fill the knowledge gap about failed movements given that the social movement literature is generally focused on the “lucky” parts of the world with successful movements. The study however curiously omits the 100 Dram initiative.

A most welcome aspect of this study is its approach, which restores autonomy and agency to social actors

in Armenia, building the possibility of change into the analysis of Armenia’s political structure. The authors account for peoples’ motivations in their discussions of perceptions, helping readers understand the process that leads actors from understanding a problem to undertaking action to address it. With an agency-focused approach that captures the relationship between Armenian society and collective action, the study contributes to a more holistic conceptualisation of Armenia’s polity a quarter century after independence. The authors give substantial evidence to the belief that informal politics really do shape formal politics in Armenia; that actors actively engage in identity and meaning construction as well as learn about strategies and tactics as they go, reflexively adapting tactics and strategies as needed. Protests are seen not just as taking an issue to the street, but rather as a serious classroom of development for better and more informed engagement.

In summary, the study under review represents a great contribution to the field of post-Soviet and social movement studies. It will, no doubt, serve as a strong basis for further research. The empirics and theoretical considerations outlined in it will contribute to a refinement of current approaches, in particular those that account for structure as well as culture. In particular, it will surely become the catalyst for future studies that will bring in a more systematic theory-oriented analysis. It is also a call for more insight into the role of social media in contention in Armenia.

#### *About the Reviewer*

Karena Avedissian is currently a Fellow at the University of Southern California’s Institute of Armenian Studies. She is a political scientist focusing on issues of democracy, civil society, media, and human rights in the former Soviet Union. She has published in the *Caucasus Survey* and regularly writes for outlets such as *Open Democracy*.

## CHRONICLE

## 8 December 2016 – 6 February 2017

8 December 2016	A court in Azerbaijan sentences opposition activist Bayram Mammadov to ten years in prison on drug trafficking charges
9 December 2016	Georgian Parliamentary Speaker Irakli Kobakhidze announces that the Parliament plans to set up a state commission to develop a package of constitutional amendments
12 December 2016	The European Union extends the mandate of the monitoring mission in Georgia (EUMM) for two more years that has been deployed following the August 2008 war between Russia and Georgia
13 December 2016	Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu meets with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev during a visit to Baku to discuss bilateral ties, and meets with leaders of Azerbaijan's Jewish community
15 December 2016	The Azerbaijani state oil company says that one person is dead and nine are missing after part of an off-shore platform fell into the sea due to heavy winds
15 December 2016	The Georgian Parliament approves a new state constitutional commission, chaired by Parliamentary Speaker Irakli Kobakhidze, with the task to develop constitutional amendments before 1 April 2017
16 December 2016	Georgian Defense Minister Levan Izoria meets with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev during a visit to Baku and emphasizes the importance of having Azerbaijan as a "reliable neighbor" as well as the strategic partnership between the two countries
20 December 2016	The Council of the European Union confirms the agreement with the European Parliament on visa liberalization for Georgia
21 December 2016	Iranian President Hassan Rohani meets with Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian during a visit to Yerevan to discuss bilateral ties and attend an Armenian–Iranian business forum
21 December 2016	Armenian Defense Minister Vigen Sargsyan visits Georgia and meets with his Georgian counterpart, Levan Izoria, to discuss defense cooperation and sign an agreement on bilateral military cooperation for 2017
26 December 2016	Three more parliamentary factions are established within the Georgian Dream—Democratic Georgia (GDDG) majority in the Georgian Parliament
27 December 2016	The Special Representative of Georgian Prime Minister for relations with Russia, Zurab Abashidze, declares that Georgia is ready to help Russia in the search for victims of a military plane crash on 25 December near the coast of Sochi and the breakaway region of Abkhazia
29 December 2016	Officials say that four soldiers were killed and further soldiers wounded in an armed clash at the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan
30 December 2016	During a telephone conversation, Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko agree to intensify the political dialogue between the two countries and deepen bilateral cooperation
1 January 2017	US Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John McCain and two further US Senators visit Georgia to hold talks with Georgian leaders and opposition representatives
5 January 2017	United World Wrestling imposes a four-year ban on athletes from Iran and Azerbaijan after athletes from the two countries were tested positive for doping during world competitions
6 January 2017	Former mayor of Tbilisi and a leader of the Georgian opposition party United National Movement, Gigi Ugulava, is released from prison after his sentence is reduced by three years and three months
6 January 2017	The Trump Organization, Donald Trump's property development company, and Silk Road Group (SRG) announce in a joint statement that they are formally ending the development of Trump Tower Batumi in the Georgian Black Sea coast town
9 January 2017	Israeli President Reuven Rivlin visits Georgia and meets with Georgian President Giorgi Margvelashvili and Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili to discuss economic cooperation between the two countries
9 January 2017	De facto Abkhaz Foreign Minister Daur Kove attends the presidential inauguration of Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua
10 January 2017	Georgian Foreign Minister Mikheil Janelidze meets with his Turkish counterpart, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during a visit to Istanbul to discuss transport and energy cooperation, and expresses his condolences following recent terrorist attacks in Turkey

10 January 2017	Georgian Energy Minister Kakha Kaladze meets with Director General of Gazprom Export LLC Elena Burmistrova in Minsk to discuss Russian gas transit to Armenia via Georgia and renew a gas transit agreement
11 January 2017	Georgian Foreign Minister Mikheil Janelidze meets with his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif in Teheran and discusses bilateral relations in trade, tourism, economy and culture
13 January 2017	The deputies of the United National Movement opposition party rename their parliamentary faction to “European Georgia” following a split in the party
16 January 2017	Georgian Economy Minister Giorgi Gakharia and China Energy Company Limited CEO Zhang Yuzhuo sign a memorandum of understanding on strengthening new Silk Road projects
17 January 2017	The former Georgian Parliamentary Speaker and former leader of the Republican Party, Davit Usupashvili, announces a new political party and says that “he and his teammates” will achieve “serious success” in the 2020 parliamentary elections
21 January 2017	Georgian President Giorgi Margvelashvili sends a congratulatory message to the new US President Donald Trump and invites him to visit Georgia, while noting the historical friendship between the two countries
23 January 2017	Georgian Defense Minister Levan Izoria visits Finland before flying to Sweden and Estonia to discuss defense cooperation and explore the countries’ experience on “total defense” and conscription
25 January 2017	A court in Baku sentences Azerbaijani members of the opposition Movement for Muslim Unity and Popular Front Party to prison terms for publicly inciting ethnic, religious and social hatred
27 January 2017	Georgian President Giorgi Margvelashvili pardons five former Ministry of Defense officials convicted in 2014 for exceeding official powers
31 January 2017	A Georgian platoon leaves for the Central African Republic to join the EU-led military training mission (EUTM RCA) for six months
2 February 2017	The European Parliament adopts a proposal on visa liberalization for Georgia that allows biometric passport holders to enter the Schengen area for 90 days for holiday or business purposes, but not work purposes
2 February 2017	A court in Armenia finds three men guilty of inciting mass disorder in connection with the seizure of a police station in the capital Yerevan in 2016
3 February 2017	An agency in the Georgian Ministry of Education decides to close down the Batumi Refaiddin Şahin Friendship School, a Gülen affiliated School in the Georgian Black Sea coast town
6 February 2017	Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev cancels a meeting with the European Parliament in Brussels, which hosted an event on human rights violation in Azerbaijan, after discussing a new partnership agreement between Azerbaijan and the European Union with EU officials
6 February 2017	South Ossetian leader Leonid Tibilov signs a decree to hold a referendum in April 2017 on renaming the breakaway region to “the Republic of South Ossetia—the State of Alania”

*Compiled by Lili Di Puppo*

*For the full chronicle since 2009 see <[www.laender-analysen.de/cad](http://www.laender-analysen.de/cad)>*