

**The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict 1988-1994
From Communal Violence to Civil War:
The Role of Democracy and Political Entrepreneurs**

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ABSTRACT

Geysar Gurbanov: The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict 1988-1994
From Communal Violence to Civil War:
The Role of Democracy and Political Entrepreneurs
(Under the direction of Erica J. Johnson)

This paper examines underlying reasons behind communal violence and civil war and attempts to explain the role of political entrepreneurs in escalating communal violence to civil war. The author tests his theory against the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. The paper argues that communal violence transitions to civil war when and if political entrepreneurs are present in an environment absent of democracy. In this regard, the author elaborates on the role of these two variables: political entrepreneurs and the absence of democracy.

*To Janet D. Olejar, my mentor and friend,
I could not have done this without your support, care, and love.
Thanks for everything. I treasure you immensely.*

*To victims of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and their families
who perished in the civil war between Armenians and Azerbaijanis.*

*To peace entrepreneurs across the globe
who work and fight for peace and reconciliation.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Growing up in Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh war, I was curious about how sporadic acts of communal violence gradually transitioned to civil war, a more organized, extreme, and destructive form of violence. In searching for a better answer to my question as to why communal violence transitions to civil war, I have started this research by choosing the Nagorno-Karabakh war as my case study. One reason for this was that I had been an eyewitness of this conflict and experienced the war through my own life and lives of those with whom I had a chance to interact prior and after immigrating to the United States.

It was not until 2005 that I had met the first Armenian in Tacoma, WA—during my fellowship program funded by the U.S. Department of State—when suddenly communal differences (e.g. ethnicity and religion) had little or almost no value outside of my country. Moreover, not only in the United States, but also in Iran, Turkey, Georgia, and Russia, Armenians and Azerbaijanis lived peacefully together, traded with and married each other.¹ Why was it that Armenians and Azerbaijanis killed each other on the line of contact in Nagorno-Karabakh, but outside of this territorial domain they were treating each other peacefully?² And how did the conflict transition from communal violence to a full scale civil war in 1992? The answer to these questions can be found in the actions of the Armenian and Azerbaijani political entrepreneurs who prevented any peaceful interactions between the two groups outside of battlefields, where thousands of Armenians and Azerbaijanis perished in a war for a piece of

¹ In Georgian Village, Armenians And Azeris Find Common Ground. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Web: 24 July, 2013. Source: <http://www.rferl.org/media/photogallery/25046864.html>

² Although, there are a few cases when this is not true. For example, read Ramil Safarov's case. Ethnic hatred was a reason why in February 2004 Gurchen Markaryan, an Armenian lieutenant, was murdered by his Azerbaijani counterpart Ramil Safarov during a NATO training seminar in Budapest, Hungary. Upon his extradition to Azerbaijan in 2012, Safarov was pardoned by President Ilham Aliyev and received as a hero back at home.

land. These actions of Azerbaijani and Armenian political entrepreneurs who eventually came to power perfectly fit what David Lake and Donald Rothchild describe as “processes of social polarization” and raising “the political saliency of ethnicity.”³ In other words, in order to seek political and economic payoffs, political entrepreneurs in the course of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict divided the society along communal lines, exaggerated the hostilities of the ethnic others, and magnified the likelihood of the civil war.

In this paper I will argue that political entrepreneurs—rational actors who seek personal benefits and, by doing so, change the direction of politics—choose to escalate communal violence to civil war in order to attain political and economic payoffs. To achieve this goal, political entrepreneurs escalate communal tensions and propel communal divides in the society. To demonstrate the validity of my argument, I will look at the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and will analyze the roles of two Armenian (Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan) and two Azerbaijani (Abulfaz Elchibey and Heydar Aliyev) political entrepreneurs in escalating the conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. I will demonstrate that communal violence transitions to civil war when and if political entrepreneurs are present in an environment absent of democracy, i.e. in an environment where legal equality, political freedoms, and rule of law do not exist. In such a climate, political entrepreneurs successfully adopt strategies that would not be immediately available to them in a democratic system. Therefore, in this chapter I will briefly introduce the reader to basic definitions of the key variables of communal violence, civil war, political entrepreneurs, and democracy and will outline my main argument about the transition of the conflict from communal violence to civil war.

1. Defining Communal Violence

What is communal violence and how to define it? In this study, I will use the term “communal violence” to mean a form of violence committed across communal lines, i.e. a type of

³ Lake, David A. and Donald Rothchild. "Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict." *International Security* 21, no. 2 (Fall, 1996): 41-75.

violence in which perpetrators choose their victims based upon group membership.⁴ These membership differences may include but are not limited to race, religion, ethnicity, language, nationality, and kinship. Originally the term “communal violence” was constructed in the British Empire to define violence between religious and ethnic groups in its African and South Asian colonies.⁵ However, communal violence can be found anywhere in the world where one group of individuals resorts to violence against another group based on membership differences.

Academicians and practitioners across the world refer to communal violence using multiple and interchangeable terms, including ethnic violence, civil unrest, ethnic riot, racial violence, inter-communal violence, or ethno-religious violence.⁶ For example, Donald Horowitz, who wrote extensively on ethnic violence and ethnic conflict, writes that the terms describing acts of violence along ethnic lines overlap in definitions. Horowitz uses the term “ethnic riot” instead of “communal violence” to describe acts of “an intense, sudden, though not necessarily wholly unplanned, lethal attack by civilian members of one ethnic group on civilian members of another ethnic group, the victims chosen because of their group membership.”⁷ In this paper, I will use the term “communal violence” because this term has a more inclusive nature and embraces all other similar terms such as ethnic riot, racial violence, and civil unrest, i.e. it is not limited to only one type of group membership (e.g., ethnicity, race, religion).

Moreover, Horowitz’s study, also, correctly points out the lack of scholarship that explains how communal violence escalates to civil war.⁸ Additionally, he proposes that “ethnic riots are a frequent forerunner of secessionist warfare”⁹ and, therefore, he establishes a

⁴ Horowitz, Donald. *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

⁵ Klinken, Geert Arend van. *Communal violence and democratization in Indonesia*. London; New York: Routledge, 2007, pp. 13-14.

⁶ Wilson, Chris. *Ethno-religious violence in Indonesia: from soil to God*. London; New York: Routledge, 2008.

⁷ Horowitz, Donald. *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. p.1

⁸ Ibid. p.4.

⁹ Ibid. p.12.

connection between communal violence and civil war. However, existing research does not reveal much about why communal violence transitions to civil war. Therefore, my goal in this paper is to explain this phenomenon by analyzing the role of political entrepreneurs and the absence of democracy.

2. Defining Civil War

James Fearon describes civil war as “a violent conflict within a country fought by organized groups that aim to take power at the center or in a region, or to change government policies.”¹⁰ Here, too, violence happens along group membership lines. However, the scale and magnitude of such violence is amplified by political entrepreneurs. In this regard, civil war is the next level of violence that originates on the level of communal violence. It cannot erupt without preexisting communal violence. Communal violence is a necessary precursor to civil war. Thus, “a civil war is a high-intensity conflict, often involving regular armed forces, that is sustained, organized and large-scale.”¹¹ Therefore, civil wars may result in large numbers of casualties and the consumption of significant resources. In contrast, in communal violence, clashes are episodic, sporadic, and less organized.

If communal violence can simmer as episodic but not sustained and large-scale conflict, what has to happen for communal violence to be classified as civil war? Which conditions must be met to conclude that the transition has occurred? To answer this question we must explicitly define the term “war” in order to draw its difference from communal violence. In the “Correlates of War,”¹² a research project established in 1963, David Singer and Mel Small define war as “sustained combat, involving organized armed forces, resulting in a minimum of 1,000 battle-

¹⁰ Fearon, James. “Iraqi’s Civil War.” *Foreign Affairs*. Mar/Apr2007, Vol. 86 Issue 2: pp. 2-15.

¹¹ Goodin, Robert. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

¹² McLean, Iain, and Alistair McMillan. “Correlates of War.” *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

related fatalities within a twelve month period."¹³ Therefore, if these conditions are met, we may argue that the conflict has transitioned from communal violence to civil war.

3. Explanation of Why Communal Violence Transitions to Civil War

Despite the many efforts to explain concepts of communal violence and civil war, existing theories fail to provide a convincing argument on why communal violence transitions to civil war. For example, Horowitz writes that "no one has specified the conditions that turn an ethnic riot into protracted civil war..."¹⁴ In this regard, my argument about the lack of literature is the same, with the only difference that what he calls an ethnic riot I call communal violence. Before delving further, I want to define my independent variables and explain why I prefer to use the term "transition" instead of "transformation" within the context of my argument. The word "transition" implies "a movement, development, or evolution from one form, stage, or style to another."¹⁵ "Transformation," on the other hand, means "a complete or major change in ... something's appearance, form, etc."¹⁶ A transformation is a more dramatic form of change. It is extreme and radical. Therefore, transformation of conflict, in my opinion, has a more revolutionary nature and, furthermore, can go in the opposite direction from war to peace. On the contrary, transition of conflict is an evolutionary process (i.e., moving between related levels). Because civil war cannot exist without preexisting communal violence, I argue that the conflict transitions from communal violence to civil war.

¹³ The COW Typology of War: Defining and Categorizing Wars (Version 4 of the Data) by Meredith Reid Sarkees. Source: http://www.correlatesofwar.org/COW2%20Data/WarData_NEW/COW%20Website%20-%20Typology%20of%20war.pdf

¹⁴ Horowitz, Donald. *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. p.4.

¹⁵ "Transition." *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 11 Nov. 2014. Source: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transition>

¹⁶ "Transformation." *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 11 Nov. 2014. Source: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transformation>>

3.1. Political Entrepreneurs

I argue that political entrepreneurs are central to transitioning communal violence to civil war. I define political entrepreneurs as self-interested rational actors¹⁷ who choose to escalate communal violence to civil war in order to attain political and economic payoffs. I borrow the concept of political entrepreneurs from existing scholarship developed by Lake and Rothchild.¹⁸ Moreover, as I will argue in Chapter 2, there are other terms that describe political entrepreneurs (e.g. ethnic activists, ethnopolitical entrepreneurs, and conflict entrepreneurs). But the lines between these terms are blurry and overlapping. What all of them have in common is that these actors seek political or economic payoffs from escalating the conflict. In this regard, the term “political entrepreneurs” seems to be more encompassing and inclusive in its nature.

In addition, as I will suggest in the literature review chapter, political entrepreneurs do not only factor in their immediate payoffs but also consider potential future rewards from escalating the conflict from communal violence to civil war. As Matthew Jackson and Massimo Morelli write, “[O]ne could in principle rationalize the incentives to eliminate another ethnic group or minority ideological group by a desire to obtain a larger share of the social cake, in the present and/or in the future.”¹⁹ To achieve these goals, political entrepreneurs escalate communal tensions and propel communal cleavages in the society. In this regard, “[p]olitical entrepreneurs can also reinforce processes of social polarization ... [and] raise the political saliency of ethnicity. In framing issues for the public, moreover, political entrepreneurs can exaggerate the hostility of others and magnify the likelihood of conflict—thereby distorting public debate and images of other groups and driving co-ethnics toward them for power and

¹⁷ “In international affairs or economics, the term rational actor is used to describe somebody who is concerned about their survival, prosperity or strength and is making calculations on the basis of these concerns. It describes someone who calculates costs and benefits.” Source: <http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2012/03/08/zakaria-iran-is-a-rational-actor/>

¹⁸ Lake, David A. and Donald Rothchild. “Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict.” *International Security* 21, no. 2 (1996), pp. 41-75.

¹⁹ Morelli, Massimo and Jackson, Matthew. “The reasons for wars: An updated survey.” *The Handbook on the Political Economy of War* (2011), pp. 34-57.

support."²⁰ This definition is important because transition of conflict from communal violence to civil war does not happen without political entrepreneurs.

Essentially, civil war is a more escalated and organized form of communal violence and this transition requires greater leadership capacity that political entrepreneurs can offer to their constituencies. At this moment political entrepreneurs step forward with their own agendas: they exploit whichever reasons drive communal violence and, in doing so, they facilitate the transition of communal violence to civil war. In the next chapters, and especially in Chapter 3, I will demonstrate how during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenian and Azerbaijani political entrepreneurs climbed to power as a result of their leadership role in transitioning the conflict from communal violence to civil war.

3.2. Absence of Democracy

Another independent variable in my theory is the absence of democracy. I argue that communal violence transitions to civil war in an environment absent of democracy, i.e. in an environment where legal equality, political freedoms, and rule of law do not exist. In such climate, political entrepreneurs successfully adopt strategies that would not be immediately available to them in a democratic system. Yet there is no agreement on how to define democracy. As Richard Mulgan writes "[t]he 'definition of democracy' is a dead horse which may be offered annually to students for remorseless flogging in examinations but is otherwise not worth serious academic consideration... The word 'democracy' is so vague, democracies are so varied, that there is little chance of substantial agreement."²¹ Despite this problem, however,

²⁰ Lake, David A. and Donald Rothchild. "Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict." *International Security* 21, no. 2 (1996), pp. 41-75.

²¹ Mulgan, Richard. "Defining 'democracy.'" *Political Science* 20, no. 2 (1968), pp. 3-9.

legal equality, freedom, and rule of law have been identified as important and common characteristics of democracy.²²

In this paper, I define democracy as a type of government in which all eligible citizens participate equally in the proposal, development, and establishment of the laws by which their country is run, i.e. it is a form of government in which “all eligible citizens have an equal say in lawmaking.”²³ Because my argument is built on the idea that democracy must be absent for communal violence to transition to civil war, I will assume that such transition happens in non-democracies. For example, I will demonstrate how the absence of democracy in Azerbaijan helped Armenian and Azerbaijani political entrepreneurs to capitalize on the conflict and achieve their political goals. In Azerbaijan, during and after the immediate collapse of the Soviet Union, the country was not democratic, i.e. fundamental elements of democracy (e.g. free and fair elections, protection of the human rights of all citizens, and rule of law) were simply absent. Such absence, therefore, has allowed political entrepreneurs to advance their agendas and achieve their goals, which, otherwise, would not be possible in a democratic state.

Also, I must note here that I do not exclude that the escalation of communal violence to civil war can happen in a democracy. However, my research did not find any past or present examples of such transition in a democratic political system.

4. Justification for Case Selection

The reason why I chose Azerbaijan as a case study for this paper is because the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict presents a good example of how political entrepreneurs have succeeded in escalating communal violence (1988-1992) to civil war (1992-1994) in an environment absent of democracy. In Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, such political entrepreneurs as Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan—ethnic Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh—and Heydar Aliyev and

²² O'Donnell, G., In Diamond, L.; Morlino, L., *Assessing the Quality of Democracy*, JHU Press, 2005, p. 3.

²³ Diamond, Larry and Plattner, Marc. *Electoral systems and democracy*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006, p.168.

Abulfaz Elchibey—ethnic Azerbaijanis—came to power during or as a result of the conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. They all used the war rhetoric and nationalist agenda as part of their political platforms. Chapters 3 will illustrate in details how these political entrepreneurs were gaining political and economic payoffs in an environment absent of democracy.

In this regard, Azerbaijan, at the time of the conflict, was not democratic. And the absence of democracy allowed to transition the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh from communal violence to civil war. Strong state institutions, free and fair elections, protection of the human rights of all citizens, and rule of law are the main elements of the democratic state. In Azerbaijan during the conflict in 1988-1994, these features were absent. Such absence, therefore, allowed political entrepreneurs to advance their agendas and achieve their goals. On one hand, weak government institutions both in Nagorno-Karabakh and in Azerbaijan have enabled political entrepreneurs to capture the state and seize political power. On the other hand, undemocratic political systems created an atmosphere of fear among Armenians and Azerbaijanis for their future.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter I introduced my thesis. I argued that political entrepreneurs—rational actors who seek personal benefits and, by doing so, change the direction of politics—choose to escalate communal violence to civil war in order to attain political and economic payoffs. To achieve this goal, political entrepreneurs escalate communal tensions and propel communal divides in the society. To demonstrate the validity of my argument, I look at the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. I suggest that communal violence transitions to civil war when and if political entrepreneurs are present in an environment absent of democracy, i.e. in an environment where legal equality, political freedoms, and rule of law do not exist.

In Chapter 2, I will delve deeper into academic discourse about communal violence and civil war and how the former transitions to the latter. I will review the existing literature on communal violence and civil war as well as inform the reader about the role of political entrepreneurs and the absence of democracy in the context of my theory. Chapter 3 will examine the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. I will demonstrate that the escalation of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh helped previously little-known Armenian politicians come to power. Two of these politicians, Serzh Sargsyan and Robert Kocharyan, from Nagorno-Karabakh even succeeded to become presidents of Armenia. In Azerbaijan, by escalating the conflict from communal violence to civil war, the Azerbaijan Popular Front founder, Abulfaz Elchibey, seized political power in Baku. Later, by exploiting the same conflict, Heydar Aliyev, ousted communist leader, returned to power. Chapter 4 will draw a conclusive summary of my research findings.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I will review the academic discourse about communal violence and civil war and how the former transitions to the latter. I will continue to argue that communal violence transitions to civil war when political entrepreneurs are present in an environment absent of democracy. This literature review chapter will talk about detailed definitions of communal violence, civil war, political entrepreneurs, and democracy and will support my main argument about the transition of the conflict from communal violence to civil war.

1. Communal Violence

Let's first look at how academicians and practitioners define communal violence. Scholars and practitioners use a range of distinct, but overlapping terms to refer to communal violence. Margaret Wyszomirski defines communal violence as a form of violence along racial, linguistic, or religious cleavages in an environment absent of a common value or identity.²⁴ This definition is important because it can be potentially linked to some of the power of democracy that provides a common value in divided societies. Practitioners from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime define communal violence as a "form of violence between communities of different religious group, different sects or tribes of same religious group, clans, ethnic origins or national origin."²⁵ In the previous chapter, I introduced communal violence as a form of violence committed across communal lines, i.e. a type of violence in which perpetrators chose their victims based upon group membership. Additionally, these group memberships are

²⁴ Wyszomirski, Margaret J. "Communal Violence: The Armenians and the Copts as Case Studies." *World Politics* 27, no. 3 (1975), p.443.

²⁵ Homicide, Violence and Conflict. UNODC, United Nations. Source: https://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/Chapter_4.pdf

“organized along a shared communal identity, meaning that they are not formally organized rebel groups or militias but that the confrontation takes place along the line of group identities.”²⁶ Consistent with the definitions above, these membership differences may include, but are not limited to, race, religion, ethnicity, language, nationality, and kinship.

Originally the term “communal violence” was constructed in the British Empire to define violence between religious and ethnic groups in its African and South Asian colonies. In India, “the British raised Muslim communalism as a counter-weight to emerging Indian nationalism”²⁷ that resulted in “Hindu-Muslim riots in north Indian cities during the first half of the nineteenth century.”²⁸ “In all the cases [of communal violence],” writes Bayly, “however, there is adequate evidence that participants and observers both recognized that subjective matters of religious affiliation did in fact represent a significant, if not exclusive, issue in the conflicts.”²⁹ Bayly also notes, however, that “there is a question whether a distinction should be drawn between ‘religious conflicts’—disputes over symbols, rites and precedents—and ‘communal conflicts’ in which broader aspects of a group’s social, economic and political life were perceived as being unified and marked off from other(s) by religious affiliation.”³⁰

I argue that violence along religious lines sits in the domain of communal violence because both concepts assume violence based on membership affiliation. However, communal violence is a more inclusive term than religious violence because it embraces all other terms such as ethnic riot, racial violence, and civil unrest. Communal violence is not limited to only one type of membership (e.g. ethnicity, race, religion). Geert van Klinken who researched communal violence in Indonesia, similarly argues that: “Religion ... is seen as a social positive,

²⁶ Elfversson, Emma and Brosché, Johan. “Communal conflict, civil war, and the state: Complexities, connections, and the case of Sudan.” *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, Vol.12, Issue 1, p.35.

²⁷ Bayly, Christopher. “The Pre-History of ‘Communalism’? Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860.” *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (1985), pp. 177-203.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.178.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.179.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.179.

provided it is practised with respect for others. It would be confusing to subsume religion under ethnicity. Yet the political roles they play clearly have much in common. The term communal, first used in India, solves this problem by introducing a new term to embrace both types of identity politics.”³¹

As I mentioned previously in Chapter 1, Donald Horowitz also writes about the overlapping definitions of ethnic violence. He uses the term “ethnic riot” instead of “communal violence” to describe acts of “an intense, sudden, though not necessarily wholly unplanned, lethal attack by civilian members of one ethnic groups on civilian members of another ethnic group, the victims chosen because of their group membership.”³² Yet I prefer to use the term communal violence because ethnic riot has a more restrictive nature that limits the scope of academic inquiry to particular cases without allowing a broader approach to the phenomenon of communal violence.

Because the Indian subcontinent has experienced numerous vicious cycles of communal violence as early as in the 18th century between Hindus and Muslims, as well as between Sunni and Shia sects of Islam,³³ I think it is important to look at the definition of communal violence in the Indian law where it is described as “act of omission or commission committed as part of a targeted attack, planned or otherwise, against the persons and properties of any particular group, caste or religious community which can be inferred directly or from the nature or circumstances of the attack...”³⁴ Horowitz definition of communal violence is somewhat similar to what I found in the Indian law:

³¹ Klinken, Geert Arend van. *Communal violence and democratization in Indonesia*. London; New York: Routledge, 2007, p.13.

³² Horowitz, Donald. *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. p.1.

³³ Baber, Z. Race, Religion and Riots: The ‘Racialization’ of Communal Identity and Conflict in India. *Sociology* 38, no.4 (2004), pp.701-718.

³⁴ This definition comes from The Communal Violence (Prevention, Control and Rehabilitation of Victims) Bill No. CXV enacted by the Parliament of India in 2005 and later amended by the National Advisory Council to enhance the definition of communal violence along with 48 other amendments to the bill.

The ethnic riot, as I have defined it, entails a substantial measure of relatively spontaneous physical assault by members of one group on members of another. [...] High levels of anger are displayed and atrocities are typically committed in the course of the riot. The main targets are people and the property that is associated with them, rather than institutions.³⁵

Based on this analysis I can suggest that communal violence is a type of spontaneous, episodic conflict where victims are selected based upon group membership. However, there is also another challenge here: one might ask about the very definition of violence per se. For example, what does the violence mean: murder, destruction of property, physical abuse? As Christian Krohn-Hansen puts it, violence is a difficult concept to define³⁶ and “the social sciences refer to an extremely broad spectrum of actions by the term ‘violence.’”³⁷ While there is truth in this critique, I suggest, however, an international definition of violence that is “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.”³⁸

The American Psychological Association gives a more general definition of violence, explaining it as “an extreme form of aggression, such as assault, rape or murder [...] Violence has many causes, including frustration, exposure to violent media, violence in the home or neighborhood and a tendency to see other people’s actions as hostile even when they’re not.”³⁹ Since interpretations and explanations of violence can vary depending on cultural, social, and academic aspects, it was important to me to find a common denominator among different

³⁵ Horowitz, Donald. *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. p.17.

³⁶ Krohn-Hansen, Christian. "The Anthropology of Violent Interaction." *Journal of Anthropological Research* 50, no. 4 (Winter, 1994): pp. 367-381.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.369.

³⁸ Krug et al., *World report on violence and health*. World Health Organization, 2002.

³⁹ Kazdin, Alan. *Encyclopedia of psychology*, Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association; Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

definitions of this phenomenon. For the purpose of this study, violence is defined as a form of aggression intentionally committed against another person or a group of people.

Here it is also important to mention current academic debate about the distinction between the concepts of violence and conflict. Yuhki Tajima writes on this problem in his dissertation work "Order and Violence in Authoritarian Breakdowns: How Institutions Explain Communal Violence in Indonesia:"⁴⁰

Scholars have made more progress in explaining ethnic conflicts than ethnic violence. For the most part, studies of ethnic conflicts describe what drives different groups apart such as inequality, poverty, greed, indivisible geography and emotions. While these factors are important for understanding violence, they are not sufficient to explain violence. Unfortunately, the extension of theories of ethnic conflict to explaining ethnic violence often results in the overdetermination [sic] of ethnic violence.⁴¹

Although my goal in this paper is not to explain what drives communal violence, Yuhki Tajima's observation points at one of the challenges that scholars face when attempting to define and analyze the concept of communal violence. Brubaker, Rogers, and Laitin similarly note this point in their article "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence."⁴² They argue that "[i]n the study of ethnicity, ethnic conflict, and nationalism, accounts of conflict have not been distinguished sharply from accounts of violence. Violence has generally been conceptualized—if only tacitly—as a degree of conflict rather than as a form of conflict, or indeed as a form of social or political action in its own right."⁴³ They also touch upon the problem of coding the instances of violence. They write: "The coding of past, present, or feared future violence as ethnic is not only an analytical but a practical matter. Violence is regularly accompanied by social struggles to define

⁴⁰ He writes more about this challenge in his book *The Institutional Origins of Communal Violence Indonesia's Transition from Authoritarian Rule* published by Cambridge University Press in 2014.

⁴¹ Yuhki, Tajima. *Order and Violence in Authoritarian Breakdowns: How Institutions Explain Communal Violence in Indonesia*, Harvard University, 2009.

⁴² Brubaker, Rogers and David D. Laitin. "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24, (1998), pp.423-452.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.425.

its meaning and specify its causes, the outcome of which—for example, the labeling of an event as a pogrom, a riot, or a rebellion—may have important consequences.”⁴⁴

This observation is applicable to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, where both sides until today argue about the coding of ethnic clashes between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Sumgait (1988) and Baku (1990). Armenians qualify those clashes as pogroms. By contrast, many Azerbaijanis interpret those events outside of their ethnic content by avoiding calling those instances as pogroms and choose to view them in a broader context of their struggle for national independence. At the same time, however, Azerbaijanis define mass murder of the civilian population in Khojaly (1992) by Armenians as an act of genocide. In contrast, many Armenians classify or code the event as an unintended consequence or a simple casualty of war, totally ignoring ethnic cleansing elements of the committed atrocities. These facts demonstrate that not only scholars find it challenging to define the violence along group membership lines, but also perpetrators and victims of such violence, oftentimes, struggle to code it in the most objective, accurate way possible.

2. Civil War: Four Schools of Thought

Academic discourse of ethnic war is debated by political scientists and sociologists who generally fall into one of four categories: primordialist, instrumentalist, constructivist, and rationalist. Primordialist theory argues that ethnic conflicts are driven by ancient hatreds and that ethnic groups because of their differences are naturally inclined to fight each other. Constructivist theory argues that ethnic conflicts are grounded in historical processes and that a group identity has a constructed nature. The authors James Fearon and David Laitin frame differences between primordialists and constructivists in their study of the social construction of ethnic identity: “Primordialists are said to believe that conflict between two ethnic groups... is inevitable because of unchanging, essential characteristics of the members of these categories.

⁴⁴ Brubaker, Rogers and David D. Laitin. "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24, (1998), p.428.

The constructivist position rejects the notion of unchanging, essential characteristics and thus rejects this claim."⁴⁵

Instrumentalist theory asserts that political leaders who manipulate ethnic identities to achieve their goals are responsible for ethnic conflicts. Rationalist theory claims that ethnic conflicts are galvanized by information failures, commitment problems, or the utility maximizing strategies of rational actors. In this section, I will reject primordialist accounts of ethnic conflict. Instead, I will develop my theory on conflict transition from communal violence to civil war by blending instrumentalist, constructivist, and rationalist schools of thought. I will use this approach for two reasons. First of all, as Fearon and Laitin write, "[T]he insights of a constructivist approach merge with, or become hard to distinguish from, a rationalist or strategic choice approach."⁴⁶ And second, to follow the rationalist explanations of civil war does not mean to reject instrumentalist and constructivist accounts. Or, by the same token, to support constructivist views does not mean to deny rationalist explanations.

2.1. Primordialist Theory

Primordialist school of thought argues that "[e]thnic groups and nationalities exist because there are traditions of belief and action towards primordial objects such as biological features and especially territorial location."⁴⁷ The primordialist school believes in a concept of kinship among members of an ethnic group. Donald Horowitz argues that this kinship "makes it possible for ethnic groups to think in terms of family resemblances".⁴⁸ I personally disagree with primordialist explanation of civil wars. There is plenty of evidence that demonstrates how societies divided by ethnic, racial, or religious lines can exist peacefully. For example, in

⁴⁵ Fearon, James and Laitin, David. "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity." *International Organization*, 11/2000, Vol.54, Issue 4, p.849.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.853.

⁴⁷ Grosby, Steven. "The verdict of history: The inexpungeable tie of primordiality – a response to Eller and Coughlan". *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17 (1), 1994: 164–171, p.168.

⁴⁸ Horowitz, Donald. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985. p. 57.

Azerbaijan predominantly Muslim communities have peacefully coexisted with their Jewish neighbors, who settled in these lands over two and a half millennia ago.⁴⁹ On the other hand, in the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh under control of Armenians, Jewish communities feel less welcome and choose to hide their identity fearing persecution.⁵⁰ This example demonstrates that primordialist explanations of civil war do not hold against case studies where ethnic or religious groups peacefully coexist despite all the odds.

Some authors in academia such as Roger Petersen explain violent conflicts from a psychological—or emotional—point of view. In his book “Understanding Ethnic Violence,”⁵¹ Petersen explains how emotions can lead to ethnic violence. For the purpose of his argument, he divides emotions into four groups: fear, hatred, rage, and resentment. He finds, however, that neither fear nor rage necessarily leads to ethnic violence. Instead, resentment is more likely to lead to conflict and subsequent violence. Petersen’s model, however, does not provide a comprehensive account explaining how communal violence can escalate to civil war. I will support my argument by trying to apply Petersen’s model to Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Although an emotional dimension played an important role in igniting communal violence between Armenians and Azerbaijanis (e.g. hatred as a result of traumatic historical memories or resentment as a result of growing nationalism and secessionism), the conflict cannot be fully understood without taking into account other important factors. For example, Petersen’s model ignores the fact that Armenian political entrepreneurs saw many opportunities in violence, i.e. seizing control of natural resources (e.g. gold, land, and water), mobilizing political masses in Nagorno-Karabakh, attracting financial support of the Armenian diaspora, etc.

⁴⁹ Pfeffer, Anshel. “The land of no anti-Semitism.” Haaretz. Web: 2 Mar., 2013. Source: <http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/jerusalem-babylon/the-land-of-no-anti-semitism.premium-1.506546>

⁵⁰ Sverdlow, Steve. “The Forgotten Jews of Karabakh.” The Journal of Turkish Weekly. Source: <http://www.turkishweekly.net/article/19/the-forgotten-jews-of-karabakh.html>

⁵¹ Petersen, Roger. *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

2.2. Instrumentalist Theory

I tend to agree more with the instrumentalist school of thought that explains civil wars as an outcome of the involvement of political entrepreneurs. Instrumentalist perception of civil war, argues Antony Smith, a professor on nationalism studies at the London School of Economics, "came to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States, in the debate about (white) ethnic persistence in what was supposed to have been an effective melting pot."⁵² His theory explained this phenomenon as the result of the actions of community leaders, "who used their cultural groups as sites of mass mobilization and as constituencies in their competition for power and resources, because they found them more effective than social classes."⁵³ In this account of ethnic identification, "[e]thnicity and race are viewed as instrumental identities, organized as means to particular ends,"⁵⁴ i.e., instrumentalists believe that ethnic differences are not sufficient to explain ethnic wars.⁵⁵

In this regard, it is important to refer to another article by James Fearon and David Laitin. In the "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity: Review Essay"⁵⁶ Fearon and Laitin ask if there is a relationship between the social construction of ethnic identities and the probability of ethnic conflict. They write: "Our purpose here is to see if we can reject the null hypothesis that the social construction of ethnicity has little or no bearing on the likelihood of ethnic violence." Their approach speaks against primordialist school of thought as they further write:

We find considerable evidence linking strategic aspects of the construction of ethnic identities to violence, and more limited evidence implicating specific

⁵² Smith, Anthony. *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*. Cambridge: Polity, 2001. pp. 54–55.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.54–55.

⁵⁴ Cornell, Stephen; Hartmann, Douglas. *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge, 1998. p.59.

⁵⁵ Smith, Dan. "Trends and Causes of Armed Conflicts". In Austin, Alexander; Fischer, Martina; Ropers, Norbert. *Handbook for Conflict Transformation*. Berlin: Berghof Research Centre for Constructive Conflict Management, 2003.

⁵⁶ Fearon, James and David Laitin. "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity: Review Essay." *International Organization* 54, no. 4 (2000).

cultural or discursive systems. If there is a dominant or most common narrative in the texts under review, it is that large-scale ethnic violence is provoked by elites seeking to gain, maintain, or increase their hold on political power... Violence has the effect, intended by the elites, of constructing group identities in more antagonistic and rigid ways. These newly constructed (or reconstructed) ethnic identities serve to increase support for the elites who provoked the violence while favoring the continuation or escalation of violence.⁵⁷

In their other article, the two authors share similar concerns and here, too, they find the reason behind civil wars in economic and political paradigms. They write: "The factors that explain which countries have been at risk for civil war are not their ethnic or religious characteristics but rather the conditions that favor insurgency. These include poverty—which marks financially and bureaucratically weak states and also favors rebel recruitment—political instability, rough terrain, and large populations."⁵⁸

Another important question that the authors are posing in their articles is why the public follows its leaders down the path of ethnic violence. One of the answers they provide is that followers "often are not so much following as pursuing their own local or personal agendas not directly related to ethnic antipathy." Their findings support my argument that political entrepreneurs are one of the main forces behind civil wars. In other words, by provoking violence and escalating it from communal violence to civil war, political entrepreneurs seek to gain political or economic payoffs that they cannot obtain without, otherwise, provoking and escalating violence from its embryonic form—communal violence—to its more mature form—civil war.

Other authors who disagree with the ethnic rationale behind civil wars are Collier and Hoeffler. They argue that economic incentives better explain violence than ethnic identities.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Fearon, James and David Laitin. "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity: Review Essay." *International Organization* 54, no. 4 (2000).

⁵⁸ Fearon, James and Laitin, David. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." *American Political Science Review*, Issue 01, 2003, pp.75-90.

⁵⁹ Collier, Paul and Anke Hoeffler. "Greed and Grievance in Civil War." *Oxford Economic Papers* 56, no. 4 (Oct., 2004): pp.563-595.

They compiled a large dataset from 161 countries in 1960-1999 and took into account such factors as income inequality, support from diaspora, local terrain, export commodities, GDP, and education level of male population. The authors compare two motivations for civil war: greed and grievance, which capture the idea of transition of communal violence to civil war. They found that "[t]he extent of primary commodity exports is the largest single influence on the risk of conflict."⁶⁰ This is a crucial argument because it explains how political entrepreneurs can show interest in escalating violence to seek immediate or future payoffs from primary commodity exports. Not surprisingly, Nagorno-Karabakh with its surrounding areas was rich with primary commodity resources.

Their conclusion is strikingly applicable to Nagorno-Karabakh conflict:

However, we can show that by far the strongest effect of war on the risk of subsequent war works through diasporas. After five years of post-conflict peace, the risk of renewed conflict is around six times higher in the societies with the largest diasporas in America than in those without American diasporas. Presumably this effect works through the financial contributions of diasporas to rebel organisations.⁶¹

Their argument explains how in some instances—such as in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict—political entrepreneurs while pursuing other interests (e.g. looking to legitimize their power and extracting profits from commodity exports) might also seek payoffs from aid and donations that come from diaspora or similar structures.⁶² In some way, it is a vicious cycle as Collier and Hoeffler point out in their study that "grievance begets conflict which begets grievance which begets further conflict. Our model suggests that what is actually happening is that opportunities for primary commodity predation cause conflict, and that the grievances which this generates induce diasporas to finance further conflict."⁶³

⁶⁰ Collier, Paul and Anke Hoeffler. "Greed and Grievance in Civil War." *Oxford Economic Papers* 56, no. 4 (Oct., 2004): p.26.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.26.

⁶² Read more about it in Chapter 3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.26.

However, Christoph Zürcher argues against such conclusion in "The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus."⁶⁴ He conducts the analysis of the organized violence in the Caucasus by mainly looking at case studies from Chechnya, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Dagestan. His main question is why some conflicts turned violent, whereas others did not. Zürcher's main goal is to engage against Collier and Hoeffler's arguments about the importance of diaspora structures, proximity and dependence of natural resources, and dominance of mountainous terrain, which he believes to be inconsistent or faulty in the case of the Caucasian conflicts.

2.3. Constructivist Theory

My theory has been also inspired by the constructivist school of thought, which examines the socially constructed nature of ethnic groups. Therefore, my journey into understanding the concept of communal violence and civil war started with Anderson's "Imagined Communities."⁶⁵ Anderson's work is of great value for my work because in Azerbaijan, nationalism was a driving force behind communal violence and the subsequent civil war. It was the nationalism card that Armenian and Azerbaijani political entrepreneurs played out to mobilize masses and escalate the conflict. Anderson starts his work by defining that nation is nothing but a cultural artifact "of a particular kind." He explains why nation as a cultural artifact aroused strong and deep attachments in the hearts and minds of people. To explore this proposition, he analyzes the role of cultural roots, language, patriotism, and history. Additionally, he attributes an important role in creation of nations to censuses, maps, and museums. About imagine-ness of nations he says: "[T]he members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." He

⁶⁴ Zürcher, Christoph. *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus*. New York: New York University Press, 2007.

⁶⁵ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London; New York: Verso, 1991.

identifies nation as a community because “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”

A more comprehensive and geographically relevant study about the constructed nature of nations and ethnicities in Azerbaijan has been done by Francine Hirsch.⁶⁶ In her book *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*, Hirsch offers resourceful insights about constructed nature of nations. Hirsch builds her thesis around “cultural technologies of rule,” i.e. known as border-making, population census, and cultural museums. Speaking about the Soviet Union as an “empire of nations,” Hirsch demonstrates in her extensive study of how former Tsarist experts on ethnography, geography, and anthropology together with Lenin attempted to create a new state, a new nation out of various ethnic groups, including Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

On the constructed nature of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, I have benefited from Thomas De Waal’s book *Black Garden*.⁶⁷ His book is among those few works that provide an independent, extensive, objective, and transparent overview of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The book is based on about 120 interviews supported by eyewitness reporting and secondary sources from both sides. It traces the conflict as far as the Russian Empire’s invasion and consequent occupation of the Caucasus and in some instances even farther back in history. De Waal demonstrates how nationalist construction was used in the conflict and how it was played by the political entrepreneurs: “More than most conflicts, the Armenian-Azerbaijani dispute is ‘all in the mind.’ To listen to people on both sides talk about the conflict is often to hear a litany of views that have been learned almost unconsciously by the speaker.”⁶⁸ In this regard, his

⁶⁶ Hirsch, Francine. *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge & the Making of the Soviet Union*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005.

⁶⁷ De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press, 2003.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

argument supports the “imagined” or “constructed” nature of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by Armenian and Azerbaijani political entrepreneurs.

2.4. Rationalist Theory

The rationalist theory assumes that actors make their decisions based on a strategic-choice approach. In their book *Strategic Choice and International Relations*, authors Robert Powell and David Lake write that “the strategic-choice approach assumes that [rational] actors make purposive choices, that they survey their environment and, to the best of their ability, choose the strategy that best meets their subjectively defined goals... By ‘rational,’ most theories mean simply that actors can rank order the possible outcomes of known actions in a consistent manner--or, more formally, that they possess complete and transitive preferences.”⁶⁹

Another study that explains rationalist explanations of civil war has been conducted by James Fearon.⁷⁰ He writes that “...war can be a rational alternative for leaders who... find that the expected benefits of war sometimes outweigh the expected costs, however unfortunate this may be.”⁷¹ Fearon also writes that “states might be unable to locate a peaceful settlement both prefer due to issue indivisibilities.”⁷² He continues to argue that “[t]erritory is the most important example, since it may provide economic resources that can be used for the military or be strategically located, meaning that its control greatly increases a state’s chances for successful attack or defense.”⁷³

Authors Massimo Morelli and Matthew Jackson similarly discuss issues of territorial indivisibility and how political entrepreneurs—rational actors—may seek to extract payoffs from

⁶⁹ Powell, Robert and Lake, David. *Strategic choice and international relations*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999, p.7.

⁷⁰ Fearon, James. “Rationalist explanations for war.” *International Organization*, Vol.49, Issue 3, 1995: pp.379-414.

⁷¹ Ibid., p.380.

⁷² Ibid., p.381.

⁷³ Ibid., p.408.

war. They write that "there must be some plausible situations in the eyes of the decision makers such that the anticipated gains from a war in terms of resources, power, glory, territory, and so forth exceed the expected costs of conflict, including expected damages to property and life. Thus, for war to occur with rational actors, at least one of the sides involved has to expect that the gains from the conflict will outweigh the costs incurred."⁷⁴ They continue with this argument and suggest that a rational action by an agent requires "that action to maximize the expected payoff to that agent out of the available actions and relative to the agent's beliefs about the potential consequences of the actions."⁷⁵ On the issue of indivisibility, Morelli and Jackson write that "[i]f it is difficult to finely divide territory, or other natural resources in ways that strike the exact balance needed, that could lead to an inability to reach an agreement in the face of war."⁷⁶

Monica Tofts agrees, too, with Fearon on the issue on indivisibility. She writes that "the likelihood of violence depends on how the actors in a dispute view the territory at stake and how they represent their interests over that territory."⁷⁷ She continues that "because they experience an attachment to the land which has little to do with the land's strategic worth or resources, ethnic groups, especially concentrated majorities and concentrated minorities, are more likely to represent independence as an indivisible issue."⁷⁸ Tofts argues that for "...ethnic groups, survival is based on the group's identity, which in turn is based on control over territory, usually a homeland."⁷⁹ She concludes that, by understanding how "legitimacy and power interact" with each other, one can figure out "why some ethnic conflicts turn violent while others do not." For example, she writes that "nationalist rhetoric by leaders seeking legitimacy often directed

⁷⁴ Morelli, Massimo and Jackson, Matthew. "The reasons for wars: An updated survey." *The Handbook on the Political Economy of War*, 2011, p.2.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.4.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.17.

⁷⁷ Toft, Monica Duffy. *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003, p.17.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.29.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.119.

national passions against members of other groups, leading to increased violence."⁸⁰ This is an important observation because it explains how political entrepreneurs choose to exploit communal feelings to legitimize their bidding for power.

This thesis has been also informed by Barry Posen's work on ethnic conflict.⁸¹ Posen examines the rise of ethnic, nationalist, and religious conflicts in Eurasia since the end of the Cold War. Posen seeks to apply "a basic concept from the realist tradition to international relations theory, 'the security dilemma', to the special conditions that arise when proximate groups of people suddenly find themselves newly responsible for their own security."⁸² He finds that geographical location of ethnic settlements in relation to other settlements, availability of military equipment and other assets, level and distribution of power, and the existence of "windows of opportunity"—all play a crucial role in defining the odds for the next violent conflict. His study is of special interest because it sheds light on how political entrepreneurs can sometimes take advantage of the existing resources (e.g. ethnic settlements, military, and other resources) and seek "windows of opportunity" to achieve their goals.

3. Political Entrepreneurs

This section discusses in detail political entrepreneurs, why they are able to provide leadership to their constituencies divided along communal lines, what their motivations and expected payoffs are, and in which environment they succeed in transitioning communal violence to civil war. I argue that political entrepreneurs play a central role in this transition. First of all, why do I choose to brand them as "political entrepreneurs"? In the academic

⁸⁰ Toft, Monica Duffy. *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003, p.9.

⁸¹ Posen, Barry "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict." *Survival* (London) 35, no. 1 (1993).

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.27.

literature political entrepreneurs are also known by such titles as ethnic activists,⁸³ ethnopolitical entrepreneurs⁸⁴ and conflict entrepreneurs.⁸⁵ I, however, have selected the term “political entrepreneurs” because it is more inclusive and not restrictive in its definition. I define political entrepreneurs as self-interested rational actors who choose to escalate communal violence to civil war in order to attain political and economic payoffs. To achieve this goal, political entrepreneurs escalate communal tensions in the society.

Essentially, civil war is a more escalated and organized form of communal violence and this transition requires greater leadership capacity that political entrepreneurs can offer to their constituencies. Political entrepreneurs do not create communal violence. They use it to their own advantage and escalate it to civil war. In other words, as authors Jennifer Todd and Joseph Ruane write, “[I]n situations of intense conflict, political entrepreneurs do not so much create group-ness as respond to it...”⁸⁶ Therefore, in the existence of communal violence, political entrepreneurs step forward with their own agendas: they exploit whichever reasons drive communal violence and, in doing so, they facilitate the transition of communal violence to civil war. More specifically, political entrepreneurs divide the society along communal lines, exaggerate the hostilities of another communal group, heighten the level of hatred in the society, and magnify the likelihood of the civil war.

On this subject, the authors David Hulme, Nick Lewer, and Jonathan Goodhand write that:

One should not ignore the importance... and the processes through which hate is constructed and mobilised. Conflict entrepreneurs appear to have an intuitive understanding of such processes... Propaganda and violence have been used to nurture... a currency of fear, victimhood and a sense of grievance. Showcase

⁸³ Lake, David and Donald Rothchild. "Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict." *International Security* 21, no. 2 (1996): 41-75.

⁸⁴ Brubaker, Rogers. "Ethnicity without groups." *European Journal of Sociology*. Vol.43, Issue 2 (2002): 163-189.

⁸⁵ Hulme, David; Lewer, Nick and Goodhand, Jonathan. "Social Capital and the Political Economy of Violence: A Case Study of Sri Lanka." *Disasters*, Vol.24, Issue 4 (2000): 390-406.

⁸⁶ Todd, Jennifer and Ruane, Joseph. "The Roots of Intense Ethnic Conflict may not in fact be Ethnic: Categories, Communities and Path Dependence." *European Journal of Sociology*. 8/2004, Vol.45, Issue 2: 209-232.

killings and 'theatrical' violence have been used strategically to cow populations, provoke reprisal killings and deepen ethnic fault lines.⁸⁷

Similarly, Donald Green and Rachel Seher write that political entrepreneurs “capitalize on differences between groups, such as language, physical appearance, or religion, in order to establish ethnically based political movements aimed at increasing the economic and political well-being of their group or region.”⁸⁸ They also write that “demonization of out-groups allows demagogues to consolidate power against their in-group rivals and how historical memories are manufactured and made salient by political entrepreneurs.”⁸⁹ The author Philip Roder argues that “[p]olitical entrepreneurs play a critical role in the mobilization of protest, the politicization of ethnicity, and in many cases even the creation of ethnic identities...”⁹⁰ These quotes demonstrate the ability of political entrepreneurs to escalate communal violence to civil war.

But why do people follow political entrepreneurs? The authors James Fearon and David Laitin raise identical questions in their research and find that: “[T]he masses are not duped at all. Rather 'ethnic violence' can be a cover for other motivations such a looting, land grabs, and personal revenge; and activities of thugs set loose by the politicians can 'tie the hands' of publics who are compelled to seek protection from the leaders who have endangered them.”⁹¹ In other words, Fearon and Laitin suggest that the public also joins political entrepreneurs in seeking payoffs from the conflict. Such payoffs can be both material (e.g. land grabs) or emotional (e.g. revenge). The narrative about “activities of thugs set loose by the politicians” can be also found in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. As Serzh Sargsyan, incumbent president of Armenia recounts

⁸⁷ Hulme, David; Lewer, Nick and Goodhand, Jonathan. "Social Capital and the Political Economy of Violence: A Case Study of Sri Lanka." *Disasters*, 12/2000, Vol.24, Issue 4, p. 401.

⁸⁸ Green, Donald and Seher, Rachel. "What role does prejudice play in ethnic conflict?" *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2003, Vol.6, p.521.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p.525.

⁹⁰ Roeder, Philip. "Soviet Federalism and Ethnic Mobilization." *World Politics*, 43 (1991), p.202.

⁹¹ Fearon, James and Laitin, David. "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity." *International Organization*, 11/2000, Vol.54, Issue 4, p.874.

in his memories about the war “[a]t first lads of a rather criminal type were attracted to weapons, to fighting.”⁹²

Two other authors, Joan Esteban and Debraj Ray, raise the same question of why the public follows political entrepreneurs in the context of civil war.⁹³

We take the position that 'prize-grabbing' on a large scale--often economic but possibly political, cultural, or religious in nature--is frequently at the heart of ethnic conflict, both for the elites as well as for the masses. In particular, we view social conflict as the attempted takeover of 'budgets' or 'policies' that produce various public goods. Such budgets or policies may be used to benefit one class over another... To seize these budgets, we suppose that groups must form... ethnic alliances.⁹⁴

This argument by Esteban and Ray, once again, demonstrates why political entrepreneurs convince their constituencies to follow their agendas. In some cases, as these quotes suggest, people also seek to gain political and economic payoffs from the escalation of conflict to civil war. This discussion brings us to the next question: in which environment do political entrepreneurs succeed in transitioning communal violence to civil war? The answer to this question will be provided in the next subsection.

4. Absence of Democracy

For political entrepreneurs to push the transition from communal violence to civil war, there must be an environment that favors such a shift in the intensity of violence. At the end, as I outlined in the previous chapter, civil war is a more intense form of communal violence. Here, I approach the subject of the democracy paradigm and argue that political entrepreneurs escalate communal violence to civil war in non-democratic states. Part of the argument that communal violence transitions to civil war in non-democracies comes from the democratic

⁹² De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press, 2003. p.163.

⁹³ Although, they use the term ethnic conflict instead of civil war, but this does not defeat my argument.

⁹⁴ Esteban, Joan and Ray, Debraj. "On the salience of ethnic conflict." *The American economic review*, Vol.98, Issue 5 (2008), p.2186.

peace theory, which claims that democracies are less likely to engage in armed conflict with each other.⁹⁵ Michael Doyle applied this international relations paradigm to what he called “liberal states,” which are identified as entities “with some form of representative democracy, a market economy based on private property rights, and constitutional protections of civil and political rights.”⁹⁶ Basically, democratic peace theory says that a) democratic leaders are forced to present the issue to a voting public; b) publicly accountable statesmen are more inclined to establish diplomatic institutions for resolving the tensions; and c) democracies tend to possess greater public wealth than others, and, therefore, avoid war to preserve their resources.

Authors James Morrow, Bruce de Mesquita, Alstair Smith, and Randolph Siverson also arrive at a similar conclusion that:

[D]emocratic leaders, when faced with war, are more inclined to shift extra resources into the war effort than are autocrats. In addition to trying harder, democrats are more selective in their choice of targets. Because defeat is more likely to lead to domestic replacement for democrats than for autocrats, democrats only initiate wars they expect to win. These two factors lead to the interaction between polities that is often referred to as the democratic peace.⁹⁷

This paragraph demonstrates that political entrepreneurs in democratic societies are less inclined to escalate communal violence to civil war in order to seek political and economic payoffs. An identical argument has been also made by George Downs and David Rocke. They write that in “a democracy, the mechanisms that help deal with this principal-agent problem range from a free press and legislative declaration of war to electoral defeat and impeachment. In an autocracy, there are far fewer of these mechanisms, and at the extreme there may be nothing more than the costly option of armed rebellion.”⁹⁸ The authors Morelli and Jackson in

⁹⁵ Doyle, Michael. “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs.” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1983): 205, 207–208.

⁹⁶ Another reading on this subject is by Clemens Jr., Walter C. “Complexity Theory as a Tool for Understanding and Coping with Ethnic Conflict and Development Issues in Post-Soviet Eurasia.” *International Journal of Peace Studies*.

⁹⁷ Morrow, James; de Mesquita, Bruce; Smith, Alastair and Siverson, Randolph. “An Institutional Explanation of the Democratic Peace.” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol.93, Issue 4, 1999: 791-807.

⁹⁸ Downs, George and Rocke David. “Conflict, Agency, and Gambling for Resurrection: The Principal-Agent Problem Goes to War.” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol.8, Issue 2 (1994): 362-380.

the same manner agree that “when a leader has a disproportionately high share of benefits relative to costs from war when compared to the average citizen, then war can occur... [T]he checks and balances of a democracy can help reduce the chance of having a biased leader.”⁹⁹

There is also evidence that democracies have less internal violence.¹⁰⁰ Christian Davenport and David Armstrong write: “Repeatedly, democratic political systems have been found to decrease political bans, censorship, torture, disappearances and mass killing, doing so in a linear fashion across diverse measurements, methodologies, time periods, countries, and contexts.”¹⁰¹ Another such study that supports my argument has been carried out by Håvard Hegre, Scott Gates, Petter Gleditsch, and Tanja Ellingsen, who write in their research paper:

Based on an analysis of the period 1816–1992, we conclude that intermediate regimes are most prone to civil war, even when they have had time to stabilize from a regime change. In the long run, since intermediate regimes are less stable than autocracies, which in turn are less stable than democracies, durable democracy is the most probable end-point of the democratization process. The democratic civil peace is not only more just than the autocratic peace but also more stable.¹⁰²

This study well explains why in Azerbaijan during the period of undemocratic regime changes in 1988-1994, the political entrepreneurs quickly sought an opportunity to seize power by exploiting communal differences and transitioning communal violence to civil war. Democracy is important in my theory because in democracies “due to the complexity of the democratic process and the requirement of securing a broad base of support for risky policies, democratic leaders are reluctant to wage wars, except in cases wherein war seems a necessity or

⁹⁹ Morelli, Massimo and Jackson, Matthew. “The reasons for wars: An updated survey.” *The Handbook on the Political Economy of War*, 2011, p.21.

¹⁰⁰ Rummel, Rudolph. *Power kills: democracy as a method of nonviolence*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1997.

¹⁰¹ Davenport, Christian and David Armstrong. “Democracy and the Violation of Human Rights: A Statistical Analysis from 1976 to 1996.” *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no.3 (2004): 538-554.

¹⁰² Hegre, Håvard; Ellington, Tanja; Gates, Scott; Gleditsch, Nils Petter. “Towards A Democratic Civil Peace? Opportunity, Grievance, and Civil War 1816–1992.” *American Political Science Review* 95, no.1 (2001): 33–48.

when the war aims are seen as justifying the mobilization costs."¹⁰³ Therefore, when democracy is absent, political entrepreneurs find it easy to push forward their risky, self-serving interests.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I looked at existing theories that explain the concept of war. I dismissed the primordialist explanation of civil war and instead built my theory upon synthesizing constructivist, instrumentalist, and rationalist interpretations of this phenomenon. I argued that political entrepreneurs, as rational actors, seek political and economic payoffs in transitioning the conflict from communal violence to civil war by appealing to previously constructed identities (e.g. ethnicity, religion, or nation). In this regard, the identity of a group becomes an instrument or a means to achieve political entrepreneurs' present or future goals. For political entrepreneurs to successfully complete their transaction, i.e. facilitate the transition of communal violence to civil war, they must operate in an environment that is absent of democracy. To support my argument, I discussed how in political systems that lack democracy political entrepreneurs are more likely to accomplish their objectives.

I have also discussed the literature on communal violence. I demonstrated that there are overlapping definitions of this phenomenon and there are problems with its coding depending on the role of its participants. While this is true, communal violence is a type of aggressive, brutal conflict that has a sporadic, episodic nature regardless of its coding. Additionally, the term communal violence can and does include in itself other known forms of collective violence based on ethnic, religious, national, and other types of group membership.

In the next chapter, I will test my argument against the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. I will introduce and analyze political entrepreneurs on each side of the conflict and will demonstrate how the absence of democracy has helped to transition communal violence to civil war.

¹⁰³ Zeev Maoz and Bruce Russett. "Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946-1986." *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 87, No. 3 (Sep., 1993), pp. 624-638.

3. THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

1. Introduction

Why and how did the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenians and Azerbaijanis transition from communal violence to a full scale civil war in 1992? I argue in this chapter that Armenian and Azerbaijani political entrepreneurs in the course of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict gained political and economic payoffs such as rising to and capturing political power and benefiting economically from black markets, humanitarian aid, and export of primary commodity resources. They achieved their goals by escalating the conflict from communal violence to civil war.

In the second section of the chapter, I demonstrate that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has remained primarily an issue of territory. Contrary to media reports that nearly always mentioned the religions of Armenians and Azerbaijanis, religious grievances never gained significant influence in the conflict.¹⁰⁴ It is also not true that both groups have always fought each other over the ownership of Nagorno-Karabakh. These primordialist accounts of the conflict about ancient hatreds do not fully explain the origins of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, an ideological ground that was used by political entrepreneurs to make communal appeals was an extreme nationalism.

In the third section devoted to communal violence (1988-1992), I propose that communal violence in Nagorno-Karabakh in 1988 was inspired by two events that occurred on or about the same day: a) vote for secession of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan and b)

¹⁰⁴ Tishkov, Valery. *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame*. London: Sage, 1997. p.107.

¹⁰⁵ Garagozov, Rauf. "Characteristics Of Collective Memory, Ethnic Conflicts, Historiography, And The "Politics Of Memory." *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology* 46 (2008), pp. 58-95.

alleged reports about two Azerbaijani female students raped by Armenians. Initial acts of communal violence in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict were sporadic and disorganized. However, after the “Black January” events in 1990, the instances of communal violence continued to spiral with the death toll constantly on the rise. At that point of the conflict, the communal violence required organizational and planning skills that political entrepreneurs offered their constituencies and, by doing so, escalated the conflict from communal violence to civil war. Thus, as Armenian and Azerbaijani political entrepreneurs started to factor their own political and economic interests in stirring violence, the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh transitioned to civil war. This transition happened after the Khojaly massacre of Azerbaijani civilian population by Armenian fighters on February 26, 1992, when the death toll reached 1,000 people¹⁰⁶ within a twelve month period, and the violent confrontation transitioned into a sustained combat involving organized Armenian and Azerbaijani armed forces.

Here, I also examine the absence of democracy and argue that in Azerbaijan during the conflict in 1988-1994 basic features of democracy were not present. On one hand, weak government institutions both in Nagorno-Karabakh and in Azerbaijan enabled political entrepreneurs to capture the state and seize political power. On the other hand, undemocratic political systems created an atmosphere of fear among Armenians and Azerbaijanis for their future. In Baku, capital of Azerbaijan, military coups and violence between rival political groups, gross human rights violations, rigged elections, and omnipresent corruption demonstrated that the political environment was absent of democracy. But the Azerbaijani political entrepreneurs were not the only ones operating in the environment absent of democracy. Armenian political entrepreneurs, too, in Nagorno-Karabakh took advantage of the lack of democracy. The political environment in Nagorno-Karabakh during the conflict was characterized by gross violations of human rights, weak state institutions, dubious elections, and a lawless society. In such an

¹⁰⁶ Quinn-Judge, Paul. “Armenians killed 1000, Azeris charge.” Boston Globe. Web: 3 March 1992. Source: <http://goo.gl/b9RT4f>

environment, democracy was absent and political entrepreneurs were able to achieve their goals in escalating the conflict from communal violence to civil war.

In the fourth section devoted to the civil war (1992-1994), I demonstrate how by escalating the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, previously little known Armenian politicians came to power. Two of these politicians, Serzh Sargsyan and Robert Kocharyan, from Nagorno-Karabakh even succeeded to become presidents of Armenia. In Azerbaijan, by escalating the conflict from communal violence to civil war, the Azerbaijani Popular Front (APF) founder Abulfaz Elchibey seized political power in Baku. Later, by applying a similar strategy, Heydar Aliyev, the ousted communist leader, returned to power. In developing a discussion on this subject, I elaborate on who the Armenian and Azerbaijani political entrepreneurs were and what their explicit role was in escalating communal violence to civil war in the course of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Also, I briefly discuss in this section the fact that civil war in Nagorno-Karabakh could have been avoided if not for the Armenian political entrepreneurs. In 1991, moderate Armenian politicians from Nagorno-Karabakh offered their Azerbaijani counterparts a capitulation deal, but more radical political entrepreneurs in Nagorno-Karabakh thwarted this process in order to profit from the escalation of the conflict.

But before discussing the role of political entrepreneurs and the absence of democracy in escalating the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from communal violence to civil war, I will look at how the territorial indivisibility, nationalism, and ancient hatreds played in this conflict. This discussion brings us to the next section of this chapter.

2. Territorial Indivisibility, Nationalism, and Ancient Hatreds

When one examines the conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, it becomes apparent that many grievances can be brought to a common, denominator: Nagorno-Karabakh, an indivisible piece of mountainous territory within Azerbaijan covering the southeastern range

of the Lesser Caucasus Mountains or approximately 4,556 square miles.¹⁰⁷ Nagorno-Karabakh, as an administrative territorial unit with its modern borders, was created by Joseph Stalin in 1923 as a self-governing administrative unit within Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic. Audrey Altstadt argues that the borders of Nagorno-Karabakh were established in a manner that would include Armenian villages and exclude as much as possible Azerbaijani villages, so that the resulting area would have an Armenian majority.¹⁰⁸ Scholars speculate that the decision to keep the Nagorno-Karabakh within Azerbaijan was an application of the *divide et impera*¹⁰⁹ strategy by Russia. Others propose that this was a goodwill gesture by the Soviet Union to maintain positive relationship with Turkey.¹¹⁰ Although, the official version is that Nagorno-Karabakh was left within Azerbaijan's territorial domain due to its economic ties with the latter.¹¹¹ In my opinion, Stalin's decision was inspired by all of the three assumptions.

The territorial indivisibility and ownership of Nagorno-Karabakh has been largely disputed between Armenian and Azerbaijani scholars and, thus, became a source of grievance for both sides. Armenian scholars argue that the modern territory of Nagorno-Karabakh is one of the cradles of Armenian statehood and that many centuries ago the area was a part of Armenian kingdoms. Therefore, Armenians and Azerbaijanis also debated "who was first" on the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. This is how Christoph Zürcher describes this discussion:

[T]he ideologists of the conflicting parties pushed the question of when the conflict was started decisively backward in time... This question gained importance in the dispute over the legitimacy of borders and administrative statuses established in the early days of Soviet rule. While this issue touches on the general problem of the legitimacy of borders decided by colonial powers,

¹⁰⁷ Including seven occupied regions of Azerbaijan outside of Nagorno-Karabakh: Kelbajar, Lachin, Kubatli, Jebrail, Zangelan, Aghdam, and Fuzuli.

¹⁰⁸ Altstadt, Audrey. *The Azerbaijani Turks: power and identity under Russian rule*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1992.

¹⁰⁹ Divide and rule is a strategy based on gaining and maintaining power by breaking up larger concentrations of power into pieces that individually have less power than the one implementing the strategy.

¹¹⁰ Tchilingirian, Hratch. "Nagorno Karabagh: Transition and the elite." *Central Asian Survey*, Vol.18, Issue 4 (1999), pp. 435-461.

¹¹¹ Zürcher, Christoph. *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus*. New York: New York University Press, 2007, p.154.

“who was first” has been raised by both sides as a fundamental claim to ethnically defined ownership of land and tended to drift from population statistics around the turn of the last century backward via pre-Russian, pre-Ottoman, and pre-Persian history to prehistory itself.¹¹²

Unfortunately, the debate about the original territorial ownership of Nagorno-Karabakh gives little space to the fact that the area was claimed by Arab, Turkish, Mongol, and Persian empires, too. Likewise, Azerbaijani historians disregard the existence of Armenian fiefdoms on the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh during various historical periods. The truth is that none of the parties has succeeded to maintain regular control or continuous ownership over the land.

Armenian arguments are also based on the assumption that Azerbaijanis did not exist as a nation until their territory was included into the USSR. One author, Alexei Zverev, describes how Zori Balayan, one of the political entrepreneurs who engineered Armenian ultranationalism, put this theory into perspective:

An influential Armenian writer, Zori Balayan, presents a view of history which furthers Armenian interests by appealing to Russian imperial ambitions and denigrating the legitimate nationhood of Azerbaijan - that "tentative country with tentative Union borders", as he puts it. In Balayan's view, when Russia fought her early 19th-century wars against Iran to annex Eastern Armenia to Russia, Azerbaijan did not exist as a state, nor did the Azeris exist as a nationality...¹¹³

This theory is also partially flawed. I argue that while for one group—that turned out to be Armenians—the best way to survive was to unite its ranks by preserving its original religion and alphabet, for another group—that later emerged as Azerbaijanis—survival strategy was built around ethnic assimilation and political accommodation. In other words, Armenians chose consolidation along ethnic lines to survive invasions and Azerbaijanis chose disassociation from their ancient roots to blend into political and social structures of the invaders.

In reality though, both Armenians and Azerbaijanis in their ethnic and national realms are socially constructed terms and neither group has a primordial origin. In fact, one study

¹¹² Zürcher, Christoph. *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus*. New York: New York University Press, 2007, p.155.

¹¹³ Zverev, Alexei. *Contested borders in the Caucasus*. Brussels: VUBPRESS, 1996.

reveals that “Indo-European-speaking Armenians and Turkic-speaking Azerbaijanians [sic] were more closely related genetically to other Caucasus populations (who speak Caucasian languages) than to other Indo-European or Turkic groups, respectively.”¹¹⁴ Therefore, first, these findings prove, on one hand, that modern day Armenians in the Caucasus are not members of a completely different and pure race that inhabited these territories since ancient times and, on the other hand, that Azerbaijanis as a group are not completely foreign to the region. Second, as a result of millennia long compact coexistence and intermarriages, cultural, genetic, and physical resemblances between the two became very strong.

In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, an ideological ground that was used by political entrepreneurs to make communal appeals was a radical nationalism. It is important to study Armenian and Azerbaijani nationalism together because the two have influenced each other, feeding similar grievances and igniting mutual hatreds. Even so, the Armenian nationalism was more advanced and, therefore, more radical.¹¹⁵ It started to form during the tsarist regime in Russia and under Ottoman rule in Turkey as Armenians were spread between the two fiefdoms. In fact, it was due to Russian-Turkish wars that the Armenian nationalism experienced its first boom. In the course of imperialistic contestations for land, power, and resources, a disputed number of a million or more Armenians were massacred, deported, and, as some scholars claim, became victims of genocidal policies by Turks and Kurds.¹¹⁶ Perhaps, the best description of this tragedy is given by Charles King in his book *The Ghost of Freedom: “Commemorated in popular memory and public memorials, the genocide has emerged as the defining tragedy in the history*

¹¹⁴ Nasidze, Ivan; Sarkisian, Tamara; Kerimov, Azer; Stoneking, Mark (2003). "Testing hypotheses of language replacement in the Caucasus: evidence from the Y-chromosome." *Human Genetics* 112, no. 3 (2003), pp. 255–261.

¹¹⁵ Suny, Ronald. *The revenge of the past: nationalism, revolution, and the collapse of the Soviet Union*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993.

¹¹⁶ Dadrian, Vahakn. *The history of the Armenian genocide: ethnic conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*. New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2003.

of the Armenian nation, the lens through which national history is interpreted, and the inescapable collective experience that shapes relations between Armenia and its neighbors."¹¹⁷

My point here is neither to defend Turks who argue that massacres occurred in the course of World War I and "plenty of Muslims were killed by local Armenians,"¹¹⁸ who were used as a proxy or the fifth estate to sabotage the Ottoman Empire, nor to aid Armenians who believe that their unfortunate fate was a result of brutal genocide. Yet, one way or another, these tragic events as a result of Russian-Turkish wars are partly responsible for the mutually exclusive radical nationalism developed among Armenians and Azerbaijanis. In this light, Azerbaijanis—who were flying under various ethnic colors of Tartars, Turks, Mongols, and Persians—became easily associated with the Ottomans and turned into enemies of the Armenians. Christoph Zürcher elaborates further on this phenomenon: "

Against the background of the genocide of 1915, Armenians were quick to interpret the rising tensions and the intercommunal violence as a continuation of the genocide, thereby equating the "Turks" of Azerbaijan with those of the Ottoman Empire... One of the many peculiarities of the Karabakh conflict is the pervasiveness of this particular interpretative routine...¹¹⁹

Meanwhile, for millions of Azerbaijanis who did not have an established ethnic identity compared to Armenians, nationalism started to blossom with the introduction of print media and schools teaching in the national language.¹²⁰ The process of creating nationhood in Azerbaijan was further bolstered by the first oil boom in the world's history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when oil fields on the Absheron peninsula around Baku city started pumping oil and exporting it abroad. Baku suddenly became a town divided along ethnic lines where European and American expatriates stood on the top of the social strata,

¹¹⁷ King, Charles. *The ghost of freedom: a history of the Caucasus*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, p.255.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.255.

¹¹⁹ Zürcher, Christoph. *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus*. New York: New York University Press, 2007, p.156.

¹²⁰ Turkish language written in Persian alphabet.

Russians and Armenians below them, and Azerbaijani workers on the bottom.¹²¹ However, among early oil barons, there was also a caste of the Azerbaijani magnates, who invested their capital into forming the first Azerbaijani intelligentsia. Hundreds of Azerbaijanis went to study abroad in Europe—a cradle of nationalism—and upon returning to their homeland brought back the ideas of nationhood.¹²² The unfortunate fates of their Azerbaijani compatriots created the enemy image of the ethnic other responsible for social injustice.

It is also important to mention in this section that during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, due to lack of available information about the roots and causes of the conflict, foreign reporters filled the information vacuum with constant references to the religious factor, i.e. the fact that Armenians were predominantly Christian, whereas Azerbaijanis were Muslim.¹²³ However, this factor was irrelevant in the course of the entire conflict and religious grievances never gained significant influence in the conflict.¹²⁴ Moreover, it was not until the Khojaly massacre in February 1992—when hundreds of Azerbaijanis were killed by Armenian forces—that references to religion slowed down since they appeared to be contrary to the widespread belief that Christian Armenians were shown as victims of Muslim Azerbaijanis. Thus, considering all above mentioned information, I conclude that nationalism was evident on both sides of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

¹²¹ Suny, Ronald. *The revenge of the past: nationalism, revolution, and the collapse of the Soviet Union*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993, pp. 38-43.

¹²² Mostashari, Firouzeh. *On the religious frontier: Tsarist Russia and Islam in the Caucasus*. London; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006 (read Chapter 9: The Azerbaijani Intelligentsia, Nationalism and Revolution).

¹²³ Shiriyev, Zaur. "Inter-religious dialogue around Nagorno-Karabakh conflict." *Today's Zaman*. Web: 9 December 2011. Source: http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist/zaur-shiriyev/inter-religious-dialogue-around-nagorno-karabakh-conflict_265279.html

¹²⁴ Vaserman, Arie and Ginat, Rami. "National, territorial or religious conflict? The case of Nagorno-Karabakh." *Studies in conflict and terrorism*, Vol. 17, Issue 4 (1994), p.358.

3. Communal Violence (1988-1992) and the Absence of Democracy

3.1. Communal Violence

The first acts of communal violence between Armenians and Azerbaijanis happened long before the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and took place in Baku in February 1905. Soon, the conflict spilled over to other parts of the Caucasus. In March 1918, communal tensions grew further and conflict in Baku began. Azerbaijani *Musavat* and Armenian *Dashnak* nationalist parties engaged in violent confrontation, which resulted in heavy casualties. Many Azerbaijanis were expelled from Baku and their political leaders went underground. Exact numbers are heavily disputed between the two, but in the course of these years, tens of thousands of innocent men and women from both sides perished on the battlegrounds of Baku, Guba, Ganja, Shusha, Yerevan, and other cities of Azerbaijan and Armenia. Today, in presenting their own version of suffering that is conceptually equal to the Armenian Genocide, Azerbaijanis refer to communal violence in March 1918 as *soyqırım* (genocide).¹²⁵

The Soviet period of Armenian-Azerbaijani relationships, which started in 1920, did not witness any instances of communal violence until 1988. However, as Georgi Derluguian writes “[t]he Soviet period had not been entirely peaceful either. Occasionally, there were nasty fights, ethnic slurs could be heard, and competition for bureaucratic appointments or lucrative opportunities in the shadow economy sometimes assumed an ethnic tinge.”¹²⁶ Thomas De Waal, who wrote extensively on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, suggests a similar account about relations between Armenians and Azerbaijanis during the Soviet regime: “[T]he Soviet system, while preaching harmony and brotherhood, institutionalized competition and rivalry. This was very true in the Caucasus, where there was surprisingly little regional economic cooperation... Politically subservient to the center, the leaders in Baku, Stepanakert, and Yerevan hoarded

¹²⁵ Ibrahimov, Rovshan. “Azerbaijani Genocide 31 March 1918: Don't Forget Bloodiest Pages of History” *The Journal of Turkish Weekly*. Web: 1 April 2008. Source: <http://www.turkishweekly.net/columnist/2874/azerbaijani-genocide-31-march-1918-don-39-t-forget-bloodiest-pages-of-history.html>

¹²⁶ Derluguian, Georgi. *Bourdieu's secret admirer in the Caucasus: a world-system biography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, p.174.

their local powers jealously and had almost no incentives for cooperation."¹²⁷ Additionally, after Stalin's death, Armenians made numerous attempts to urge the Kremlin's leadership to pass ownership over Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. But all such attempts were unsuccessful as territorial transfers based on nationalistic claims were not popular in Moscow's opinion.

This discussion brings us to communal violence in 1988-1992. Communal violence in Nagorno-Karabakh in 1988 was inspired by two events that occurred on or about the same day: a) vote for secession of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan and b) alleged reports about two Azerbaijani female students raped in Nagorno-Karabakh by Armenians. These events, in the context of communal violence, were extraordinary occurrences on the level of mass trauma, which significantly shifted public opinion to such an extent that resorting to collective violence became an acceptable remedy or solution to such trauma.

On February 20, 1988, encouraged by Gorbachev's new plan to reform the USSR, the Nagorno-Karabakh parliament voted in favor of uniting itself with Armenia and a referendum—boycotted by Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh—was held.¹²⁸ But Gorbachev was against the referendum citing the Article 78 of the Soviet Constitution.¹²⁹ The vote for secession marked the beginning of communal violence committed by both sides. In Nagorno-Karabakh's case, the secession shocked millions of Azerbaijanis, who perceived this piece of land as an integral, indivisible part of their homeland. With anti-Azerbaijani protests attracting hundreds of thousands of Armenians from Yerevan¹³⁰ to Nagorno-Karabakh, soon the first Azerbaijani

¹²⁷ De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press, 2003. p.135.

¹²⁸ The resolution read: "Welcoming the wishes of the workers of the Nagorny Karabakh Autonomous Region to request the Supreme Soviets of the Azerbaijani SSR and the Armenian SSR to display a feeling of deep understanding of the aspirations of the Armenian population of Nagorny Karabakh and to resolve the question of transferring the Nagorny Karabakh Autonomous Region from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR, at the same time to intercede with the Supreme Soviet of the USSR to reach a positive resolution on the issue of transferring the region from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR."

¹²⁹ Rost, Yuri. *The Armenian Tragedy: An Eye-Witness Account of Human Conflict and Natural Disaster in Armenia and Azerbaijan*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990, p.17.

¹³⁰ Capital of Armenia.

victims of communal violence were fleeing from Armenia to Azerbaijan. One description of these tragic events comes from Thomas de Waal's book *Black Garden*:

Around 25 January 1988, the historian Arif Yunusov was going to work in the Academy of Sciences in Baku when he saw more evidence of Azerbaijanis having fled Kafan. Four red Icarus buses were standing outside the government headquarters on the top of the hill: "They were in a terrible state. On the whole it was women, children and old people. There were few young people. Many of them had been beaten. They were shouting."¹³¹

On February 20, 1988, when Armenians voted to secede, two Azerbaijani female students were reportedly raped by Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. The accounts of this incident also come from Thomas de Waal's book: "Apparently, two Azerbaijani girls from Stepanakert had been raped... The hospital nurses... confirmed that 'these girls had come from the Pedagogic Institute in Stepanakert, that there had been a fight or an attack on their hostel. The girls were raped. They were in a bad way.'"¹³²

News of this event provoked more communal violence and two days later, Azerbaijanis and Armenians near Askeran city in Nagorno-Karabakh fought each other in a deadly skirmish that claimed lives of two Azerbaijanis. These events caused massive resentment in Baku and Sumgait, the two largest cities of Azerbaijan. In Sumgait—where the urban population was relatively poor and composed of ex-convicts and newly arrived refugees from Armenia—tensions grew fast between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Mass demonstrations turned into violent riots on February 27, 1988, which resulted in the deaths of 26 Armenians and 6 Azerbaijanis.¹³³ As a result, as Charles King writes: "From the Armenian perspective, repeated attacks against ethnic Armenian communities were reminiscent of the Ottoman-era genocide... From the Azerbaijani perspective, Armenians were attempting to squelch the nascent Azerbaijani national movement

¹³¹ De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press, 2003, p.19.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.15.

¹³³ Hosking, Geoffrey. *The First Socialist Society: A History of the Soviet Union from Within* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993, p.475.

by destroying the republic's territorial unity, not to mention carrying out their own ethnic cleansing of ethnic Azerbaijanis..."¹³⁴

On March 23, 1988, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR rejected the demands of Armenians to join Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia. In the following months, according to the Azerbaijani government, a total of 216 civilians were killed during violent deportations of Azerbaijanis. However, as Erik Melander argues, "Most of the clashes arose spontaneously and spread primarily because of the incompetence of local and central authorities."¹³⁵ Therefore, communal violence during this period was not centrally organized and controlled.

By January 1990, nationalist demonstrations in Azerbaijan forced the Kremlin to declare a state of emergency in Baku and send interior troops to occupy the city. Nonetheless, demonstrators built barricades and, in response, the interior troops opened fire leading to the deaths of 137-300 Azerbaijanis on January 20.¹³⁶ The "Black January" further fueled anti-Armenian moods in Azerbaijan. However, not all Azerbaijanis participated in the acts of aggression against Armenians. Georgi Derlugian asserts that "[t]here exist many testimonials that during the Baku pogroms of 1990, Azeris, including nationalist intellectuals, helped to hide their Armenian friends and neighbors from the enraged crowds."¹³⁷ Moreover, perpetrators and victims of violence in the course of communal clashes interchangeably switched their roles.

By 1992, considering the increasing level of communal violence, the situation in Azerbaijan was more than ripe for civil war. In the next section, I will demonstrate how political entrepreneurs stepped forward in this time period to advance their goals and gain profits from the conflict by escalating it from communal violence to civil war. But before discussing the role

¹³⁴ King, Charles. *The ghost of freedom: a history of the Caucasus*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, p.213.

¹³⁵ Melander, Erik. "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Revisited: Was the War Inevitable?" *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol.3, Issue 2 (2001), p.63.

¹³⁶ "Black January: Baku (1990). Behind the Scenes - A Photojournalist's Perspective." Azerbaijan International. 08.15.2001. pp. 33–37. Retrieved 04.15.2014.

¹³⁷ Derlugian, Georgi. *Bourdieu's secret admirer in the Caucasus: a world-system biography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, p.193.

of political entrepreneurs, I want to elaborate on the role that the absence of democracy plays in helping political entrepreneurs to escalate the conflict. In this regard, the absence of democracy, as an independent variable in my theory, serves as a pre-condition for the transition of the conflict from communal violence to civil war. The absence of democracy creates an enabling environment in which political entrepreneurs operate to achieve their goals.

3.2. The Absence of Democracy

Looking in retrospective, one can ask the question whether the conflict could have been avoided if Azerbaijan was more democratic. Strong state institutions, free and fair elections, protection of the human rights of all citizens, and rule of law are the main elements of the democratic state. In Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, these features were absent. Such absence, therefore, allowed political entrepreneurs to advance their agendas and achieve their goals, which, otherwise, would not be possible in a democratic state. On one hand, weak government institutions both in Nagorno-Karabakh and in Azerbaijan enabled political entrepreneurs to capture the state and seize political power. On the other hand, undemocratic political systems created an atmosphere of fear among Armenians and Azerbaijanis for their future. Therefore, the absence of democracy helped newly emerging political elites to seek a window of opportunity and seize the power by dragging their nations into civil war.

Azerbaijan at the time of the conflict was classified as a non-democracy in Polity IV Data Series, an annual report on the level of democracy in independent states.¹³⁸ A similar has been produced by Freedom House: "Elections since 1992 have often been mired in fraud or intimidation, and fighting took place between demonstrators and security forces..."¹³⁹ This quote provides evidence that Azerbaijan during the transition of conflict from communal violence to civil war was not democratic.

¹³⁸ Source: <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/aze2.htm>

¹³⁹ "Azerbaijan. Period of democratic transition: 1989–1991." Freedom House. Source: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline_images/Azerbaijan.pdf

In *Oil Wars*, author Mary Kaldor argues that Azerbaijan was a post-totalitarian dictatorship. She suggests that key features of such dictatorships are “dominant leaders who establish or maintain their position through some kind of electoral process and control the main political institutions; control over the electronic media, especially television; widespread bribery and corruption; widespread human rights violations; and strong security measures.”¹⁴⁰

However, another author, Michael McFaul, makes an argument that Azerbaijan was partially democratic in 1989-1992.¹⁴¹ Author Farid Guliyev argues that Azerbaijan “falls into a group of countries from the southern belt of the former USSR, which after 1991 did not see a movement towards democracy and freedom as in the Baltic States, but the rise of repressive regimes and odious dictators... or the establishment of hybrid regimes which blend democratic and non-democratic features.”¹⁴² While it is true that there are differences among partially democratic, undemocratic, post-totalitarian, and hybrid regimes, such discussion is beyond the scope of this research paper. For as long as the country is not democratic and the main elements of democracy are not present, my argument about the absence of democracy remains valid.

So, how exactly is the absence of democracy defined in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict? Nina Caspersen writes that “[t]he experience of war and unresolved conflict has had a significant impact on the political systems in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Democratic stagnation and reversals have characterised both cases and ‘hybrid regimes’ have resulted.”¹⁴³ She adds that democratic transition did not happen in Azerbaijan and the rivaling groups used the conflict to advance their political interests.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Karl, Terry Lynn; Said, Yahia and Kaldor, Mary. *Oil Wars*. London: Pluto, 2007. p.164, 166.

¹⁴¹ McFaul, Michael. "The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship." *World Politics*, Vol.54, January 2002, p. 227.

¹⁴² Guliyev, Farid. "Oil Wealth, Patrimonialism, and the Failure of Democracy in Azerbaijan." *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, No. 2, pp. 2-5, 2009. p.2.

¹⁴³ Caspersen, Nina. "Regimes and peace processes: Democratic (non)development in Armenia and Azerbaijan and its impact on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol.45, Issue 1-2 (2012), p.133.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.133.

In 1992, when the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict finally transitioned from communal violence to civil war, in Azerbaijan, the issue of democratic contestation for political power was not resolved among political entrepreneurs. In Baku, capital of Azerbaijan, military coups and violence between rivaling political groups demonstrated that the political environment was absent of democracy. For example, Nina Caspersen writes on this occasion:

In the spring of 1992, the opposition forced [President Ayaz] Mutalibov to resign following the Khojali massacre in Nagorno-Karabakh, in which hundreds of Azeri civilians were killed, and amid accusations that the government had not been protecting the town... Communist deputies tried to restore Mutalibov to office and a shoot-out followed when the opposition ousted him anew... Azerbaijan's Freedom House ranking changed from "partly free" to "not free."¹⁴⁵

In other words, would military coups and violence among competing political entrepreneurs be possible in a democratic state? The answer, perhaps, is no. Furthermore, after Heydar Aliyev came to power in 1993, he continued to use the absence of democracy to his own advantage. Aliyev, as a political entrepreneur, operated in an environment accompanied by gross violation of human rights, consolidation of executive, judicial, and legislative branches of the government, control of media outlets, rigged elections, and omnipresent corruption.

But Azerbaijani political entrepreneurs were not the only ones operating in an environment absent of democracy. Armenian political entrepreneurs, too, in Nagorno-Karabakh took advantage of the lacking democracy. While Armenian votes for secession in Nagorno-Karabakh are presented by Armenians as peaceful and democratic,¹⁴⁶ this assertion, however, is not true. The vote in 1988 violated the laws of the Soviet Union, and the referendum in 1991 was held in an environment of forced deportations and violence against ethnic Azerbaijanis from Nagorno-Karabakh. In such an environment, democracy was absent and Armenian political entrepreneurs were able to transition the conflict from communal violence to civil war.

¹⁴⁵ Caspersen, Nina. "Regimes and peace processes: Democratic (non)development in Armenia and Azerbaijan and its impact on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol.45, Issue 1-2 (2012), p.134.

¹⁴⁶ Sahakyan, Armen. "Nagorno Karabakh is a free and democratic state." The Hill. Web: 8 July 2014. Source: <http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/211451-nagorno-karabakh-is-a-free-and-democratic-state>

4. Civil War (1992-1994) and the Political Entrepreneurs

In May 1991, sporadic battles between Armenians and Azerbaijanis intensified when Soviet troops acting together with the local Azerbaijani forces launched the Operation Ring to disarm Armenian rebels operating in and around Nagorno-Karabakh.¹⁴⁷ The operation involved the use of ground troops, armored vehicles, and artillery. Although this change in the organizational structure of armed fighting satisfies one part of the requirement for categorizing the conflict as civil war, the threshold for battle-related fatalities within a twelve month period was not met in 1991.¹⁴⁸

But the civil war in Azerbaijan would not have been possible without political entrepreneurs, who actively helped to construct a radical ideology. David Lake and Donald Rothchild argue that political entrepreneurs “may make blatant communal appeals and outbid moderate politicians, thereby mobilizing members, polarizing society, and magnifying the inter-group dilemmas.”¹⁴⁹ Among the most prominent political entrepreneurs in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in 1988-1994 were historians Zori Balayan from Armenia and Ziya Bunyatov from Azerbaijan. The two were hardcore nationalists who helped to revive radical nationalism in their respective countries, thus, allowing nationalist sentiments to feed the source of grievance (territorial indivisibility).

David Lake and Donald Rothchild write that “ethnic activists—individuals with especially strong needs to identify with ethnic kin—can manipulate such desires to produce a process of social polarization that is rapid, apparently spontaneous, and essentially unpredictable... [E]thnic activists can [also] drive individuals to represent falsely their true preferences. While

¹⁴⁷ De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press, 2003, p.114.

¹⁴⁸ In the “Correlates of War,” a research project established in 1963, David Singer and Mel Small define war as “sustained combat, involving organized armed forces, resulting in a minimum of 1,000 battle-related fatalities within a twelve month period.” Therefore, if these conditions are met we may argue that the conflict has transitioned from communal violence to civil war.

¹⁴⁹ Lake, David A. and Donald Rothchild. “Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict.” *International Security* 21, no. 2 (1996), pp.41-75.

they might prefer, for instance, not to associate exclusively with members of their own group, individuals are pressed by activists and the social pressures they spawn to alter their behavior in a more 'ethnic' direction."¹⁵⁰ Here, one might ask if ethnic activists and political entrepreneurs represent the same group in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. As I argued in the literature review chapter, lines between ethnic activists, ethnopolitical entrepreneurs, conflict entrepreneurs, and political entrepreneurs are blurry. What all of them have in common is that these actors seek gaining political and economic payoffs from escalating the conflict. In this regard, once again, the term "political entrepreneurs" seems to be more encompassing and inclusive in its nature.

Thomas De Waal calls Ziya Bunyadov (1923-1997) "Azerbaijan's foremost Armenophobe," and suggests that "Buniatov concluded that the Sumgait pogroms had been planned by the Armenians themselves in order to discredit Azerbaijan and boost the Armenian nationalist cause."¹⁵¹ According to Russian historian Victor Shnirelman, Bunyadov "purposefully tried 'to clear' the territories of modern Azerbaijan from the presence of Armenian history."¹⁵² After becoming vice-president of Azerbaijani National Science Academy, Bunyadov continued his anti-Armenian platform, which allowed him to get elected into Azerbaijani Parliament in 1995. Among Armenians, the role of Ziya Bunyadov was played by Zori Balayan (1935 -). Born in Stepanakert (Khankendi), Nagorno-Karabakh, he became famous in the course of the conflict for his essay "Hearth," in which he tried to demonstrate the Armenian identity of Nagorno-Karabakh and identified Nakhchivan as historically belonging to Armenia. He further regarded Turks, including Azerbaijanis, as enemies of both Russia and Armenia. Thomas De Waal called Zori Balayan a "chauvinistic intellectual warrior," whose book "Hearth" "might never have been

¹⁵⁰ Lake, David A. and Donald Rothchild. "Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict." *International Security* 21, no. 2 (1996), p.44.

¹⁵¹ De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press, 2003, p.42.

¹⁵² Shnirelman, Victor. *Voyni pamyati. Mifi, identichnost i politika v Zakavkazye*. Moscow, Academkniga, 2003.

allowed to spread beyond a few low-circulation publications.”¹⁵³ But, unfortunately, the contrary happened and both Zori Balayan and Ziya Bunyadov contributed in directing their nations on a destructive path towards civil war.

With Gorbachev resigning as the Secretary General on December 21, 1991, the Soviet Union ceased to exist on December 31, 1991. Amid these events, Armenian and Azerbaijani political entrepreneurs were quick to realize the importance of looting weaponry from military stockpiles located throughout Nagorno-Karabakh.¹⁵⁴ As the Soviet troops began to pull out, most of the conscripts sold their weapons for cash or even vodka to either side. However, some of the Russian officers and conscripts stayed and offered their services to both sides. There were also cases when Soviet soldiers sold tanks and other heavy military equipment to Armenians and Azerbaijanis. One account from Thomas de Waal’s book provides a good example: “The American human rights activist Scott Horton says that in July 1991, an officer named Yury Nikolayevich, mistaking him for a businessman, offered to sell him a tank for three thousand dollars. Others tell how Armenians simply paid the regimental officers in vodka or rubles to open fire or deploy its weapons.”¹⁵⁵

While the largest chunk of weapons in the possession of Armenians and Azerbaijanis were made in the USSR or Eastern bloc countries, Azerbaijanis received some military aid and provision from Turkey, Israel, and Arab countries. Likewise, the Armenian diaspora donated a significant amount of aid to Armenia through the course of the conflict and even managed to push for legislation in the United States Congress to pass a bill “Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act” to place a complete ban on military aid from the United States to Azerbaijan in

¹⁵³ De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press, 2003, p.143.

¹⁵⁴ Read more in De Waal (2003) and Goltz (1999).

¹⁵⁵ De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press, 2003, p.167.

1992.¹⁵⁶ Russia at the same time “shipped over \$1 billion in arms to Armenia from 1993 to 1995” without any payment made.¹⁵⁷

In such environment, political entrepreneurs were extracting economic payoffs from foreign military and humanitarian aid. Nona Shahnazarian writes: “One consequence of the war was a rise in black market trade, stimulated by an influx of humanitarian assistance. According to numerous Armenian diaspora aid workers, significant amounts of supplies never reached their destinations. It became clear that aid and supplies were routinely placed into the pockets of influential clans or sold for profit.”¹⁵⁸ In *Oil Wars*, author Mary Kaldor writes how Armenian and Azerbaijani political entrepreneurs benefited from the conflict:

On the Armenian side, funding was almost entirely war related – diaspora support, Russian military assistance, loot and pillage, contraband trade (especially petroleum products) and hostage taking... On the Azeri side, the government was able to commandeer crude oil from the Azerbaijan State Oil Company (SOCAR) either for use at the front or for sale, but it did not have diaspora support or, after 1992, Russian military assistance. Because they were losing, the Azeris were not able to take advantage of loot and pillage on the same scale; but hostage taking and contraband trade remained important.¹⁵⁹

Moreover, looting and mutilation of dead soldiers were commonly reported. After the war ended, both sides accused their opponents of continuing to hold captives. Similar practice was observed with dead bodies, which were exchanged for money or other material rewards. The warlords—leaders of military groups—facilitated the barter of dead and alive men and, thus, capitalized on these activities, too. While warlords are not necessarily political entrepreneurs,

¹⁵⁶ This ban makes Azerbaijan the only exception to the countries of the former Soviet Union, to receive direct aid from U.S. government under this act to facilitate economic and political stability. The Act was strongly lobbied for by the Armenian American community in the United States during the Nagorno-Karabakh war.

¹⁵⁷ Derouen, Karl. *Civil wars of the world: major conflicts since World War II*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2007, p.155.

¹⁵⁸ Shahnazarian, Nona. “The Making of a De Facto State: Warlords and Militarized Society in Nagorno-Karabakh.” *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo* No. 103 (June 2010).

¹⁵⁹ Karl, Terry Lynn; Said, Yahia and Kaldor, Mary. *Oil Wars*. London: Pluto, 2007. p.162.

their involvement in such activities indicates why, perhaps, they followed political entrepreneurs and their radical agendas.

In addition, as I suggested in the literature review chapter, political actors do not only factor in their immediate payoffs but also consider potential future rewards from escalating the conflict. Future control of natural resources was another incentive for political entrepreneurs. As Karl Derouen writes “[t]he Nagorno-Karabakh region in Azerbaijan has numerous mineral springs as well as deposits of zinc, coal, lead, gold, marble, and limestone...”¹⁶⁰ While my research did not identify any reports of immediate exploitation of natural resources in the course of civil war by Armenian political entrepreneurs, more recent reports prove that future payoffs were part of the rationale in escalating the conflict from communal violence to civil war. In 2007, one such report made by the Azerbaijani side to the OSCE reads that “Armenia tries to intensify illegal exploitation of the natural resources of Azerbaijan, transfer Armenian settlers to the occupied territories and accumulate large stockpiles of weapons and munitions there, which far exceed all possible quotas. This activity is not helpful to the negotiations.”¹⁶¹ Another report makes more detailed allegations:

Armenia and the separatist regime of Nagorno-Karabakh by various means draw foreign companies to invest illegally in the occupied Azerbaijani territories... Only within 8 months of 2006, 897 ha of forest zones have been destroyed. In this area 7 wood processing plants belonging to French, Belgian, US, Iranian, Greek, Japanese, German companies function illegally. The OSCE observers have eye-witnessed transportation of trees from the forests of Kalbajar. The entrepreneurs of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and UAE have spent 111 million US dollars for mineral water sources of the occupied Azerbaijani districts of Lachin and Kalbajar.¹⁶²

These reports demonstrate that behind calls for violence, secessionist warfare, and independence, oftentimes, stands economic and political interests. Because Armenian political entrepreneurs (e.g. Serzh Sargsyan and Robert Kocharyan) who escalated the conflict from

¹⁶⁰ Derouen, Karl. *Civil wars of the world: major conflicts since World War II*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2007, p.34.

¹⁶¹ Source: <http://www.osce.org/mc/29432?download=true>

¹⁶² Source: <http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/Doc/XrefViewHTML.asp?FileID=11628&Language=EN>

communal violence to civil war are still controlling Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenia in a corrupt political and economic system, I will argue here and later in this chapter that they directly benefited from immediate and future payoffs of the conflict. In Azerbaijan, by escalating the conflict from communal violence to civil war, the National Popular Front members seized political power in Baku. Later, by exploiting the same conflict, Heydar Aliyev, the ousted communist leader, returned to power.

This discussion about the political entrepreneurs in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and their expected payoffs from escalating the conflict from communal violence to civil war brings us to the next two subsections in this chapter: Armenian and Azerbaijani political entrepreneurs.

4.1. Armenian Entrepreneurs

In this subsection, I will elaborate more on who the Armenian political entrepreneurs were and how they succeeded to escalate communal violence to civil war in the course of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In particular, I will write about such political entrepreneurs as Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan. The reason why I chose these two individuals is because they are the most prominent Armenian political entrepreneurs and there is more information and evidence available to explain their role in the conflict.

Robert Kocharyan (1954 -) is, perhaps, one of the most visible figures among Armenian political entrepreneurs who climbed to power by escalating the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Born in Stepanakert (Khankendi) in Nagorno-Karabakh, Kocharyan, before the conflict, held various low positions within the communist bureaucracy in Nagorno-Karabakh.¹⁶³ In 1988, he appeared on the political scene as a leader of the *Krunk* and *Miatsum* secessionist and nationalist movements that demanded independence for the region and its future unification with Armenia. In other words, by demanding independence for Nagorno-Karabakh, Kocharyan and his political circle were a) escalating the conflict and b) envisioning new political

¹⁶³ Source: <http://www.president.am/en/robert-kocharyan/>

and economic opportunities in a region that would not be controlled by Azerbaijan in the case of successful secession. But Robert Kocharyan, as a political entrepreneur, did not emerge from nowhere. As Christoph Zürcher writes:

...Kocharian's career within the nomenklatura in provincial Karabakh is to be explained by the fact that, lacking local patrons, he could not get a job in Armenia. He then returned to Nagorny-Karabakh and worked his way up to first secretary of the Komsomol. Thereafter, however, he could not further crack the Azerbaijani nomenklatura... Seeing his upward mobility within the nomenklatura blocked, Kocharian gladly embraced the new career paths that opened up within the new national movement.¹⁶⁴

Therefore, the extreme nationalist political agenda campaigned by Kocharyan helped him to become the president of Nagorno-Karabakh in 1994. Three years later, in 1997, he became the prime minister of Armenia and from 1998 to 2008 he served as the president of Armenia. As Thomas De Waal suggests: "Nagorny Karabakh's military success... gave [Robert Kocharyan] a heroic reputation and great influence in Armenia."¹⁶⁵ Escalating the conflict to civil war helped Robert Kocharyan to capture power beyond the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh and his climb to power.¹⁶⁶ Kocharyan and his circle succeeded to escalate the conflict by leading the war effort against Azerbaijanis,¹⁶⁷ sabotaging any prospects for peaceful negotiations, and making radical nationalistic calls.

The author Georgi Derlugian also draws a rationalist portrait of Robert Kocharyan "with a distinctly Machiavellian air."¹⁶⁸ He writes that during the conflict "Kocharyan began to make secret preparations for a real war, and this foresightedness, he claims, is what allowed him to

¹⁶⁴ Zürcher, Christoph. *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus*. New York: New York University Press, 2007, p.173.

¹⁶⁵ De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press, 2003. p.256.

¹⁶⁶ King, Charles. *The ghost of freedom: a history of the Caucasus*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, p.220.

¹⁶⁷ De Waal, Thomas. "Why does Nagorno Karabakh matter?" BBC. Web: 31 March 1998. Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/analysis/72268.stm>

¹⁶⁸ Derlugian, Georgi. *Bourdieu's secret admirer in the Caucasus: a world-system biography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. p.361.

become leader despite his relatively young age."¹⁶⁹ But Robert Kocharyan does not feel like he is personally responsible for the conflict. Thomas De Waal, who interviewed Robert Kocharyan, writes that he talked of the war "as if he had played no role in starting the conflict, as if it had come out of the blue. Again the language was passive, as though simply 'ethnic conflicts begin,' like natural phenomena."¹⁷⁰ These accounts about Kocharyan are important because they demonstrate, as rational players, he and his immediate circle carefully calculated their payoffs and engineered the transition of the conflict from communal violence to civil war by taking leadership positions in the nationalist movement, steering violence, and leading their followers to civil war as their military commander.

So, why did the public follow Robert Kocharyan? Was it due to economic payoffs that his constituency expected to gain? Kocharyan himself denies this argument: "All the same I would not rest the question on whether we lived well or badly. I don't exclude the possibility that even if it had been good in Azerbaijan, then these problems would have arisen all the same."¹⁷¹ But historian Charles King draws another picture where economic payoffs from the Armenian diaspora were factored into the conflict by political entrepreneurs and their followers:

Diaspora politics has also played a role. Armenia and the Armenian diaspora have been the sine qua non of Karabakh's existence... Already in 2000, Swiss-Armenian businesspeople invested some \$900,000 in a watch manufacturing facility; others have spent \$2 million to renovate Stepanakert's central Hotel Karabakh; still other investors have pledged some \$17 million to build tourist facilities near Karabakh's striking medieval monasteries.¹⁷²

This paragraph demonstrates that without escalating the conflict to civil war and seceding from Azerbaijan, diaspora would not invest in Nagorno-Karabakh if it was under control of Azerbaijan and political entrepreneurs such as Robert Kocharyan, those alike, and

¹⁶⁹ DerLuguian, Georgi. *Bourdieu's secret admirer in the Caucasus: a world-system biography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, p.192.

¹⁷⁰ De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press, 2003. p.54.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.139.

¹⁷² King, Charles. *Extreme Politics*. Oxford University Press, 2009. p.118.

their followers would not be able to benefit economically immediately or in the future from humanitarian and financial investment packages from the diaspora.

Serzh Sargsyan (1954 -) is another Armenian political entrepreneur whose profile played an important role in transitioning communal violence to civil war in Nagorno-Karabakh. The political career of Serzh Sargsyan is intertwined with the political path of Robert Kocharyan. As Thomas de Waal writes: "...Kocharian's old comrade, Serzh Sarkisian, was put in charge of the logistics of the Karabakh military campaign. Sarkisian, had been senior to Kocharian when the two were the leaders of the Stepanakert Young Communist organization, the Komsomol, and... the two men resumed a tandem, which would eventually bring them jointly to power in Armenia."¹⁷³

Serzh Sargsyan was also born in Stepanakert (Khankendi) in Nagorno-Karabakh. He, too, held various positions within the communist nomenklatura and when the conflict started, he became the Chairman of the Nagorno-Karabakh Self-Defense Forces Committee. He led battles during the civil war and in 1993 he became the defense minister of Armenia. From 1999 to 2007 he was the Secretary of the National Security Council. In 2007, he became the prime minister of Armenia and a year later he was elected the president of the country with a reelection followed in 2013.

Serzh Sargsyan, like other political entrepreneurs, played an important role in escalating the conflict from communal violence to civil war. One such example can be given from the massacre of Azerbaijani civilians in 1992 in the village of Khojaly, a small town four miles away from Stepanakert (Khankendi) with an estimated population of 6,000 men. On February 26, 1992, Armenian and Russian troops launched an offensive to capture the town. According to Sargsyan, "Before Khojali, the Azerbaijanis thought that they were joking with us, they thought that the Armenians were people who could not raise their hand against the civilian population.

¹⁷³ De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press, 2003. p.197.

We were able to break that [stereotype]. And that's what happened."¹⁷⁴ On this episode of the civil war in Azerbaijan, De Waal writes that "Sarkisian's account throws a different light on the worst massacre of the Karabakh war, suggesting that the killings may, at least in part, have been a deliberate act of mass killing as intimidation."¹⁷⁵ As the leader of the Nagorno-Karabakh Self-Defense Forces, Sargsyan was directly responsible for the Khojaly massacre, which helped to escalate the conflict to civil war.¹⁷⁶ Therefore, the conflict transitioned from communal violence to civil war after the Khojaly massacre. At that point the death toll reached 1,000 people¹⁷⁷ within a twelve month period, and the violent confrontation transitioned into a sustained combat involving organized Armenian and Azerbaijani armed forces.

While leaked secret U.S. diplomatic cables reveal the amount of wealth that Serzh Sargsyan amassed as a result of his political career built thanks to his active participation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict,¹⁷⁸ he himself blames the war on inter-ethnic relations between Armenians and Azerbaijanis: "The most important thing is not the territory... Our cultures are not compatible."¹⁷⁹ This discussion is important because Sargsyan, similarly to Kocharyan, denies that he and his immediate circle engineered the transition of the conflict from communal violence to civil war by taking leadership positions in the nationalist movement, steering violence, and leading their followers to civil war. However, his political and economic achievements outlined in this subsection would not be possible without his active role in the conflict because, as Christoph Zürcher puts it, he could not further crack the Azerbaijani

¹⁷⁴ De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press, 2003, p.172.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.172.

¹⁷⁶ Sources: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/65055>, <http://www.hrw.org/news/1997/03/23/response-armenian-government-letter-town-khojaly-nagorno-karabakh>

¹⁷⁷ Quinn-Judge, Paul (3 March 1992). "Armenians killed 1000, Azeris charge." *Boston Globe*. Retrieved: March 17, 2015.

¹⁷⁸ Source: https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/03YEREVAN2975_a.html

¹⁷⁹ De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press, 2003. p.273.

nomenklatura. One reason why Sargsyan and Kocharyan deny their role in escalating the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to civil war is because the government of Azerbaijan seeks to press criminal charges and indict the two as war criminals.¹⁸⁰

It is also important to mention under this section that there was a chance to avoid the transition of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from communal violence to civil war. However, because political entrepreneurs were present in the conflict and because they were interested in gaining profits from the war, they rejected such an opportunity. This argument comes from author Erik Melander, who suggests that: "In 1991 the political leadership of the Armenian separatist movement in Nagorno-Karabakh offered the Azerbaijani authorities a virtual capitulation in exchange for a cessation of hostilities,"¹⁸¹ but "more radical Armenian leadership in Stepanakert proved decisive in the subsequent escalation of the conflict..."¹⁸² This important piece of information about the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh reveals the role of political entrepreneurs whose interests in escalating the violence helped to transition the conflict from communal violence to civil war.

4.2. Azerbaijani Entrepreneurs

During the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Azerbaijani political entrepreneurs, too, attempted to gain political and economic payoffs by escalating the conflict from communal violence to civil war. Overall, political entrepreneurs in Azerbaijan were divided along two camps competing for power. One camp was consolidated around Heydar Aliyev, former First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, and the other camp centered around

¹⁸⁰ Sources: <http://en.apa.az/news/116857>; <http://vestnikkavkaza.net/news/politics/66957.html>

¹⁸¹ Melander, Erik. "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Revisited: Was the War Inevitable?" *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol.3, Issue 2 (2001), p.48.

¹⁸² Read more: "Despite the Armenians' willingness to enter negotiations on terms favorable to Baku..., harsh criticism of the meeting in Baku was broadcast over the radio on 29 July, stirring anger and dismay among the more radical segments of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. Then, on 10 August one of the Armenian participants in the meeting in Baku, Valerii Grigoriyan, was murdered in a drive-by shooting in the center of Stepanakert. This assassination of one of the old nomenklatura leaders in Stepanakert was widely assumed to be a move by the radicals to silence the proponents of negotiation with Baku." p.69-71.

Azerbaijani Popular Front (APF) founder Abulfaz Elchibey. According to De Waal, "in the new Popular Front, there was broad agreement that Azerbaijan must win autonomy from Moscow. Its members wanted a higher status for the Azeri language and more contact with their ethnic cousins in Iran—and there was also consensus that they wanted a secular, not an overtly Islamic, movement."¹⁸³

Abulfaz Elchibey (1938 – 2000) was an Azerbaijani Soviet dissident and scholar of Middle East studies. According to De Waal, Elchibey "saw Azerbaijan's future in the closest possible ties with Turkey, and he consistently emphasized that Azerbaijanis were "Turks." He was hostile to Iran and Russia and pointedly refused to speak Russian in public, using an interpreter even when he traveled to Moscow."¹⁸⁴ On June 16, 1989, Elchibey established the Azerbaijani Popular Front and was selected as its leader. He and his advisers, while initially bouncing between moderates and radicals, eventually joined the latter camp. Elchibey's "purpose was to lead social resistance and to organize volunteers into defense brigades" to fight in Nagorno-Karabakh against Armenians.¹⁸⁵

Moreover, Elchibey escalated the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and raised tensions between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, when, in 1991, he "sanctioned the region and blocked all transportation, fuel, and emergency paths to the region."¹⁸⁶ Elchibey's deliberate policy of blockading Nagorno-Karabakh left Armenians with no choice but to fight back more aggressively for their survival.¹⁸⁷ This reaction, in return, further escalated the situation and, by continuing to intensify the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, Elchibey eventually came to power

¹⁸³ De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press, 2003. p.86.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.86.

¹⁸⁵ Haghghian, Hassan and Mehdizadeh, Akbar. "The Role of Abulfaz Elchibey and Heydar Aliyev in Karabakh Crisis: A Decision Model." *Journal of Political & Social Sciences*. Vol., 1 (1), 5-10, 2014, p.8.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.9.

¹⁸⁷ Lally, Kathy. "Boycott, cold bring deprivation to Armenians." *The Baltimore Sun*. Web: 31 January 1993. Source: http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1993-01-31/news/1993031002_1_armenia-azerbaijan-humanitarian-assistance/2

because his policies were supported by his Azerbaijani constituency. As one news report of that time mentions: "On the Azerbaijani side, the offensive coincided with the announcement of official election results naming Abulfaz Elchibey the new president of Azerbaijan. That move raised the question of whether Mr. Elchibey, a Popular Front leader, was launching an aggressive new policy."¹⁸⁸

After the AFP came to power in Azerbaijan on June 7, 1992 with Afulfaz Elchibey becoming president, the nationalists launched new counter offensives against Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. According to De Waal, "Elchibey's victory appeared to have resolved the country's long-running political crisis, and morale at the front was high. Units like Iskender Hamidov's extreme nationalist Gray Wolves division were now fighting for a government they supported."¹⁸⁹ Guerilla forces and volunteers were now replaced by regular army forces composed of young conscripts with little or no experience in warfare. The assault forced Armenian forces to retreat and on June 18, 1992, a state of emergency was announced in Nagorno-Karabakh. As winter approached, both sides largely abstained from large scale battles. Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh were on the verge of economic collapse. Likewise, for Azerbaijanis economic conditions were also challenging. As many as one million internally displaced people and refugees from Armenia were forced to live in rudimentary tent camps throughout Azerbaijan. Access to sanitation and basic resources was either very limited or completely absent. Azerbaijan also struggled to rehabilitate its petroleum industry—its main source of national income.

Meanwhile in Azerbaijan, the AFP's bidding for power did not solely pursue political payoffs. Nationalists realized that whoever controlled the government would also control the country's oil and gas resources. De Waal recounts that in 1993, "shortly before he was

¹⁸⁸ "Azerbaijan drive takes 5 villages Armenia threatens direct intervention." The Baltimore Sun. Web: 14 June 1992. Source: http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1992-06-14/news/1992166037_1_nagorno-karabakh-azerbaijan-armenians

¹⁸⁹ De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press, 2003, p.195

overthrown, Azerbaijan's then president, Abulfaz Elchibey, had been negotiating contracts with Western companies to develop Caspian oil fields." However, Elchibey's government soon collapsed because of growing political discord within the ranks of the AFP. In June 1993, Elchibey sent his troops to disarm Suret Huseynov, a warlord who became disloyal to the AFP. But Huseynov's guerilla forces did not surrender and instead started moving towards Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, in order to capture the government. Under these circumstances, fearing for his own life, Abulfaz Elchibey had to flee from Baku to Nakhchivan. De Waal writes that "[t]he desperate Popular Front government then invited Heidar Aliev to come from Nakhichevan to Baku to its aid, the equivalent, as Goltz puts it, of 'inviting a crocodile into the goat-pen.' A rapid train of events was set in motion, which saw Elchibey lose power and Aliev become president in his stead."¹⁹⁰ This narrative brings us to Heydar Aliyev, the next political entrepreneur, who returned to power by manipulating the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Heydar Aliyev (1923 – 2003), after his forced resignation from the communist nomenklatura in 1987, remained in Moscow until 1990. His role in escalating the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh from communal violence to civil war is in some ways controversial. While Aliyev's supporters presented him as a savior of the nation who achieved the ceasefire agreement in Nagorno-Karabakh, his local and foreign opponents believed that Aliyev played a major role in staging acts of communal violence against Armenians and sabotaging the AFP's government. De Waal writes, "Several of Azerbaijan's new opposition activists feared that some of their comrades-in-arms were in fact merely pawns in this struggle. These suppositions became more plausible in 1990, after Aliev returned from Moscow to his home province of Nakhichevan and several leading Popular Front activists, including the right-hand man of Abulfaz Elchibey, Bejan Farzaliev, began to work with him."¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press, 2003, p.213.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.85.

Moreover, according to De Waal, there is additional evidence that Heydar Aliyev was running politics in Baku behind the scene from Moscow and later from Nakhchivan. He writes that Ayaz Mutalibov, Azerbaijan's communist party chief flew to Moscow to visit Aliyev and the fact that "the new Party boss chose to visit the disgraced Aliev suggests that Aliev remained a powerful behind-the-scenes figure in Azerbaijani life." George Soros, an American investor and philanthropist, also believes in Aliyev's involvement in escalating the acts of communal violence against Armenians, which were instigated by the local mafia controlled by Aliyev, in order to create a situation that would be detrimental to Gorbachev regardless of the outcome.¹⁹² De Waal writes that:

Aliyev's "connection, or lack of it, to the January events is an intriguing subplot to the main story, which has never been properly explained. Aliev himself has said that at the height of the demonstrations, Gorbachev telephoned him outside Moscow and asked him to "remove his people from the streets" of Baku and make a public statement—to which he responded by saying that he was in Moscow and had nothing to do with what was going on in Baku. Gorbachev's call suggests that he, for one, believed that Aliev was still pulling strings in Baku. What-ever his role before the bloodshed, Aliev used the aftermath of Black January to begin his long climb back to power.¹⁹³

After the January 1990 events in Baku, Heydar Aliyev left Moscow for his native Nakhchivan, where he was elected as a Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic in 1991 and continued to govern Nakhchivan without any subordination to the official government in Baku. When Abulfaz Elchibey left his political office and stepped down, Heydar Aliyev became the speaker of the Parliament. And on October 3, 1993, Aliyev was elected president of Azerbaijan. De Waal writes that the results of those elections were "preordained and he was awarded an improbable 98.8 percent of the vote."¹⁹⁴ After Heydar Aliyev came to power, the civil war continued to spiral. Scholars, such as De Waal, argue that

¹⁹² Soros, George. "The Gorbachev Prospect." *The New York Review of Books* Vol.36, Number 9, 1 June 1989.

¹⁹³ De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press, 2003, p.26.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.251.

letting Armenians advance on the Nagorno-Karabakh front helped Aliyev to undermine “the authority of military commanders, who might be plotting to depose him—including his own ally in the ousting of the previous regime, Suret Husseinov. Up to a point, he may even have welcomed the reverses at the front. The new president used his new powers to disband thirty-three battalions loyal to the Popular Front... and vowed to create a new national army instead. Tens of thousands of teenagers without fighting experience were conscripted. As press gangs rounded up young men, restrictions were put on bars and restaurants and military censorship was introduced.”¹⁹⁵

But after using the civil war to discredit his domestic rivals, Heydar Aliyev no longer needed the conflict as the war was becoming too costly, with an estimated one million Azerbaijanis displaced from the fighting, including those from both Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Just like Abulfaz Elchibey, he was factoring oil and gas reserves into his rationale and even went further by appointing his son Ilham Aliyev as vice-president of SOCAR, the state oil company.¹⁹⁶ Therefore, as the final battles of the conflict took place, on May 5, 1994—with Russia acting as a mediator—Armenians and Azerbaijanis agreed to cease hostilities. And in fall 1994, Heydar Aliyev signed a 7.4 billion dollar contract—also known as the Contract of the Century—with foreign oil companies to develop oil fields in Azerbaijan.¹⁹⁷ Before signing the contract, Heydar Aliyev’s corrupt regime received an 80 million dollar bonus from the consortium of foreign oil corporations with the remaining 220 million dollars to be paid in three additional installments.¹⁹⁸ As Gubad Ibadoglu argues, instead of improving living conditions in

¹⁹⁵ De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press, 2003, p.225.

¹⁹⁶ Nassibli, Nasib. “Azerbaijan’s geopolitics and oil pipeline issue.” *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*. 12/2000, Volume 4, Issue 4, pp.97-120.

¹⁹⁷ Sagheb, Nasser. “Azerbaijan’s ‘Contract of the Century’ Finally Signed with Western Oil Consortium.” *Azerbaijan International*, Winter 1994, pp.26-28. Source: http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/24_folder/24_articles/24_aioc.html

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

the country, petrodollars from the Contract of the Century accumulated in the pockets of Aliyev's regime.¹⁹⁹

Today, after more than twenty years, political entrepreneurs on both sides continue to exploit the conflict in their own interests to consolidate their constituencies. Kolstø Pal and Blakkisrud Helge argue that “[w]hen a group of people is confronted by a common threat, they tend to huddle together and downplay disagreements and divisions among themselves. They acquire a strong sense of common destiny: they survive together or perish together.”²⁰⁰ In Azerbaijan’s case—just like in Armenia’s, where the current regime rose to power by escalating the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh—the territorial dispute continues to be a strong tool to keep political entrepreneurs in power. First, the Azerbaijani opposition—then in power—lost the war to Armenians. This is something that the current Azerbaijani regime of President Ilham Aliyev uses in any political debate against the opposition as the survey of public opinion offers that the ethnic conflict with Armenia remains on the top list of the electorate’s concerns.²⁰¹ Second, by maintaining the enemy image of the ethnic other, the incumbent diverts attention to an external issue—something that Serzh Sargsyan, the current Armenian counterpart, does as well—rather than to an internal debate on democratization issues.²⁰²

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that contrary to media reports that nearly always mentioned the religions of Armenians and Azerbaijanis, religious grievances and ancient hatreds never gained significant influence in the conflict. Instead, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has remained

¹⁹⁹ Source: http://azerireport.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1617

²⁰⁰ Pal, Kolstø, Helge, Blakkisrud. “De facto states and democracy: The case of Nagorno-Karabakh.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 45 (2012). p.143.

²⁰¹ Source: <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2013az/IMPISS1/>

²⁰² Gurbanov, Geysar. “Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: The Golden Apple of Discord or a Toy That Two Have Failed to Share.” *Europe’s Next Avoidable War: Nagorno-Karabakh*. Ed. Michael Kambeck, Sargis Ghazaryan. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 179-185.

primarily an issue of territory, where an ideological ground that was used by political entrepreneurs to make communal appeals was an extreme nationalism.

In the section devoted to communal violence (1988-1992), I proposed initial acts of communal violence in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict were sporadic and disorganized. The conflict transitioned to civil war after the Khojaly massacre of Azerbaijani civilian population by Armenian fighters on February 26, 1992, when the death toll had reached 1,000 people within a twelve month period, and the violent confrontation transitioned into a sustained combat involving organized Armenian and Azerbaijani armed forces.

Here, I also argued that in Azerbaijan during the conflict in 1988-1994 basic features of democracy were not present. On one hand, weak government institutions both in Nagorno-Karabakh and in Azerbaijan have enabled political entrepreneurs to capture the state and seize political power. On the other hand, an undemocratic political system has created an atmosphere of fear among Armenians and Azerbaijanis for their future. In Baku, capital of Azerbaijan, military coups, violence between rivaling political groups, and omnipresent corruption demonstrated the absence of democracy. Likewise, Armenian political entrepreneurs took advantage of the lacking democracy in Nagorno-Karabakh, where political environment was characterized by gross violations of human rights and a lawless society.

In the section devoted to civil war (1992-1994), I demonstrated how, by escalating the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenian political entrepreneurs Serzh Sargsyan and Robert Kocharyan succeeded to become presidents of Armenia. In Azerbaijan, the Azerbaijani Popular Front (APF) founder Abulfaz Elchibey seized political power in Baku. Later, by applying a similar strategy, Heydar Aliyev, ousted communist leader, returned to power. In developing a discussion on this subject, I suggested that the ultimate goal of the Armenian and Azerbaijani political entrepreneurs was to gain political and economic payoffs such as capturing political power and benefiting economically from black markets, humanitarian aid, and export of primary commodity resources.

4. CONCLUSION

In this paper I argued that political entrepreneurs—rational actors who seek personal benefits and, by doing so, change the direction of politics—choose to escalate communal violence to civil war in order to attain political and economic payoffs. To achieve this goal, political entrepreneurs escalate communal tensions and propel communal divides in the society. To demonstrate the validity of my argument I studied the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. I argued that communal violence transitions to civil war when and if political entrepreneurs are present in an environment absent of democracy, i.e. in an environment where legal equality, political freedoms, and rule of law do not exist. In such a climate, political entrepreneurs successfully adopt strategies that would not be immediately available to them in a democratic system.

In Chapter 1, I briefly introduced the reader to basic definitions of the key variables of communal violence, civil war, political entrepreneurs, and democracy and outlined my main argument about the transition of the conflict from communal violence to civil war. In this study, I used the term “communal violence” to mean a form of violence committed across communal lines, i.e. a type of violence in which perpetrators chose their victims based upon group membership, which may include but are not limited to race, religion, ethnicity, language, nationality, and kinship. Also, academicians and practitioners across the world refer to communal violence using multiple and interchangeable terms, including ethnic violence, civil unrest, ethnic riot, racial violence, inter-communal violence, or ethno-religious violence. I chose to use the term “communal violence” because this term has a more inclusive nature and embraces under its umbrella all other terms such as ethnic riot, racial violence, and civil unrest.

I defined civil war as a violent conflict within a country fought by organized armed forces and resulting in a minimum of 1,000 battle-related fatalities within a twelve month period. Here, too, violence happens along group membership lines. However, the scale and magnitude of such violence is amplified by political entrepreneurs. In this regard, civil war is the next level of violence that originates on the level of communal violence, i.e. communal violence is a necessary precursor to civil war. Civil wars may result in large numbers of casualties and the consumption of significant resources. In contrast, in communal violence, clashes are episodic, sporadic, and less organized.

Moreover, despite the many efforts to explain concepts of communal violence and civil war, existing theories fail to provide a convincing argument on why communal violence transitions to civil war. Additionally, few existing theories are able to explain why communal violence transitions to civil war in one group of cases but does not do so in another set of examples. I argued that communal violence transitions to civil war based on existence of two independent variables: political entrepreneurs and absence of democracy, i.e. a system of government that is not democratic.

I defined political entrepreneurs as self-interested rational actors who choose to escalate communal violence to civil war in order to attain political and economic payoffs. I borrow the concept of political entrepreneurs from existing scholarship developed by Lake and Rothchild. In academia, there are other terms that describe political entrepreneurs (e.g. ethnic activists, ethnopolitical entrepreneurs, and conflict entrepreneurs), but the lines between them are blurry and overlapping. What all of them have in common is that these actors seek gaining political or economic payoffs from escalating the conflict. In this regard, once again, the term “political entrepreneurs” seems to be more encompassing and inclusive. In addition, I suggested that political entrepreneurs do not only factor in their immediate payoffs but also consider potential future rewards from escalating the conflict from communal violence to civil war.

Another independent variable in my theory was the absence of democracy. I argued that communal violence transitions to civil war when and if political entrepreneurs are present in an environment absent of democracy. There is no agreement on how to define democracy. Despite this problem, however, legal equality, freedom and rule of law have been identified as important and common characteristics of democracy. I defined democracy as a type of government in which all eligible citizens participate equally in the proposal, development, and establishment of the laws by which their country is run. Also, in Chapter 1, I did not exclude that the escalation of communal violence to civil war could happen in a democracy. However, my research did not find any past or present examples of such transition in a democratic political system.

In Chapter 2, I reviewed the academic discourse about communal violence and civil war and how the former transitions to the latter. In discussing the literature on communal violence, I demonstrated that there are overlapping definitions of this phenomenon and there are problems with its coding depending on the role of its participants (perpetrators and victims of violence). While this is true, communal violence is a type of aggressive, brutal conflict that has a sporadic, episodic nature regardless of its coding. Additionally, the term communal violence can and does include in itself other known forms of collective violence based on ethnic, religious, national, and other types of group membership. Here, I also discussed the historical origins of communal violence.

I also looked at existing theories that explain the concept of war. I dismissed the primordialist explanation of civil war and instead built my theory upon synthesizing constructivist, instrumentalist, and rationalist interpretations of this phenomenon. I argued that political entrepreneurs, as rational actors, seek political and economic payoffs in transitioning the conflict from communal violence to civil war by appealing to previously constructed identities (e.g. ethnicity, religion, or nation). In this regard, the identity of a group becomes an instrument or a means to achieve the political entrepreneurs' present or future goals. For political entrepreneurs to successfully complete their transaction, i.e. facilitate the transition of

communal violence to civil war, they must operate in an environment that is absent of democracy. To support my argument, I discussed how in political systems that lack democracy, political entrepreneurs are more likely to accomplish their objectives.

In Chapter 3, I argued that contrary to media reports that nearly always mentioned the religions of Armenians and Azerbaijanis, religious grievances never gained significant influence in the conflict. Therefore, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has remained primarily an issue of territory, where an ideological ground that was used by political entrepreneurs to make communal appeals was an extreme nationalism. Here, I proposed that initial acts of communal violence in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict were sporadic and disorganized. But, as political entrepreneurs started to factor their own interests in stirring violence, the conflict has transitioned to civil war. This transition happened after the Khojaly massacre of Azerbaijani civilian population by Armenian fighters on February 26, 1992. At that point, the death toll reached 1,000 people within a twelve month period, and the violent confrontation transitioned into a sustained combat involving organized Armenian and Azerbaijani armed forces.

By escalating the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, previously little known Armenian politicians came to power. Two of these politicians, Serzh Sargsyan and Robert Kocharyan, from Nagorno-Karabakh even succeeded to become presidents of Armenia. In Azerbaijan, by escalating the conflict from communal violence to civil war, the Azerbaijani Popular Front (APF) founder Abulfaz Elchibey seized political power in Baku. Later, by applying a similar strategy, Heydar Aliyev, ousted communist leader, returned to power. I suggested that the ultimate goal of the Armenian and Azerbaijani political entrepreneurs was to gain political and economic payoffs such as rising to and capturing political power and benefiting economically from black markets, humanitarian aid, and exports of primary commodity resources.

I also argued that in Azerbaijan during the conflict in 1988-1994 basic features of democracy were not present. On one hand, weak government institutions both in Nagorno-Karabakh and in Azerbaijan enabled political entrepreneurs to capture the state and seize

political power. On the other hand, the undemocratic political system created an atmosphere of fear among Armenians and Azerbaijanis for their future. The absence of democracy became more obvious in 1992, when the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict finally transitioned from communal violence to civil war. In Baku, capital of Azerbaijan, military coups, violence between rivaling political groups, gross human rights violations, and omnipresent corruption demonstrated that the political environment was absent of democracy. But Azerbaijani political entrepreneurs were not the only ones operating in the environment absent of democracy. Armenian political entrepreneurs, too, in Nagorno-Karabakh took advantage of the lacking democracy. The political environment in Nagorno-Karabakh during the conflict was characterized by gross violations of human rights, weak state institutions, dubious elections, and lawless society. In such an environment, democracy was absent and political entrepreneurs were able to achieve their goals in escalating the conflict from communal violence to civil war.

Moreover, the importance of this research paper is that by showing how communal violence transitions to civil war because of political entrepreneurs, this research showed the importance of preventing their emergence in conflict-prone regions by promoting democratic political systems. In addition, in corrupt, undemocratic environments that allow political entrepreneurs to grab humanitarian aid and diaspora support and spread radical ideologies, we should use our resources towards developing peace entrepreneurs who can diffuse conflicts and advocate mutual understanding and a spirit of reconciliation. As author Jonathan Goodhand argues, “[P]eace entrepreneurs may seek to diffuse [violent] ideas and generate ‘social energy’ which transform social structures and social relations so that the likelihood of peaceableness is increased.”²⁰³ In this regard, there is need for more research on how exactly peace entrepreneurs can be identified and enabled to prevent conflicts and increase the likelihood of peace.

²⁰³ Goodhand, Jonathan. “From wars to complex political emergencies: Understanding conflict and peace-building in the new world disorder.” *Third World Quarterly*, 02/1999, Vol.20, Issue 1, p.24.

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