NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT THROUGH THE PRISM OF HORIZONTAL INEQUALITIES: THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

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Abstract

This paper is a theoretical overview that designs and proposes an alternative analytical framework within the sociology of conflict for studying the origins of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict at the group level. This article discusses the theoretical approaches to horizontal inequalities and sociopsychological infrastructure in intractable conflicts, focusing on the question of the emergence of the Karabakh movement in 1988. Building on the synthesis of macro and micro theoretical approaches, the paper reflects upon possible ways of exploring the roots of the conflict by bridging social structure with the social agency, and morphological knowledge with individual experience. Thereby, stemming from the central arguments of the examined approaches, I construct an analytical framework, thus essentially capturing the main findings of this theoretical-methodological overview. The analytical framework brought forward in this paper may potentially serve as a foundation for an operational design of a meso-level analysis of the causes of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Introduction: Minding the Gap

There is a large body of scientific scholarship on the causes, dynamics, and consequences of the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict. The conflict has been continuously studied and analyzed throughout the last few decades with the efforts of academic and practical researchers representing various fields of social sciences. However, there is still a significant knowledge gap in the studies of this complex and protracted conflict that the current theoretical overview attempts to identify.

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Received: 03.10.2021
Revised: 16.05.2022
Accepted: 21.05.2022

In order to detect that gap, as well as to define the scopes in which sociological inquiry may make a valuable analytical contribution, it is necessary to look at how the NK conflict has so far been conceptualized[1] and studied scientifically.

Up until now, international relations scholars, sociologists, and other social scientists have mainly viewed the NK dispute as an *interstate conflict*. Such scholars have attempted to explain the onset of the conflict in the context of interstate relations, particularly focusing on the broader geopolitical, historical, security, and framing aspects, as well as the wider Soviet and post-Soviet political contexts of the conflict[2].

Next to this macro analysis, a significant body of work has also been dedicated to the understanding of the micro-level of the NK conflict, viewing the latter as a *local experience*. These works especially shed light on such aspects of the conflict as subjective interpretations, identity issues, local memories, and the image of the 'enemy'[3].

Both macro and micro aspects of the conflict are clearly essential and do have an important role in understanding the dynamics of the conflict. However, it is hard to find scientific scholarship providing an overlook of the causes of the NK conflict at meso level of analysis. It can be undemanding to forget or pay little attention to the fact that the *civic movement* known as the Karabakh movement has an important role in terms of understanding the initial stages of the conflict. Interestingly, however, it is challenging to find academic research that studies the initial stages of the NK conflict between 1988-1991, as in the Karabakh movement at the communal/group level.

As soon as we zoom in on the inter-ethnic relations and the ethnopolitical aspects of the NK conflict, as a space for conflictual aberration, several thought-provoking questions arise, that essentially lack sociological investigation. Why would communities of ethnic Armenians want to start or join a civic movement, after having peacefully coexisted for decades with Azerbaijanis, before the eruption of the first Karabakh war in 1991? Why would an armed struggle be preferable to living in peace? Why would they

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[1] The discussed conflict typology that follows and which is used throughout the paper is based on the categorization of social conflicts on the basis of involved actors. Generally, two wider categories are commonly discussed in social science literature, those being *interstate conflicts* (a war between two or more governments) and *intrastate conflicts* or *civil wars* (a conflict between a government and a non-governmental party, with no interference from other countries) (Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 2021). See also: Doyle, M. W. and Sambanis, N. (2000). "International Peacebuilding: A Theoretical and Quantitative Analysis," *American Political Science Review* 94, no. 4: 779–810; Fearon, J. D. and Laitin, D. D. (2003). "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1: 7–90; Gurr, T. R. and Marshall, M. G. (2003). *Peace and Conflict*. College Park, MD: Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland; Gates, S. (2004). "*Assessing the Empirical Nature of Civil War*," paper presented at the CSCW workshop.

[2] See for example Kohlhagen, K. (2013). The Flexible Barrier of History- Moving Peace Forward Through The Past. *Nagorno Karabakh: Understanding Conflict - John Hopkins SAIS*; Arzumanian, H. (2018). The Principles of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Resolution in the 21st Century. *Geopolitica*, 243-250.

[3] See for example Арутюнян, Л. (2006). «Общество ни войны ни мира» и перспективы мирного разрешения карабахского конфликта. *КАВКАЗ. Ежегодник КИСМИ*, 104-110. Retrieved from https://bit.ly/3osfIa8; Trupia, F. (2017). Unfreezing the "other": collective trauma and psychological warfare over the Nagorno-Karabakh rivalry. *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs, 2*(3), 30-43; Ghahriyan, S., & Atoyan, A. (2018). War and Peace in Karabakh: an Analysis of Women's Perceptions. *Corridors Proceedings, 1*, 86-99. doi:10.15457/cp_1; Smbatyan, H. (2021). Civilian Participation in Interstate War: Unfolding Voluntary Collective Action in Nagorno-Karabakh War. *Pax et Bellum Journal, 4*(1), 57-69. Retrieved from https://bit.ly/3uyuf4V. More examples are included in the bibliography.

seek independence, while having the option not to? What would they expect to achieve with a battle for self-determination, that they would not be able to otherwise?

Since it is rather unlikely that ethnic contentions appear in a snap, one might ask why would a rivalry between these ethnic groups emerge then? This is a puzzle. Most of the historical reviews that try to solve this puzzle end up circling the narrative of 'restoring the historical justice' and essentially bearing the ideological dust of the political agenda in a given time period. Howbeit, not enough knowledge is accessible that explains how exactly the ethnic dissent between Armenians and Azerbaijanis emerged and evolved. Withal, it is not the relations between political elites that are in question here, but rather the ones between regular citizens who had joined the Karabakh movement – in fact, the first bottom-up mass political movement in the territory of the Soviet Union since the 1920s[4].

This is precisely why the theoretical and methodological frameworks of sociology shall be called upon since sociological analysis can potentially offer rich insights into exploring inter-group relations and social movements.

Theoretical Scopes: Conceptualizing the Gap

This paper is based on two main theoretical approaches. Firstly, it discusses the work on horizontal inequalities and civil war by Cederman et al.[5]. This approach is incorporated to outline the theorized causal link between group-level inequalities and intra-state armed conflict. Secondly, the paper tackles the theory of Sociopsychological infrastructure in intractable conflicts presented in the article by Bar-Tal[6]. This approach serves as a theoretical supplement to the process of exploring the explicitly contextualized psycho-social motives underlying mass mobilization.

Horizontal Inequality and Civil War

The authors of horizontal inequalities theory construct a theoretical argument that explains specifically how horizontal inequalities may lead to societal grievances, which in turn, cause violent conflict. The authors are "investigating the empirical link between inequalities and civil war outbreak at the level of groups[7]". Horizontal inequalities here are to be understood as perceived inequalities between groups on the basis of economic, political, social, and cultural matters. These kinds of inequalities are exemplified by a given group's limited if at all access to the central political decision-making power (political inequality), unequal share of income and other resources (economic inequality), restricted possibilities for social mobility in terms of education and social

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[4] De Waal, T. (2013). *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War.* New York: New York University Press

[5] Cederman, L. E., Gleditsch, K. S., & Buhaug, H. (2013). *Inequality, Grievances and Civil War.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139084161

[6] Bar-Tal, D. (2007). Sociopsychological Foundations of Intractable Conflicts. *American Behavioral Scientist, 50*(11), 1430-1453. doi:10.1177/0002764207302462

[7] Cederman, L. E., Gleditsch, K. S., & Buhaug, H. (2013). *Inequality, Grievances and Civil War.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139084161 p. 35

status (social inequality), and limited opportunities for realizing cultural practices, such as traditions, holidays, and religious ceremonies (cultural inequality)[8].

Horizontal inequalities in human societies have existed since the rise of agriculture and sedentary habitation [9]and are even integral to the sophisticated contemporary social systems[10]. Moreover, Malesevic (2010) argues[11] that historically long-lasting group-level inequalities predominantly result from political domination and warfare. In this context, Cederman et al. discuss the important causal tie between inequalities and armed conflict, pointing out that ethnonationalist warfare shapes through the ethnic groups acknowledging themselves as being in fundamentally different states of affairs[12].

The authors rely on the classical meta-theoretical approach suggested by Coleman[13], and thus discuss the causal mechanisms at the group and individual levels of aggregation. This, instead of discussing the relationship between collective violence and inequalities at the macro level, rather highlights the role of "actors", instead of "factors"[14], focusing on the group-level processes. The discussed theoretical mechanism is outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The causal path from inequalities to onset through grievances[15]
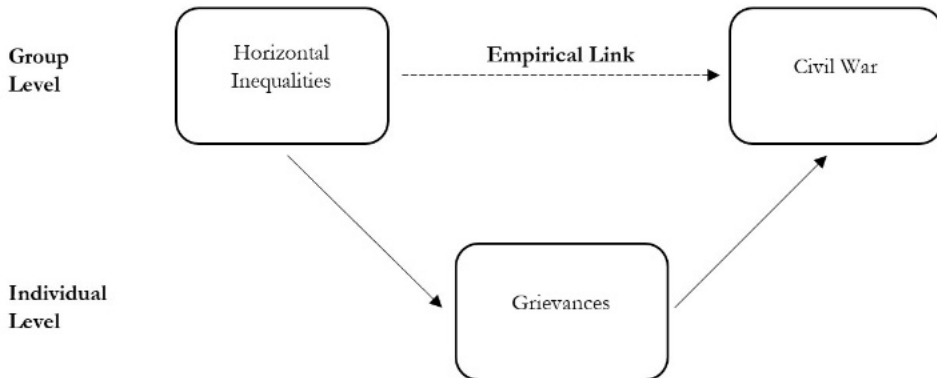
In order for inequalities to be transformed into grievances, as per the authors, inequalities have to be politicized. The latter is explained in a four-stage process, that includes group identification, intergroup comparison, evaluation of injustice, and framing and blaming (see Figure 2).

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[8] Horowitz, D. L. (1985). *Ethnic Groups in Conflict.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; Gurr, T. R. (1970). *Why Men Rebel.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Stewart, F. (2008). Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: An Introduction and Some Hypotheses. In F. Stewart, *Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: Understanding Group Violence in Multiethnic Societies.* Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

[9] Malesevic, S. (2010). *The Sociology of War and Violence.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[10] Sidanius, J., & Pratto, F. (1999). *Social Dominance: An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[11] Malesevic, S. (2010). *The Sociology of War and Violence.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[12] Cederman, L. E., Gleditsch, K. S., & Buhaug, H. (2013). *Inequality, Grievances and Civil War.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139084161

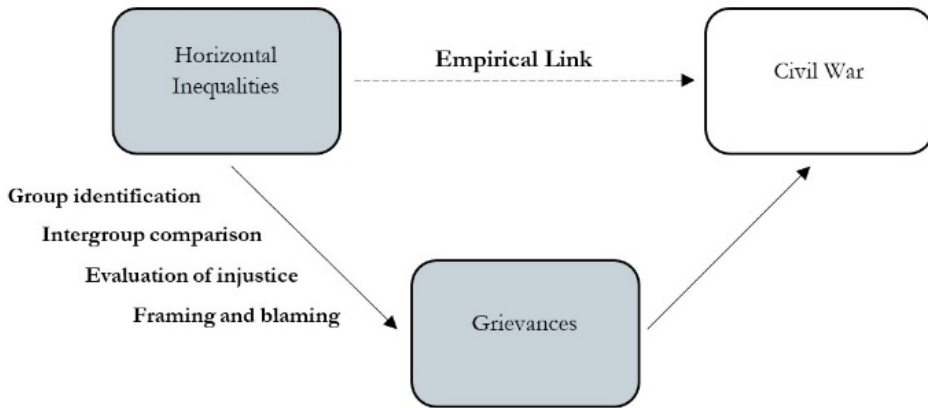[13] Coleman, J. S. (1990). *Foundations of Social Theory.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[14] Cederman, L. E., Gleditsch, K. S., & Buhaug, H. (2013). *Inequality, Grievances and Civil War.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139084161, p. 36

[15] Ibid.

Figure 2. The causal path from horizontal inequalities to grievances[16]

Group identification happens when the members of the group connect their individual identity with that of their group. According to this theory, objective group-level inequalities alone are unlikely to evolve into collective grievances, unless the members of a given group perceive them as such. When group members identify with a given issue and this phenomenon affects a significant part of the population, the group identity further crystallizes. Additionally, the more state policies discriminate and exclude a given group, the more immediately this may cement group identities. This issue is also discussed in the same light in the theories of reactive identity formation[17].

After the group identification has taken place, the members of the group begin the **intergroup comparison**, comparing their own group's status and wealth with that of the other. This is a relational setting where, as social psychologists of social identity theory suggest as well[18], serve as a marker of justifications for conflict. According to Tajfel and Turner, group loyalty shapes faster through arbitrary and imposed distinctions. It is indeed possible that these comparisons may sometimes lay on misperceived or socially constructed differences. However, these would hardly turn into mass grievances, while when there are objectively observable and measurable inequalities along ethnic lines, the out-groups tend to be viewed even more threatening. As Williams pinpoints, "where strongly bounded ethnics act as rival collectivities (rather than mere social categories or unorganized aggregates of individuals), their *relative* positions become salient[19]". Under such conditions, comparison becomes almost inevitable.

Group comparison is followed by what this theory defines as **evaluation of injustice** when the group members identify what exactly is unfair about the status quo. Without the evaluation of injustice, considerable asymmetries in political, social, economic, and cultural inclusion could go unnoticed without generating any major grievances. This

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[16] Ibid., p. 37
[17] See for example Simmel, G. (1955). *Conflict and the Web of Group-Affiliations.* (R. Bendix, Trans.) New York, NY: Free Press; Coser, L. A. (1964). *The Functions of Social Conflict.* London: Hurst & Company.
[18] Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict. In W. G. Worchel, *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations.* Monterey, CA: Brooks Cole.
[19] Williams, R. M. (2003). *The Wars Within: Peoples and States in Conflict.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, p. 135

would then lead the group to accept or ignore the status quo, rather than try to change it. Williams provides an excellent explanation of this phenomenon:

"Grievances are not merely expressions of deprivation and dissatisfaction. People can be deprived, disappointed, frustrated, or dissatisfied without feeling that they have been unjustly or unfairly treated – their unsatisfactory outcome may be "just the way things are" or the result of divine judgment or a consequence of personal ineptitude. In contrast, a real grievance, regarded as the basis for complaint or redress, rests upon the claim that an *injustice* has been inflicted upon undeserving victims. Grievances are normative protests, claiming violations of rights or rules. Those who are intensely aggrieved may use the language of moral outrage[20]."

Hence, it is important that the status quo is declared unfair among the group members, which, according to Brass, is usually done by the leaders of the group, since without elite entry "injustices and inequalities may be accepted, cultural decline or assimilation may occur, and grievances may be expressed in isolated, anomic, or sporadic forms of conflict and disorder[21]".

Lastly, this process ends with what the theory calls **framing and blaming** when the group members define the injustice and the actor(s) responsible for it. This is a crucial phase in the process of politicization of inequalities since even realizing the given state of unfairness may not necessarily give rise to grievances, not until unfairness is framed and directed towards a specific target (in this case, the binding government). Targeting the message of unjustness essentially encourages seeing the representatives of the state power as sponsors and protectors of the unfair status quo; this brings about a certain focus on grievances and a particular possibility for violence to erupt, since political grievances "are not like anomie, but directed against a target[22]".

Mason provides a commendable explanation[23] of how activists manage to pin the blame on the central government, by structuring "injustice frames"[24] that portray the social movement members as sufferers of injustice in the society.

"To activate local social networks in support of a national movement, dissident leaders employ *framing processes* to persuade the member of local social networks to join a national movement. Framing involves identifying injustices that afflict the community and attributing them to the state or some other entity that is the intended target of the social movement. . . . Effective framing involves using traditional symbols to attract nonelites to a new set of values and beliefs about the state that will make them more willing to participate in a movement that challenges the state's sovereignty[25]."

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[20] Ibid., p. 131

[21] Brass, P. (1991). *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage, p. 293

[22] Goodwin, J. (1997). State-Centered Approaches to Social Revolutions: Strengths and Limitations of a Theoretical Tradition. In J. Foran, *Theorizing Revolutions.* London: Routledge, pp. 17-18

[23] Mason, T. D. (2009). The Evolution of Theory on Civil War and Revolution. In M. I. Midlarsky, *Handbook of War Studies III: The Intrastate Dimension.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

[24] See also Moore, B. J. (1978). *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt.* London: Macmillan; Gamson, W. (1992). *Talking Politics.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press; Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. A. (2000). Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology, 26*(1), 611 - 639. doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.611.

[25] Mason, T. D., ibid,., p. 80

Authors suggest that after grievances are established, and as soon as horizontal inequalities are politicized among intellectuals, eminent protesters, and political influencers and leaders, grievances arguably start spreading within the concerned layers of the society so much so they generate large-scale internal struggle. According to Cederman et al., this mechanism is realized due to the interaction between the challenger's mobilization and the response of the state. Figure 3 presents the path between grievances and civil war onset, where the process begins with **mobilization** that then turns into **claims** and actions, which in case of receiving **repression** from the state, arguably turns into a violent civil war.

Figure 3. The causal path from grievances to civil war onset[26]
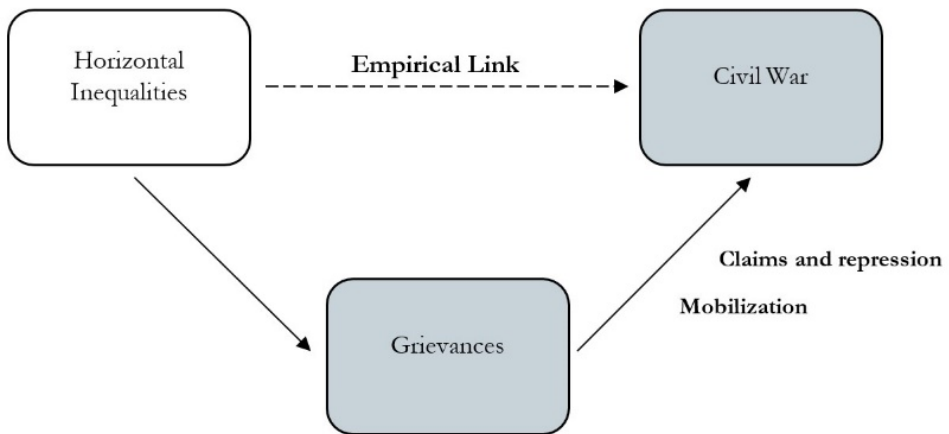
One of the central arguments of this theory is that although grievances at the elite level can be somehow manifested and claims can be put forth, they would not necessarily find strong resonance among the wider societal layers to support further **mobilization**.

What is it then that turns these grievances into collective action through mass mobilization? This question has multiple possible answers, and many social scientists have devoted their studies to depicting those. This theory before highlighting its argument about the matter builds on some of the widely discussed factors stimulating mass mobilization.

One of such explanations explicitly refers to the role of social institutions and networks, moving the social movement theory to another analytical level where it is able to explain how political goals manage to overcome collective action challenges, turning abstract claims into feasible actions and programs that receive wide support among the population in question. This sort of contextual strengthening and peer or in-group monitoring shape what is referred to as "mobilizing structures[27]". On the other hand, another significant stimulus that helps advance the mass mobilization, is the identity

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[26] Cederman, L. E., Gleditsch, K. S., & Buhaug, H. (2013). *Inequality, Grievances and Civil War.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139084161, p. 36

[27] Tarrow, S. (1994). *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

formation. In capturing this logic, Tilly's argument comes as particularly insightful, drawing on notions of "catness" and "netness." [28] This essentially refers to the effectiveness of mobilization being accounted for by the product of solidarity of categorical identification (i.e., catness) and the density of social networks (i.e., netness)[29].

In addition to these factors, Cederman et al. especially highlight the role of emotions in boosting mass mobilization, that is, the way grievances are felt about and manifested at individual and group levels. In fact, the authors argue emotions are what provide the missing part in this illustrative puzzle. Failing to consider the active role of emotions in mobilization processes makes it very difficult to understand how large levels of solidarity emerge, and how action might be triggered by "moral shocks[30]", and what are the specific emotional patterns that tend to explain how mobilization turns into violence[31].

Hence although structural and cognitive stimuli do play a key role in the mobilization, emotionally charged grievances should not be overlooked.

Once mobilization over collective grievances takes place, the challenger group's political demands are communicated to the incumbent government, in order to resolve the perceived injustices. At this stage, it is very much the state's response that decides if the challengers will choose to resort to violence or stick with peaceful means of protest.

Goodwin notes that "states that regulate or abolish perceived economic and social injustices are less likely to become the target of political demands (revolutionary or otherwise) than those that are seen to cause or reproduce such injustices[32]". Furthermore, Cederman et al. notice that "continued exclusion of mobilized groups from state power will also make violent outcomes much more probable because the state's refusal to grant the excluded groups a share of power blocks peaceful avenues of political change[33]".

Even more, when a state decides to strike systematic repressions that target the challengers, the latter is left with little to no choice but to go with violence as their means of protection from repression, therefore triggering an intra-state armed struggle. This is also highlighted in Goodwin's work, which points out that the reactions of the state, if characterized as uncompromising, will likely leave the rebels with no way out, inasmuch as just like political exclusion, "indiscriminate state violence against mobilized groups and opposition figures is likely to reinforce the plausibility, justifiability, and (hence) diffusion of the idea that the state needs to be violently "smashed" and radically reorganized[34]".

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[28] Tilly, C. (1978). *From Mobilization to Revolution.* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

[29] Cederman, L. E., Gleditsch, K. S., & Buhaug, H. (2013), Ibid,, p. 45

[30] Jasper, J. M. (1998). The Emotions of Protest: Affective and Reactive Emotions in and around Social Movements. *Sociological Forum, 13*(3). doi:10.1023/A:1022175308081, p. 409. See also Hechter, M. (1987). *Principles of Group Solidarity.* Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

[31] Mercer, J. (2005). Rationality and Psychology in International Politics. *International Organization, 59*(1), 77–106. doi:10.1017/S0020818305050058; Petersen, R. (2002). *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[32] Goodwin, J. (1997). State-Centered Approaches to Social Revolutions: Strengths and Limitations of a Theoretical Tradition. In J. Foran, *Theorizing Revolutions.* London: Routledge, pp. 17

[33] Cederman, L. E., Gleditsch, K. S., & Buhaug, H. (2013), ibid,, p. 50

[34] Goodwin, J. (1997). State-Centered Approaches to Social Revolutions: Strengths and Limitations of a Theoretical Tradition. In J. Foran, *Theorizing Revolutions.* London: Routledge, pp. 19

Thus, indiscriminate violence from the side of the state is clearly counterproductive since it is inclined to further excavate and radicalize grievances. This essentially puts the last piece of the causal mechanism into place, completing the pathway from horizontal inequalities to grievances, and from grievances to civil war.

Sociopsychological Foundations of Intractable Conflicts

One of the most prominent scientific disciplines dealing with conflict is political psychology. It is mainly concerned with such political puzzles where different forms of political functioning take place both at individual and group levels, specifically looking at the human behavior from the perspective of politics, in particular, political systems and processes, structures, and events[35]. Simply put, political psychology explains political phenomena through psychological lenses. This provides scientists a unique perspective for analyzing the roots and the deep causes of conflicts between social groups. As Tajfel argues, social identity is the "part of an individual's self-concept, which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership[36]".

It is where political psychology and social identity theory meet that Bar-Tal brings in an insightful conceptual approach that maps a framework concerned with the sociopsychological infrastructures in the society in the context of intractable conflicts. Bar-Tal's main argument is that in order to adapt to the intractable conflict conditions, societies tend to develop some sort of sociopsychological infrastructure that comprises collective memory, conflict ethos, and collective emotional orientations[37]. This infrastructure basically helps the members of the society to satisfy their needs, deal with the stress that conflict has created, as well as resist the opposing side.

Intractability here primarily refers to the conflict's severity and durability. According to the approach Bar-Tal suggests, when talking about intractable conflicts, we are looking at conflicts that are characterized by being protracted, violent, perceivably irresolvable, and demanding extensive investment[38]. Such conflicts usually have a long history of existence and have lasted so long that at least a generation has not lived in a reality without that conflict. Because of the long duration and continuous confrontations between the sides of these conflicts, such societies usually tend to develop, what I would call, a culture of violence. In other words, the intensity and frequency of physical violence remain so much that it normalizes the long-term feeling of insecurity, creating a demand for further violence. This conflict continuum then begins to feel irresolvable among the society members, inasmuch as the vicious cycle of violence keeps reproducing itself and creates a feeling that the parties will never be able to reach an agreement to resolve the conflict in peaceful means. Finally, these conditions naturally create a demand for serious military, financial, and human investment into surviving the conflict, if not winning it. This in its turn, rationalizes the conflict (i.e. the

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[35] Bar-Tal, D. (2001). Foreword: Meanings of "Psychology as Politics". *Political Psychology, 22*(2), 219-226. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/3791923

[36] Tajfel, H. (1974). Social identity and intergroup behaviour. *Trends and Developments, 13*(2). doi:10.1177/053901847401300204, p. 69

[37] Bar-Tal, D. (2007). Sociopsychological Foundations of Intractable Conflicts. *American Behavioral Scientist, 50*(11), 1430-1453. doi:10.1177/0002764207302462

[38] Ibid.

resources have been mobilized, they have to serve their purpose), increases the durability of conflict, and thus makes the conflict intractable[39].

As the author rightfully argues, intractable conflicts are also existential in nature and become a struggle for survival. Due to this, such conflicts are considered zero-sum or win-or-lose in essence, which polarizes the parties of the conflict further and makes the conflict the most central aspect of social life and the public agenda. This leads to the development of a sociopsychological infrastructure in the conflict context that serves the main purpose of providing support to the society in adapting to the intractable conflict.

This sociopsychological infrastructure, according to Bar-Tal, combines three key elements: collective memories, ethos of conflict, and collective emotional orientations, which are interconnected and are primarily built on societal beliefs. Bar-Tal defines societal beliefs as "cognitions shared by society members on topics and issues that are of special concern for their society and contribute to their sense of uniqueness[40]".

In particular, **collective memory** is constructed to provide a narrative about the past that in fact does not attempt to shape objective history but rather represent it in a way that would be most functional for the society's present existence within the given conflict context. This is essentially a socially constructed public narrative that is considered to be rather biased, selective, and one-sided, and serves the purpose of framing the past in a certain way and thus guiding the interpretations thereof. Inasmuch as collective memory is based on societal beliefs, it is usually commonly shared by the members of the society and most of the time viewed as the only truth about the society.

Collective memory is reasonably complemented by another belief system commonly called **conflict ethos**, which Bar-Tal defines as "the configuration of shared central societal beliefs that provide a particular dominant orientation to society at present and for the future[41]". This is the logical continuation of collective memory except that it is constructed to explain the present and the future of the reality, providing meanings and orientation on the conflict, its purpose, conditions, as well as the in-group and out-group self-conceptions.

Finally, collective memory and conflict ethos are cemented by the **collective emotional orientations**. These are social constructs that frame the answer to the question of what emotions the society members should experience in response to the constructed conceptualization and context of the conflict. Usually, collective emotional orientations are revolving around such emotions as collective fear, hatred, or anger, and in some cases also guilt or pride.

The interdependency between intractable conflict and the sociopsychological infrastructure becomes especially interesting when viewing conflicts on the grounds of ethnicity. This in part is addressed in the work of Worchel and Coutant. The authors attempt to showcase that the sociopsychological landscape is especially ubiquitous in inter-ethnic and inter-cultural conflicts[42], which is the primary factor in the prevalence

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[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., p. 1435
[41] Ibid., p. 1438
[42] Worchel, S., & Coutant, D. K. (2008). Between Conflict and Reconciliation: Toward a Theory of Peaceful Coexistence. In A. Nadler, T. Malloy, & J. D. Fisher, *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Reconciliation.* New York: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195300314.003.0019

and persistence of such conflicts. In this, a major role is played by fear which principally is sensitizing and highlighting the threatening cues in the intergroup relationship.

Essentially, fear is something that makes people interpret unclear information or happenings as negative and threatening. And since fear at group-level is an emotion that is in itself unwanted and does not necessarily require reasoning, sociopsychological infrastructure helps focus on making it look reasonable. Hence, the fear from the rival group is justified by emphasizing the potential danger posed by the out-group. What follows afterward is that the out-group, or rather its conception, begins to be constructed with evil portrayals and in a homogeneous way, beginning to be considered homogenous, so the in-group members find themselves in a difficult position to differentiate between the out-group members. In Worchel and Coutant's words, "fear of specific groups becomes chronic and is adopted into the group's history[43]".

In sum, collective memory, conflict ethos, and collective emotional orientations are what enhance the sociopsychological infrastructure in the society, which despite helping the society members to cope with the stress arising from the conflict and not lose touch with their individual and group identity, also poses rather long-term effects that are usually considered to be challenging for the development of the society at large.

Discussion: Filling the Gap

Drawing on the theoretical scopes presented in the previous section, this discussion attempts to synthesize the main theoretical arguments of those frameworks in the context of studying the Karabakh movement. By doing so, this paper's objective is to outline some conceptual and operational guidelines for exploring the Karabakh movement within the disciplinary scopes of the sociology of conflict. Each of the theoretical approaches in itself and their combination per se has huge potential in shedding light on this research problem.

On one hand, the theory[44] by Cederman et al. is an excellent explanatory framework that showcases the link between group-level inequalities and the emergence of civil war, through collective grievances. This has rarely been systematically studied in the case of the NK conflict. Scientific knowledge on the Karabakh movement's emergence at the meso level is tough to find unless we consider the segmented and temporally and spatially limited yet important analyses that are available. Meanwhile, the everyday knowledge of the Karabakh movement's emergence is often romanticized and presented within patriotic ideologies. Both of these levels of knowledge are indeed essential and are key parts of the scientific and public discourses on the NK problem, however, both of them overlook the arguably complex and multi-layered process of the emergence of a political movement of such a scale, at the meso level.

On the other hand, the theory[45] by Bar-Tal offers a unique conceptual framework that constructs sociopsychological foundations in intractable conflicts. The NK conflict in

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[43] Ibid., p. 6

[44] Cederman, L. E., Gleditsch, K. S., & Buhaug, H. (2013). *Inequality, Grievances and Civil War.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139084161

[45] Bar-Tal, D. (2007). Sociopsychological Foundations of Intractable Conflicts. *American Behavioral Scientist, 50*(11), 1430-1453. doi:10.1177/0002764207302462

general, and the Karabakh movement in particular, have seldom been systematically investigated within the wider context of past traumas as part of the Armenian identity. Specifically, the Genocide trauma, although having been studied continuously within the context of collective memory and collective identity, has arguably not been interpreted sufficiently as a background explanation for such a large-scale national mobilization as seen in the case of NK. Furthermore, collective memory, conflict ethos, and collective emotional orientations have not been observed as interconnected nodes making up a psycho-social landscape that feeds back the culture of intractable conflict.

The combined potential of theoretical approaches to horizontal inequalities and sociopsychological infrastructure can allow depicting the process of the emergence of the Karabakh movement, and, simply put, answer the research question on why did the Karabakh movement emerge (when it could have possibly not)? Relevant hypothetical answers to this question could be the following:
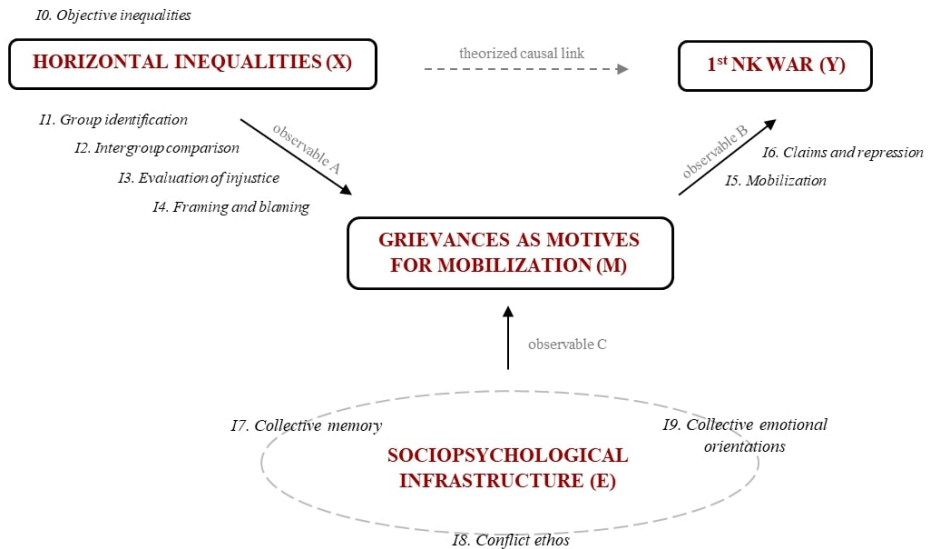
H1: Horizontal inequalities between Armenians and Azerbaijanis are what underlie the emergence and evolvement of the Karabakh movement.

H2: Mobilization of Armenians around the NK problem is predominantly conditioned by sociopsychological infrastructure formed against the genocide trauma.

In order to test these hypotheses, a deductive process tracing (theory testing)[46] would be most relevant. This will enable exploring the issue from the perspectives of both structure and agency, creating a unique space for sociology to 'do its job.' This will also allow testing the theory of horizontal inequalities in the case of the NK conflict, and if necessary, suggesting relevant modifications and contextual improvements to this theory. Moreover, considering the multi-layered nature of such a research puzzle, the sole analysis of the causal link between inequalities and armed conflict would not suffice alone, hence I argue that the interpretative perspective would constitute the "real" value of such an inquiry. Building on this, I hereby construct an analytical framework that could potentially serve as an operational design for such an investigation. The amalgamation of the discussed theoretical approaches and their contextualization within the scopes of the NK conflict is represented in Figure 4, which essentially captures the main findings of this theoretical-methodological overview.

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[46] Bennett, A., & Checkel, J. T. (2015). *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool.* Cambridge University Press.

Figure 4. Analytical framework for studying the emergence of the Karabakh movement

I0. Objective inequalities

HORIZONTAL INEQUALITIES (X) — — — theorized causal link — — — → **1ˢᵗ NK WAR (Y)**

I1. Group identification
I2. Intergroup comparison
I3. Evaluation of injustice
I4. Framing and blaming

observable A

observable B

I6. Claims and repression
I5. Mobilization

GRIEVANCES AS MOTIVES FOR MOBILIZATION (M)

observable C

I7. Collective memory

SOCIOPSYCHOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE (E)

I9. Collective emotional orientations

I8. Conflict ethos

As presented in Figure 4, the analysis shall ideally try to test theorized causal link between horizontal inequalities (serving as an **independent variable**) and the first NK war (serving as a **dependent variable**). Collective grievances shall serve as **mediating variable**s, and sociopsychological infrastructure shall be observed as an **extraneous variable**.

Horizontal inequalities (X) – independent variable

In order to test this causal relationship, this inquiry shall first look for objective evidence of possible horizontal inequalities. This shall be based on the collection of morphological data, as in existing literature, research, raw statistical data, and archival materials. The systematic analysis of such data will allow, in case of discovering objective inequalities (Indicator 0), to establish support for the theoretical presumption that there were, in fact, horizontal inequalities between Armenians and Azerbaijanis of NK.

1ˢᵗ NK War (Y) – dependent variable

The dependent variable shall be kept constant, retrospectively building on the fact of the first Nagorno-Karabakh war having erupted in 1988. The link between X and Y shall be studied through the exploration of two consequent mediating processes, respectively the Observable A (the process of horizontal inequalities shaping grievances) and Observable B (the process of grievances leading to armed conflict). Additionally, Observable C (the process of sociopsychological infrastructure shaping motives for mobilization) should be explored to support the testing of this hypothesized relationship.

Observable A – From Horizontal Inequalities to Grievances

This process shall be observed by studying the narratives of the people having lived in NK upon the emergence of the Karabakh movement, attempting to depict the societal interpretations of the theorized process between group-level inequalities and collective grievances. Observable A can be analyzed through four theory-based indicators (group

identification, intergroup comparison, evaluation of injustice, and framing and blaming). All of these are aspects of agency, to be looked upon at individual and group levels. Hence, this agency can best be analyzed through narrative methodological inquiry, since the latter allows exploring both the substance and essence of social structures and the ways individuals interact with those[47].

Observable B – From Grievances to NK War

Observable B is the process from collective grievances to the eruption of the first Nagorno-Karabakh war, and basically represents the Karabakh movement in our case, from the time it was first publicly announced up till the moment of the outbreak of military operations. This process can be observed via two phasic indicators (mobilization and claims and repression) that are to be looked for among the Karabakh movement participants and the leaders and coordinators thereof. From the perspective of scientific knowledge, qualitative data (through narrative and key-informant interviews) is required here to allow a better and more in-depth understanding of the interrelation between the agency and structure.

Observable C – From Sociopsychological Infrastructure to Grievances

Analyzing the observable C is to bring about insights into the hypothesized effect of sociopsychological infrastructure, here represented by three indicators (collective memory, conflict ethos, and collective emotional orientations), on collective grievances. The theoretical presumption of this inquiry is that previously suppressed Genocidal trauma created additional emotional and psychological motives for mobilization, serving as an additional feeding source for the advancement of societal grievances. This, too, epistemologically, falls into the field of interpretative paradigm and can be best explored through in-depth analysis of interpretations of movement participants, movement leaders, as well as NK-specialized social scientists.

Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to construct and propose a rather alternative theoretical approach to the studies of the origins of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The overview of the theoretical approaches to horizontal inequalities and sociopsychological infrastructure in intractable conflicts presented in this article potentially allows filling a major knowledge gap in NK studies, as well as resolving a number of relevant methodological and theoretical puzzles. Particularly, the analytical framework that I conceptualize and arrive at in this paper may serve the discipline of sociology of conflict in multiple ways.

Firstly, I argue that the level of analysis in NK studies shall be shifted to the meso level. This by no means implies neglecting the ready-made scholarly contributions at macro and micro levels of analysis, but rather creating space for their combination. The latter is further visible when sufficient attention is paid to the origins of the NK conflict as we know it currently, as in the *civic movement* that manifested itself in the form of the Karabakh movement. Hence, to make sense of the later followed regional dynamics and

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[47] McAlpine, L. (2016). Why might you use narrative methodology? A story about narrative. *Eesti Haridusteaduste Ajakiri, 4*(1), 32-57. doi:10.12697/eha.2016.4.1.02b; See also Syed, M., & McLean, K. C. (2021). Master narrative methodology: A primer for conducting structural-psychological research. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 1939-0106. doi:10.1037/cdp0000470

the local consequences of this localized inter-state ethnopolitical conflict from 1988 up until now, we shall turn our analytical focus to the group-level, trying to comprehend why the Karabakh movement arose above all.

Secondly, I suggest that combining wider macro and micro theoretical approaches will enable observing the NK conflict in two dimensions simultaneously. On the one hand, exploring societal structures and objective factors underlying the Karabakh movement can shed light on possible inter-ethnic horizontal inequalities. On the other hand, the perspective of social agency and concrete actors can bring about exceptional insights for investigating the sociopsychological background of the NK conflict. This two-dimensional analysis might potentially channel a whole new framework and outlook into understanding the causes of the NK conflict.

Lastly, the analytical framework designed as a result of this theoretical pondering builds itself on the fusion of collecting two types of knowledge, one being rather historical-sociological and factual, as possible indicators of actual inter-group inequalities; and the other being sociopsychological knowledge nested within subjective experiences, memories, and fears.

It is fair to restate that this paper has not aimed at testing the applicability of the discussed approaches, as this can only be accomplished through an empirical inquiry. Neither does this paper claim which definitions of the war apply more when speaking of the NK conflict. Instead, this paper has a rather humble purpose, in highlighting a possible theoretical space at the meso level of scholarship, where relevant theory-testing and empirical research can later be pursued.

To conclude, such a conglomeration of morphological and individual knowledge at the group level of analysis extends a possibility of a promising and ambitious sociological approach to the studies of the NK conflict. The analysis of the Karabakh movement through the prism of horizontal inequalities possesses the potential for opening up an alternative domain for conceptualizing the deeper layers of the conflict and moving the scientific discourse further ahead on this matter. In the long run, this may as well provide an improved and grounded framework for feasible policy interventions and political actions directed toward the resolution of this extremely complex and protracted conflict, highlighting possible pathways for terminating the relentless sufferings of those directly or indirectly affected by the conflict.

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ՀԱՅԿ ՍՄԲԱՏՅԱՆ – *Ղարաբաղյան կոնֆլիկտը հորիզոնական անհավասարություն-*

ների պրիզմայով. տեսական ակնարկ – Հոդվածում առաջարկվում է տեսավերլու-
ծական այլընտրանքային մոտեցում կոնֆլիկտի սոցիոլոգիայի շրջանակներում
Ղարաբաղյան կոնֆլիկտի ծագման հիմքերը խմբային մակարդակում ուսումնասի-
րելու համար: Քննարկվում են հորիզոնական անհավասարություններին և անլուծելի
կոնֆլիկտներում սոցիալ-հոգեբանական ենթակառուցվածքին անդրադարձող տեսա-
կան մոտեցումներ՝ հատկապես կենտրոնանալով 1988 թ. Ղարաբաղյան շարժման
ծնավորման հիմքերի վրա: Հիմնվելով մակրո- և միկրո- տեսական մոտեցումների
սինթեզի վրա՝ աշխատանքն անդրադառնում է կոնֆլիկտի սկզբնաղբյուրները
բացահայտելու հնարավոր եղանակներին՝ միմյանց կամրջելով սոցիալական կառուց-
վածքը և սոցիալական գործողությունը, ինչպես նաև կազմաբանական գիտելիքն ու
անհատական կենսափորձը: Ելնելով քննարկված տեսական մոտեցումների կենտրո-
նական գաղափարներից՝ այս աշխատանքը կառուցում և առաջարկում է հնարավոր
վերլուծական շրջանակ՝ ըստ էության ձևակերպելով սույն տեսամեթոդաբանական
ակնարկի հիմնական բացահայտումները: Առաջարկվող վերլուծական շրջանակը
հնարավորություն ունի դառնալու Ղարաբաղյան կոնֆլիկտի պատճառների մեգովեր-
լուծության օպերացիոնալ նախագծի հիմք:

Բանալի բառեր – *սոցիալ-հոգեբանական ենթակառուցվածք, կոնֆլիկտի սոցիոլո-
գիա, Ղարաբաղյան շարժում, սոցիալական շարժումներ, հորիզոնական անհավասա-
րություն, կոլեկտիվ բողոք, Ղարաբաղյան կոնֆլիկտ*

АЙК СМБАТЯН – *Нагорно-Карабахский конфликт через призму горизонтальных неравенств: теоретический обзор* – Статья представляет собой теоретический обзор, который разрабатывает и предлагает альтернативную аналитическую основу в рамках

социологии конфликта для изучения истоков Нагорно-Карабахского конфликта на групповом уровне. В данной статье рассматриваются теоретические подходы к горизонтальному неравенству и социально-психологической инфраструктуре в трудноразрешимых конфликтах, акцентируя внимание на вопросе возникновения Карабахского движения в 1988 году. Основываясь на синтезе макро- и микротеоретических подходов, в статье рассматриваются возможные пути исследования корней конфликта, связывая социальную структуру с социальной деятельностью, а морфологическое знание - с индивидуальным опытом. Таким образом, исходя из центральных аргументов рассмотренных подходов, выстраивается аналитическая схема, фиксирующая основные выводы данного теоретико-методологического обзора. Аналитическая структура, предложенная в этой статье, потенциально может служить основой для операционализации мезоуровневого анализа причин Нагорно-Карабахского конфликта.

Ключевые слова: *социально-психологическая инфраструктура, социология конфликта, Карабахское движение, социальные движения, горизонтальное неравенство, коллективное недовольство, Нагорно-Карабахский конфликт*

Հայկ Սմբատյան - Երևանի պետական համալսարանի Սոցիոլոգիայի ֆակուլտետի սոցիոլոգիայի տեսության և պատմության ամբիոնի ասպիրանտ, Ուփսալայի համալսարանի Հասարակական գիտությունների մագիստրոս, Շվեդիա
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