

Introduction: Elites or “Elites”? Towards the Anthropology of the Concept in Armenia and Georgia

Yulia Antonyan

Goals and methodology

This volume is the result of a joint, Armenian-Georgian anthropological survey of the concept of “elites” in contemporary Georgia and Armenia. The survey has embraced a set of topics related to the process of the formation of new national elites in the course of the construction of the nation-states, genealogy and typology of new elites, mechanisms and principles of organization of power, old and new hierarchical structures, and their continuity with the cultural heritage of previous periods of history. Particular attention has been paid to the degree with which the newly-formed or transformed elites correspond to popular perceptions of the concept of elites, and how they are changing in the course of transformation of elites and the elite culture. This study of elites, elitism and the elitist involves different social (and also ethnic and religious) groups, which have been affected by the process of reconfiguration of social structures.

The research outcome is organized as a set of individual case studies, based on common theoretical presuppositions and statements. This approach is justified because of the difference of research interests and specializations of the project participants, as well as by the variety of possible approaches to the study of elites.

Therefore, we decided not to limit ourselves to the traditional power elites (mostly economic and political), but tried to enlarge the field by including elites of ethnic and social minorities, sub-elite groups, the so-called moral elites, the lost elites of the past and the imagined elites of the present, and, importantly, relationships, conflicts and other ways of interlocking of elites.

Research methods included field studies with qualitative interviews, queries and observations, analysis of discursive fields reflected in daily conversations, mass media and social networks. Questionnaires have been developed separately for each of the studies. In more detail, the methodology for each case study will be addressed in the relevant chapters of the monograph, authored by the participants of the research project (Y. Antonyan, K. Khutsishvili, H. Melkumyan, T. Kamushadze, E. Hovhannisyan, N. Abakelia, G. Cheishvili, and H. Muradyan).

Discussing the concept of the elite sociologically and anthropologically. Main stages of the sociological and anthropological study of elites

Elites as a concept, as a social unit (group, class, stratum, caste) have been studied in a sociological and anthropological perspective for more than a century, starting from the fundamental and already classic works of Mosca, Pareto, Manheim¹, up to the modern studies of concepts and phenomena of power, the bourgeoisie, aristocracy, oligarchy, intellectuals, change and conflict of elites, etc. In general,

¹ See: Mosca 1994, Pareto 1961, 1961a, Manheim 2000. A comparative analysis of the works and theories of these authors is represented in many overviews (e.g. Mills 1956), so we did not find it necessary to address them in detail in this introduction, though we will refer to some of them later in the text.

as a further analysis will demonstrate, sociology has studied elites as a part of studies of social structures by addressing their historical and modern developments in terms of a change of political regimes, and economic and political transformations in a historical perspective, in local and global senses. As to the anthropological insight, the situation is more complicated here. The concept of the elite as a separate and self-sufficient topic for research has entered into the anthropological field quite recently, although even at the outset of the discipline, the archaic and indigenous institutes of power, leadership and prestige were the focus of the academic attention of classical anthropologists (L. H. Morgan, B. Malinovski, A. Radcliff-Brown, etc.). The specifics of the anthropological field led to the accumulation of very different data on elites which have barely been analyzed through general and comparative perspectives, by collating the anthropological theory with the sociological one. Several edited volumes published quite recently discuss the concept of the elite in the anthropological perspective (Shore, Nagent 2002; Salverda, Abbink, 2013) and state the main principles and approaches of the anthropological research of elites. It should be, first, based on the research of discursive frameworks within which elites are conceptualized and constituted in different cultural contexts (Shore, Nagent 2002: 3); second, on studying and understanding elites from within, by charting the cultural dynamics and the habitus formation that perpetuate their role, dominance or acceptance (Salverda, Abbink 2013: 2-3); and, third, concentrating on factors and processes that make elites culturally determined, that is practices of maintaining dominance over the subaltern groups, the legitimation of power and leadership and reproduction of elites over time (Salverda, Abbink 2013: 3).

However, it should be noted that unlike sociologists, who seemed

to be quite at ease with the initial coherency of the concept of elites, anthropologists have always problematized it. Chris Shore, mentioning the chapters in the volume he edited and for which he wrote the introduction (Spenser), indicated the indefiniteness and mobility of this concept depending on particular cultural contexts. Our research also proves this. However, on the other hand, as he notes with reference to George Marcus, the very concept of the elite suggests that the process and phenomenon of formation of groups of power and prestige, and cultural forms of organization and practicing of power may be mapped and described. And, finally, C. Shore suggests the working definition of elites as those who occupy the most influential positions or roles in the important spheres of social life (Shore, Nugent 2002: 4). This definition does not set the elite as a particular social group, or a class, or a stratum, but on the other hand, evokes a question about how to measure the cultural relativity of the important or unimportant spheres of life.

All the pieces of study of elites in Armenia and Georgia represented in this volume are of an anthropological nature. Therefore, particular attention was paid to the specific cultural and social contexts that actualized the investigated processes and phenomena. This is the main reason why we prioritize and rely in theoretical terms on those authors who contextualize the notion of elite, elite culture and elitism, and the related social processes in historical and cultural terms. We can find the historical aspects of this contextualization in the works of M. Mann and R. Lachmann who tried to demonstrate the historical mobility and temporal and spatial embeddedness of the elite (Mann 1986, Lachmann 2000).

M. Mann's study shows how the power and power networks were

organized in different historical periods and different political and cultural environments, including both stable and unstable ones, such as revolutions and wars. Mann’s idea about societies as organized power networks happened to be useful for understanding how the power elites of contemporary Georgia and Armenia function, how different types of elites use various types of power, forming networks, conflicting, interacting and interlocking. Richard Lachmann studied interaction and the structures of elites in different historical and cultural contexts, and emphasized the concept of conflict of elites, meaning a conflict of their interests, collisions and fight of elites, which he believes were the main driving force for the changes and transformations of the social and political structures of a society. According to him, elites and not classes or individuals are the main agents of history. Lachmann points out that “elite conflict occurs when an elite attempts to undermine another elite’s capacity to extract resources from non-elites” (Lachmann 2000: 11). His case study of social and economic processes in Florence of the Renaissance, which encompasses the analysis of oligarchic government and oligarchic power evokes a set of parallels with the current situation in Armenia and Georgia, despite the differences of epochs.

The other concepts of power elites are also very important for our research. Thus, M. Mann drew his concept of elites on four types of power, also identified by him: military, political, ideological and economic, each being attached to a particular type of elite. (Mann 1986: 2). C. Wright Mills in his study of the “Elites of Power” tried to answer the question: who is the power elite? Like Mann, he too identified three “higher circles” of society, i.e. economy, political order and military order. He emphasized the cumulative nature of

wealth, power and prestige as the main outcomes of the elitist status. As to the social nature of the elite, C. Wright Mills considers it to be a social and psychological entity, thus trying to avoid using the concepts of classes, social groups or estates. According to him, the unity of elites is not a simple unity of institutions; men and institutions are always related (Mills 1956: 19). However, elite institutes and structures are mobile and changeable; moreover, elites can transform the structures within which they function. For instance, “elites may smash one structure and set up another in which they enact different roles” (Mills 1956: 24). This not very flagrant correlation of elites as groups of individuals and elites as institutions brings about the mess and the oscillation of scholars studying elites between two extremes: the elite are omnipotent, and the elite are impotent (Mills 1956: 16). This is well represented by the transformation of elite institutes in the post-Soviet period and by “migrations” of elites from one social institute to another.

In the context of the anthropology of elites, a study by Abner Cohen, “The Politics of Elite Culture” may be considered as one of the most important (1981). His research may be characterized as explorations in the dramaturgy of power, based on modern African society. He discusses symbolic forms of elitism and techniques of the symbolization of power. He focuses his attention on the “dramaturgy” of power, meaning social mechanisms for the wielding and enactment of power. In the light of his findings, A. Cohen suggests a concept of “power mystique” – a cult of eliteness, understanding eliteness as a set of qualities that can be learned only informally, through social practices, which are attributed to this social group by origin.

Among those theoretical works that influenced our research, a

piece worth mentioning is the volume edited by M. Dogan entitled “Elites’ Configuration at the Apex of Power” (2003), which is focused on problems of the linkage between the elites, the interconnections at the summit of power, and a concept of elite interlocking.

The concepts of elites and elitism, especially in the context of cultural values considered “elitist” usually encompass those social and cultural groups that are entitled or pretend to be entitled to represent a model for a highly moral and civilized mode of life, a kind of cultural and civilizational ideal of society. Norbert Elias in his “Court Society” tried to demonstrate how such a perception was formed and why (Elias 2002).

In Georgia and Armenia, those groups are represented by the intelligentsia and descendants of aristocracy (mostly in Georgia) who have still preserved social memories of their families or have reconstructed this memory in the post-Soviet period. There is an entire bunch of studies related to aristocracy, the big bourgeoisie (e.g. Lamont 1992; Pinçon, Pinçon-Charlot 2007) and intelligentsia. The latter is often categorized as the moral elite as well (Oushakin 2009) meaning that it is endowed with the capacity to set up, embody through itself and follow up the norms and criteria of morality. Articles by Gella 1971; Geiger 1955; N. Basov, G. Simet, J. Van Andel, et al. 2010; Eyerman 1992; Foucauld 2002 address such issues as the interactions of moral, intellectual and power elites and their role in the formation and transformation of political regimes.

One of the aspects of our research considers relationships of different types of elite with religion. Religion has always been a tool for and a source of the emergence, legitimation and sacralization of different types of power (intellectual, political, military, etc.). Moder-

nity seems to have changed little in this approach. Particular forms of religion, such as civil religion, may serve as a source of moral justification of power and prioritization of values that can be best explained and conceptualized by religion. However, in the post-Soviet space, re-institutionalized religion plays a more important role in the formation of institutes and networks of power than just a control over the boundaries and dimensions of morality and reliability. For instance, the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Georgian Orthodox Church themselves come forward as power institutions and their support to or conflict with, power persons or institutions may affect the positions of the latter. In the light of interaction of religion and the elites, the issues of legitimation of power, the sacralization of charisma, interlocking of concepts of personal affluence and prosperity, political influence and religion are worthy of attention, especially in the context of the new economic elites of the region. In these terms, the works of E. Kantorowicz (1957), T. Koelner (2012), E. Wolf (1991) may provide a sound theoretical basis.

Study of elites in the post-socialist and post-Soviet academic discourse

The issue of old and new elites in the post-Soviet and post-socialist space as a topic for research emerged in the early stage of post-Soviet and post-socialist studies. Thus, it is addressed in the volume edited by G. Eval, I. Szelenyi, E. Townsley, entitled “Making capitalism without capitalists. The new ruling elites in Eastern Europe” (2000). The chapters of the volume discuss the process of transformation of the socialist elites into their post-socialist counterparts, with particular attention paid to the continuity of elites in the transi-

tional perspective. It was shown in particular, that “post-communist capitalism has been promoted by a broadly defined intelligentsia, committed to the cause of bourgeois society and capitalist economic conditions” (Eval, Szelenyi, Townsley 2000: 1). According to the authors, capitalism in the post-socialist space has resulted with two different forms. Firstly, it is “capitalism without capitalists” (countries of Eastern Europe), in which the representatives of the previous “nomenklatura” took on the roles of capitalists as they were those who had access to privatization of resources of power (as authors say, there was a transition from “plan” to “clan”). In fact, the nomenklatura has transformed into the big bourgeoisie, crushing down the Marxists’ thesis stating that transition to capitalism is impossible without having a developed class of capitalists. The second form is “capitalists without capitalism”, which is specific for Russia and, as the authors implicitly suggest, other post-Soviet countries. This form means that accumulation of wealth in private hands is far ahead of the establishment of market institutions (Eval, Szelenyi, Townsley 2000: 5). The absence of the legal and “civilized” institutes of market economy led to the formation of alternative, “violent” entrepreneurship institutes, as a Russian sociologist Vadim Volkov called them. Volkov defines violent entrepreneurship as a set of organizational decisions and action strategies enabling the conversion of organized force into money or other market resources (Volkov 2012: 10). This makes criminal circles the important players in, and agents of, the process of formation of new economic elites, and, therefore, criminal ways of thinking, behaving and institutionalizing business.

Another academic discourse that influenced our research mechanisms is that of the concept of neo-feudalism in the countries of the

post-Soviet space, which is, in particular, being developed in the post-socialism studies of K. Verdery (Verdery 1996). The concept of neo-feudalism seemed relevant to our study and it is developed in a chapter on the Armenian oligarchy.

Another conceptually meaningful book is a study on the culture of power in post-communist Russia by Michael Urban, where he suggests an analysis of elite political discourse (Urban 2010). In the context of continuity of elites, G. Derlugian's book "Bourdieu's admirer in the Caucasus" should be mentioned (2004). The author (who is also the adviser for this project) paid much attention to the shaping of Soviet and post-Soviet social structures and transformations of elites and individuals in the Caucasus. Also, the works of A. Bocharov (2006) and T. Schepanskaya (2006) on the origins and semiotics of power should be mentioned. The authors consider the practices and attributes of power in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods as a topic for analysis.

Studies of elites in post-Soviet Armenia and Georgia

The study of elites in Armenia and Georgia has not had a long history yet. Contemporary research seems to be limited mostly to the political elite. In particular, British sociologist H. Tschilingiryan explored the influence of the Karabakh elite on the advancement of the conflict (1999). He defined "elite" as members of three groups: intellectuals, top representatives of military-political institutions, and the economic elite, whose role he considered unimportant. More or less targeted research on contemporary political elites has been done by M. Margaryan (2006) and a group of sociologists coordinated by H. Danielyan (Danielyan et al. 2014). The latter was

aimed at a multifaceted study of the political elite of Armenia. The authors tried to identify the social specifics of the Armenian political elite, its social, gender and age characteristics, life strategies of becoming politicians, values and preferences. They also analyzed the social networks of which the Armenian political elite comprise a part, viewing them as a basic tool for the analysis of the political elite, according to their own definition (Danielyan et al 2014: 40). However, the research was mostly of a quantitative nature and its main problem was that all the findings were averaged, so it was not clear how they might be correlated with the social-age-gender variety of the Armenian political elite mentioned in the first part of the research. Nevertheless, some findings turned out to be very useful for us, in particular the observation on correlations between the degree to which elite representatives are involved in social networking, their position as networkers and the degree of personal power and political influence.

As far as other types of elite are concerned, we can mention the article of one of the participants of the research project, Y. Antonyan, in which she analyzes a post-Soviet discursive field developed around the concept of the Armenian intelligentsia (Antonyan 2012). In this article, a problem of “false” and “true” (genuine) elites is addressed, which is relevant for this particular research as well.

As for the situation in Georgia, the study of elites was triggered by the Rose Revolution of 2003, when a technical change in the political elites took place, due to the change of political regimes. Follow-up analyses of these changes have resulted in coining the concept of “old” and “new” elites, meaning the political and economic elites of the pre-Saakashvili and Saakashvili periods (see

Chiaberashvili, Tevzadze 2005, G. Gotua 2008, 2011; Gvalia, Lebnidze, Iashvili 2011). One more analysis of the pre-Saakashvili and Saakashvili elites is presented in the paper of Tukvadze et al. (2006) about the transformations in the Georgian political system in from a Soviet and post-Soviet perspective. The authors point out the continuity of the Georgian elites, and analyze the role of the image of a charismatic leader in the Georgian culture. The concept of “old” and “new” elites is also considered in this paper, again in the sense mentioned above.

However, the division of elites in the context of the Rose Revolution is too situational and the latest political developments (the dismissal of Saakashvili’s regime) demonstrate the non-relevance of this approach.

Chapters addressing the interaction among political and economic power, elites and religion may be found in a volume called “Religion, Nation and Democracy in the South Caucasus” A. Agadjanian, A. Jodicke, E. van Der Zverde (eds.), 2015, chapters by A. Jodicke, B. Janelidze, Y. Antonyan, T. Kekelia, and S. Hovhannisyanyan)

Anthropological description of elites, cultures of elites and elite cultures

Prior to speaking about the anthropological description of elites, it would be logical to give a working definition of the elite, appropriate for this volume. There are several definitions and most of them agree that elites are power groups. Thus, Mosca characterized elites as a ruling class. R. Lachmann defines elites in a similar way: “An elite can be defined as a group of rulers with the capacity to appropriate resources from non-elites and who inhabit a distinct organi-

zational apparatus” (Lachmann 2000: 9). Besides, to define elites, Lachmann uses the concepts of social and cultural capital, though unlike Bourdieu, he thinks that cultural capital as the basis of the elite control may be related not to individuals or their families, but to the organizations creating the elite (Lachmann 2000: 9-10). The cultural capital of elites, among other things, is in the symbols and attributes of legitimate power.

Not only formal power, but also the cultural capital couched in the symbols and paraphernalia of legitimized power makes the elite what they are. This is demonstrated by our research which points out the differences between what the elite should be and what it is in reality. Those differences come out of certain symbolic models of cultural representation of the elite persisting in the cultural memory of society. This discrepancy between the real and the imagined elites in Armenian society produces an important discourse on “true” or “genuine” and “false” elites. The authenticity or falsehood of the elite, in fact, are believed to be defined by the presence of cultural symbolism and “innate” qualities which legitimize the elite in the framework of the so-called “high culture”, a model of which is allegedly reproduced through generations and, because of this continuity, it has a right to dominate over other strata of the society. In case the elite does not meet these imagined characteristics, it is deprived the right of being called the elite. This corresponds to A. Cohen’s writings about elitism and elite power. He defines “eliteness” as qualities that can be learned only informally through social practices. (Cohen 1981: 2) The elite, according to him, is an elaborate body of symbols and dramatic performances: manners, etiquette, styles of dress, accent, patterns of recreational activity, marriage rules etc.

(Cohen 1981: 3) He also points out that when symbols of their cult (of elite) lose their potency, when outside audiences cease to defer to them, such elites lose their legitimacy and are likely to lose power (Cohen 1981: 4). The Armenian power elites do not seem to lose their power, not only because they possess the main economic and military resources of power, but also because they follow the cultural codes of elite groups of the Soviet and post-Soviet times, i.e. the party nomenklatura and criminals, or the so-called thieves-at-law.

The discrepancy between power and legitimacy in post-Soviet Georgia and Armenia is directly or indirectly addressed in the present research and many of the chapters of this volume examine this particular problem. After all, this discrepancy is seen as the main and intriguing point of formation of the concept of elitism in Armenia and Georgia.

Other definitions like those of R. Lachmann and M. Mann referring to the elite as a certain social organization or a power network (and not a class, or a group, as Marx or Mosca thought) also seem to work out for Armenia and Georgia. However, inside this organization or network one can nevertheless identify different social and cultural groups, whose cultural and social capitals are shaped depending on the types of social connectivity and cultural heritage intrinsic to these groups. For instance, the current political elites may encompass different social and cultural groups whose values, habitus and social practices originate from a criminal, Soviet partocratic, post-imperial aristocratic, intelligentsia-related, or traditionalistic cultural milieu. Similarly, intellectual elites may also descend from different social and cultural milieus, e.g., unlike the old intelligentsia of imperial times that consisted of low and middle bourgeoisie, the

new Soviet intelligentsia was intentionally recruited from the lower parts of society, mostly workers and peasants.

Given the type of legitimation, there were two ways of building a social hierarchy in the Soviet Union. Members of the formal elites (nomenklatura, top officials of science, education and art spheres) used to be legitimized “from top to bottom”. The alternative, informal elites (descendants of aristocracy, intelligentsia, criminals, informal economic elites) got their legitimation “from inside”. A. Yurchak, in his analysis of the late Soviet period, wrote about the circles of informal intellectual elite, membership in which could be available only to those who were recognized as “insiders”, that is those who shared the same values and spoke the same cultural language (Yurchak 2005:142). The same may be said about criminal elites or informal economic elites, the so called *tsekhoviks* who established closed, clan-based networks, involvement in which was possible only through the mediation of insiders. (see e.g. Mars, Altman 1983).

An analysis of frameworks and limits of access to resources and the power of formal elites has demonstrated how closely they were dependent upon their interactions with informal structures and practices. For instance, low or middle-level party functionaries formally did not get high salaries though they had some privileges and bonuses (like an office car with a personal driver, or access to some goods in deficit). But they were key knots in a network of acquaintances exchanging informal services.

The formal and informal segments of intellectual elites were intermingled and interdependent, too. Both might be members of the same institutions like universities, academic research institutes,

creative unions, etc., but their way of affecting the non-elites and their access to resources were diametrically opposed. Thus, the Soviet ethnologist V. Kabo wrote in his memoirs that some colleagues working in the same institutions, having the same positions and academic degrees were allowed to travel abroad and others were not, depending on their “dossier” that needed formal evidence of loyalty to the Soviet authorities such as the “right” social or ethnic origin, an impeccable biography, or even personal sympathies (Kabo 1995: 260-262). Intellectuals, who were not provided access to resources and privileges, however, tried to extend their influence in alternative ways, through involvement in closed intellectual circles or employment in provincial institutions where they had comparative freedom of activities, etc. Interestingly, this “interlocking” of formal and informal elites continued in the post-Soviet period as well.

Discussing informal elites, it is necessary to clarify how they are related to the concept of power, which is an irremovable quality of the elite. I am rephrasing some statements of C. Wright Mills about the specific types of power (Mills 1956: 3) in order to get some ideas on what kind of power the informal elites may exert without being directly engaged in political or business activities. Firstly, they can affect the lives, minds, goals and imagination of ordinary men through their intellectual and creative activities. Secondly, they create the demands and imperatives of the day (like ideologies, religions, morality norms, fashion, etc.).

Democratic regimes have a different way of becoming power elites, from “the bottom to the top”, through elections. One also cannot declare himself president, unless he is elected by the people and recognized as such by presidents of other countries. During Soviet

times, such a “democratic” way of being elected and “crowned” as the “elite” was adopted by the criminal sphere (Glonti, Lobzhanidze 2004: 65-66). Being opposed to other types of Soviet formal and informal elites and respected for this, criminals offered specific values, a morality and mode of life that were later adopted (totally or partially) by the new economic elites in the post-Soviet period.

Membership among the elites can be also achieved by getting specific credentials like titles, diplomas, licenses etc., even though the credentials may be formal and, in reality, may not be convincing enough to be recognized by other members of the elite. In Armenia and Georgia this type of elite is illustrated, for example, by some representatives of the Academy, who have been awarded with different types of credentials (diplomas, academic degrees, titles), yet have no access to administrative or financial resources, nor are they capable of influencing society as intellectuals. Or, leaders of the so called “pocket” political parties can be mentioned, who fully possess all the symbols of a political leader, but have no impact, even a minor one, in the political field. During a recent (February 2015) conflict between the President of Armenia S. Sargsyan and one of the most prominent Armenian oligarchs, a head of the second biggest party of Armenia, both of them would duel by sending secondary politicians from both sides to the forefront, thus giving them illusory “credentials” of political leadership and influence. As soon as the conflict was exhausted, those politicians were immediately silenced.

General types of elites. Elites versus non-elites.

Continuity of elites

Discussing the elites in Armenia and Georgia, we may preliminarily identify two basic types: power elites (political and economic), and moral-intellectual elites. The first are those who have access to resources that allow them to concentrate different types of power in their hands (ideological, political and administrative, military, and economic), according to M. Mann (Mann 1986: 2). The second are those who pretend or are thought to be producers and keepers of the cultural (meaning intellectual and behavioral) and moral values of society, i.e. the intelligentsia, aristocracy, clergy, and artists. Some binary oppositions of formal-informal, true-false, genuine–artificial generated by public discourse serve as indicators of negotiated patterns of morality, values, and behavioral norms for the newly-formed elites. In this context, the problem of continuity of the Soviet and post-Soviet elites becomes acute, though differently manifested in Armenia and Georgia.

A number of researchers indicate that, until 2004, the continuity of Soviet and post-Soviet elites in Georgia was interrupted only during the brief and tempestuous leadership of Gamsakhurdia. After that, the Soviet nomenklatura came to power once more, headed by the previous Soviet communist leader E. Shevardnadze. The previous party and Soviet administrative elite, couched this time in the form of family clans, took back all the important administrative and economic resources (Chiaberashvili, Tevzadze 2005: 187-207, Tukvadze et al, 2006: 109, Gotua 2008: 2018), as also occurred in most post-socialist countries (Eval, Szelenyi, Townsley 2000: 4-6). Old members of the Soviet nomenklatura were mostly removed by

M. Saakashvili after the Rose Revolution. The Rose Revolution was actually an attempt to change the power elite, even though new political leaders had been shaped in close contact with and under the patronage of the old nomenklatura.

In Armenia, the top members of the nomenklatura were dismissed during the Karabakh movement and shortly after that most of them left the country because of the war and blockade (1991-95). The only attempt at the reinstatement of power positions for the Soviet elite was a failed effort by a previous Soviet party leader, K. Demirchyan. K. Demirchyan himself was shot dead a while after the failed elections, during a terroristic act in the Parliament on October 27, 1999. The continuity of elites was however provided by low- and middle-level members of the nomenklatura who had just started their career before the collapse of the Communist party and easily switched to the new ideology.

However, the continuity of elites is not defined by just a physical inheritance of power, but rather by a transfer of the principles of organization of power, practices of power and moral and behavioral norms, accompanying the processes of coming to, and exerting, power.

It is impossible to avoid a mention of charisma when analyzing the elites. M. Weber distinguished a specific type of charismatic leader, who is believed to possess “exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character” as superhuman qualities that legitimate his power (Weber 1946: 79-80). A. Cohen thinks the power charisma, the “power mystique” or the “cult of eliteness” is an inherent peculiarity of power elites (Cohen 1981: 2-4). The Georgian and Armenian political cultures developed different attitudes towards the

concepts of charisma and charismatic leaders. Tukvadze, Jaonashvili and Tukvadze seriously addressed “a traditional specific characteristic of Georgians to worship a strong authoritarian and charismatic leader”. They link public trust and strong unconventional loyalty and worship towards every upcoming leader (Tukvadze et al. 2006: 105) We do not think this can be strongly supported by academic arguments, but at least as an observation which makes a part of public discourse on leadership and charisma, this statement is worthy of being mentioned. Unlike Georgia, none of the leaders in Armenia has experienced a high level of trust and worship like their Georgian counterparts (including religious ones), and public humiliation and strong sometimes offensive criticism toward the ruling authorities have always been a part of public attitudes and opinion in Armenia. The discourses on charisma in Armenia usually end up with the statement that there has not been a leader who could be called charismatic. Some charismatic qualities sometimes are attributed to the first president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, but even in his case the discussed charisma was colored in negative tones. This contrast may be related to differences in the traditional perceptions of elites and types of interaction and relationships of elites and non-elites in both countries.

Variety of elites and concepts of elitism in Armenia and Georgia: case studies

This volume embraces very different approaches to the problem of elites in Armenian and Georgian contexts. Being both very much alike and very much distinctive from each other, these two countries have developed social structures similar by form, yet discrepant

through their inner interplay of meanings, interpretations and correlations of the parts of these structures. The formal similarity is stipulated by a common pre-Soviet (imperial) and Soviet past, and the affinity of political, economic, cultural and social processes. The discrepancies may refer to the current political and cultural context with different ways and conditions for the continuity of elites. Individual studies fulfilled as parts of the joint project aimed to clarify the concepts and dimensions of elitism, the places of elites in the Armenian and Georgian social and cultural realities, and to analyze and find the roots of practices of power and elitism among old and new elites.

The volume consists of four parts each containing two chapters. Part one, *Elitist groups and networks* relates to social groups that are marginal and non-elitist by default, built into existing hierarchies and acquiring elitist statuses within their groups. It opens with a chapter by Eviya Hovhannisyan, where she explores the process of formation of new business elites among the refugees settled in the rural areas in the north of Armenia (the Gegharkunik region, after the Karabakh movement and subsequent war of 1988-1994). The author's fieldwork reveals a complicated system of relationships between newcomers and the local population, resulting in the formation of kinship and social solidarity networks that lie in the basis of the new economy and social structure of the region. The chapter identifies the types of local elites and ways in which refugees have been integrated into them or the reasons why they could not be integrated.

An instrumental understanding of the concept of elites is pivotal for the chapter by Haykuhi Muradyan, where she views people who

are employed in elitist families such as domestic staff, assistants or bodyguards as a specific type of elite among those who do the same work for less elitist “masters”. She operates a conventional notion of a “big family”, meaning an association of the wealthy elite with their domestic and personal employees, who thus acquire elitist positions in their social group. In the context of the topic, a particular ethno-religious minority group of Russian Molokans is addressed as the most elitist among other ethnic and social groups involved in this type of employment.

The first chapter in part two, *New Economic Elites*, authored by Giorgi Cheishvili, addresses contemporary social interplays that have emerged as a result of the strong economic intervention of Turkish businessmen in the Ajara province of Georgia during the last decade. By attracting businessmen from Turkey, the former leader of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili hoped to bring to life his project of modernizing Batumi, the capital of Ajara. Wealthy newcomers quickly became the owners of most business enterprises in Batumi, occupied elitist economic niches and changed the image of the city. The chapter analyzes the protests of the intelligentsia, a formerly privileged layer of society, against the new economic elite with its non-elitist origin. The intelligentsia’s movement was supported by Saakashvili’s opposition, the Georgian Dream party. Thus, the confrontation of the old cultural elite (Soviet-type intelligentsia) with the new economic elite (Turkish businessmen) may be interpreted as a part of political clashes between Saakashvili’s and Ivanishvili’s regimes. In particular, it symbolizes shifts in the developmental paradigm - Saakashvili’s economic modernization and cultural diversity project would be succeeded by traditionalism and cultural nationalism.

The topic of new economic elites continues in a chapter by Yulia Antonyan about the Armenian “oligarchs” - the new political and economic elite. Oligarchy as a cumulative term covers a number of extremely wealthy businessmen and politicians who have concentrated political and economic power in their hands, at a local or country-wide level. Although they have originated from different social and cultural backgrounds, nevertheless they form a particular social layer with some common specifics of everyday culture and a system of values. The chapter is an attempt to prepare an ethnography of oligarchs by identifying the most characteristic features of their behavioral and socio-cultural practices that would help understand what kind of elite they are. Those practices include the ways in which they build their “clans” and support networks, represent themselves, construct their reputation and authority, exert power and climb the social ladder, organize their everyday life and socialization, develop styles and preferences resulting in the emergence of a specific habitus compared to that of oligarchies and similar social structures throughout human history.

The chapters in part three, *Religion, nationalism, identity and elites*, contribute to understanding how religion and nationalism can shape elites. Thus, the contradiction between new and old national elites among the Yezidis, a Kurmanji-speaking ethnic and religious group of Armenia is described and analyzed in a chapter by Hamlet Melkumyan. This contradiction emerged as a result of the transformation of perceptions of power, elitism and prestige through the transitional period from the Soviet epoch to the post-Soviet one. The abolition of the Yezidi three-caste social system during the Soviet time led to drastic changes of social roles and positions for the caste

of laymen, *murids*, who were being granted educational opportunities and had input in the formation of a new stratum of Yezidi intellectuals. The restoration of the old elite, a caste of sheikhs, created tensions between nationalistic and modernizing intellectuals and noble traditionalists, both of whom claimed to be elite. The chapter discusses the specifics of their relationships and claims against the background of current political and social processes.

The chapter by Ketevan Khutsishvili examines the relationships between religion and the formation of the new political elite in post-Soviet Georgia. It is suggested that the correlation of religion and politics in Georgia has invested into the establishment of profitable ground for the permanent flows of leaders from the religious sphere to the political one and the influential part of the political elite in Georgia of the 1990s was created in this way. Along with this, religion played a serious part in the nationalistic and political discourses of that period. On the contrary, upon the arrival of Mikheil Saakashvili and the new political elite aiming at the modernization and democratization of Georgia, the Church became part of the opposition to the new authorities and, consequently, the new elites.

Chapter four, *Post-soviet transformations of Soviet elitism* deals with current changes in the social structures inherited from Soviet times. Nino Abakelia's chapter gives a panorama of the historical development of the concepts of "elite" and "intelligentsia" in Georgia during the pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet times, and analyzes the correlation of these two concepts. This analysis is based on a case-study of life stories of the representatives of different generations of a family considered elitist during the different periods the Georgian history in Soviet and post-Soviet times. Through the

history of a family, the epochal transformation of the elitist strata of Georgian society and their specifics can be observed. During almost a century, members of different generations of this family have been subsequently transforming into all possible types of elite: intelligentsia, nomenklatura, and art/show business celebrities. This may serve as an illustration to the thesis of continuity of elites no matter what type of elitist layer they represent.

The last chapter of the volume, written by Tea Kamushadze, is about the construction of Soviet elitism in relation to the title of Hero of Socialist Labor and to the lifestyle associated with this title. In the Soviet system of values, labor was expected to play a crucial role in the formation of the socialist identity and social hierarchies. The title of Hero of Socialist Labor was granted along with a number of life-long privileges and material awards that made the awardee a part of the Soviet nomenklatura. The chapter is based on the life stories of several Heroes living in the city of Rustavi, Georgia. It reveals how the concept of Heroism was integrated into the Georgian traditional system of values and folk culture to become a part of the new Soviet identity, and how the elitist position of Heroes transformed after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

This volume does not claim to deeply and overwhelmingly encompass the topic of elites in Armenia and Georgia, but we hope that it may at least contribute to existing and further research in this field.

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