THE VELVET REVOLUTION IN ARMENIA IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF HANNAH ARENDT'S POLITICAL THEORY

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Abstract

This research paper critically analyzes the 2018 Armenian Velvet Revolution, examining its non-violent nature and impact on society. This paper is written largely on the basis of my master's thesis at the European University in St. Petersburg, which I defended in 2023. The paper consists of two parts. The first part is devoted to the events preceding the Velvet Revolution in Armenia and is written primarily from the perspective of the history of public protests in Armenia. The second part contains reflections on the revolution from the perspective of Hannah Arendt's philosophy and political theory.

Assessing the revolution through the lenses of two models – the destructive French and transformative American Revolutions – it explores the revolution's alignment. Despite initial optimism, the post-revolution period reveals declining political interest amid external crises, raising questions about the sustainability of change. The task will be to formulate Hannah Arendt's vision of the political as a sphere of common life and to see why, in Arendt's perspective, it is revolution that contains the true spirit of the political, why it is revolutionary enterprises that contain the charge that will restore politics to its true meaning, to see to what extent Arendt's vision is idealistic, utopian or on the contrary, it allows us to see and grasp what otherwise would have been missed, the spirit that was contained and actualized in the Armenian Velvet Revolution, even if it was lost later on.

Part 1. The 2018 Velvet Revolution in Armenia: Its Prerequisites and Historical Context

To understand the Velvet Revolution, it is necessary to navigate through Armenia's post-Soviet journey, including the challenges of nation-building,

economic restructuring, and geopolitical complexities. It must be said here how the political field has been transformed within Armenia from independence to 2018, and mainly how political participation is being reimagined and taking on new forms and meanings. However, before addressing the culture of political participation in Armenia, it is necessary to understand how and from which recent past Armenian modernity emerged.

The 1990s marked a tumultuous period as Armenia asserted its independence, grappling with internal strife and external pressures. The twenty-five years that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in Armenia are called by the American historical sociologist G. Derluguian no differently than the twenty-five years of postmodernism (Derluguian & Hovhannisyan, 2018). Postmodernism is manifested here by the complete mixture of forms and epochs, the absence of stable narratives, and the cultural and political syncretism that so often characterizes the South Caucasus region.

As Prof. Derluguian notes in his paper, in Armenia, the 1990s are associated in people's memories with a difficult economic situation, the blockade and the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, for which they are called "cold and dark years", but also with a certain optimism inherent in the decade, which is associated with the Armenian people gaining their own state and winning the Karabakh war (Derluguian & Hovhannisyan, 2018). Because of this, the decade is sometimes characterized by the words "There was no light, but there was hope", contrasting with subsequent decades, when light had already appeared, but hope had faded.

Independent Armenia announced a course towards building a democratic society, with the rule of law and the development of market relations. However, in reality, the society faced many problems and challenges that could not be solved. One of them was the lack of experience manifested in the absence of stable political traditions in a country that had been deprived of independence for many years. The political sphere had not yet had time to develop in the conditions of many years of being a part of other powers. The formation of political institutions took place on the basis of former Soviet institutions either with the support of the Armenian Diaspora or from scratch after gaining independence.

Prerequisites of the Velvet Revolution: Social Protests

One of the characteristic features of Armenian society in recent decades has been the undying passion for street protests. At various times, on different occasions, on the streets of Yerevan one could find groups of people chanting slogans, voicing social and political demands, and urging curious citizens – who watched the progress of the protest columns from the windows of houses, public transportation, or restaurant verandas – to join them.

Ten years before the 2018 Velvet Revolution, in February 2008, a series of mass protests followed the presidential elections, demanding an investigation into election fraud. The opposition, led by Armenia's first president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan – who had returned to politics – argued that the elected candidate, Serzh Sargsyan, had not legitimately won the presidency and that Armenia was at serious risk of becoming an authoritarian state.

According to various sources, the number of protesters ranged from 40,000 (according to the authorities) to 650,000 (according to the opposition), with many traveling from other cities to express their discontent. Anger was the predominant effect of those gathered, they were united by a sense of injustice, and these emotions were fueled by the slogan "Struggle, struggle until the end!". The personality of the first president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, who also led street mass protests at the time of Armenia's independence in 1991 and at that time enjoyed great authority against the background of corrupt, unpopular politicians in power, also played a major role here.

The situation was aggravated by the fact that a significant part of public figures, representatives of civil society, the majority of political parties, and even public servants – officials, diplomats, and, most importantly, the military, including the heroes of the Karabakh war from "Erkrapah" – an organization of volunteers, which by that time had about ten thousand participants – were also moving to the side of the protesters.

The situation heated up very quickly. Thousands of protesters did not intend to disperse and announced that they would stay in an improvised tent city on Freedom Square until the opposition's demands were met. In response, the Armenian government, led by President Robert Kocharyan, imposed a state of emergency in the country and then deployed the army to Yerevan.

On March 1, the police and army forcibly expelled protesters from the tent city and then began beating and arresting protesters. Live grenades, lethal weapons, and water cannons were used. Two police officers and eight protesting citizens were killed as a result of the clash between the protesters and the army and police. More than a hundred people were hospitalized with injuries of varying severity (Human Rights Watch, 2009).

The authorities and police officers involved in the bloody events were not prosecuted until 2018. Armenia's second president faced a "subversion of constitutional order" case starting in 2018 for his role in the March 1 events, but trials are still ongoing. More than a hundred protesters were arrested in the March 1 case. Among them was one of the opposition leaders and then a supporter of Levon Ter-Petrosyan – future Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who, however, was released by a presidential amnesty in connection with the anniversary of independence in 2011.

The tragic events of March 1 became not only a day of national tragedy, but also, importantly, a way to inaugurate Armenia's third president, Serzh Sargsyan. The events of March 1 also increased tension and intolerance within the society. They became a hard and negative lesson for Armenian society. It should also be noted that the leader of the opposition Levon Ter-Petrosyan, who was placed under house arrest on the day of these events, gradually lost political influence, and various forces accused him of irresponsibility and deliberate escalation in order to seize power.

And, of course, the protests did not stop there. On the contrary, the next decade of Serzh Sargsyan's rule also took place in a stormy atmosphere of protests, and looking back at the protests of March 1, we should recognize that they were a kind of catalyst for mass political participation. However, the subsequent protests were qualitatively different from the previous ones. It is appropriate to talk about the growing level of self-discipline on the part of the protesters, about their greater creativity and, which is also very important, about the much more restrained and, in some respects, cunning actions of the police and the government led by S. Sargsyan. It is also relevant to recall that protests of various nature and reasons have now accompanied most of the decisions and reforms of S. Sargsyan's government, often paralyzing state activities. But the dynamics of street protests were most clearly formalized in the post-election period. The credibility of the authorities was very low, and there was a consensus in the society that the main instrument of self-reproduction of the authorities was bribes and corruption.

In the 2013 presidential elections, Raffi Hovhannisian competed with S. Sargsyan. Sargsyan got 58.6% of the votes, which was not enough for a politician with a dictatorial entourage, while opposition politician R. Hovhannisian got as much as 36.8% of the votes. At the same time, the opposition media reported that Hovhannisian allegedly had won or at least made it to the second round and only falsification of results had saved S. Sargsyan (Tamrazian et al., 2013). The traditional series of post-election protests surprised the public and even Hovhannisian himself with their massive scale, according to his own words. Hovhannisian, who was little known to the general public as the leader (chief) of the opposition, differed greatly from Ter-Petrosyan in his gentleness, friendliness and inability to lead the protesters to a violent confrontation with the authorities. Raffi Hovhannisian managed for a short time to interest that part of Armenian society, which was not sympathetic to the previous political elites for their radicalism and craving for forceful confrontation.

Anyway, this episode with the 2013 elections is interesting because, firstly, it showed that the Armenian public is still strongly dissatisfied with the authorities and that even a little-known politician can achieve results on this

wave. And secondly, it showed that mass protests do not always bring destruction and human casualties. Of course, the result was that the protest potential of those gathered did not translate into anything, and the people who came out to the squares of Yerevan went back to their usual life without significant changes. At the same time, there was growing disillusionment with the political elites, and old political brands, whose main activity took place mainly during the election periods and quickly faded afterwards.

In 2001-2012 there were very rapid processes of construction in Armenia. Due to the nature of the influx of investments, the price of land in the center of the cities, especially Yerevan, was constantly rising, and the City Hall was selling more and more urban space for private business. Former parks, buildings of cultural and historical value were taken over by developers and turned into restaurants, hotels and other commercial establishments, of which there are countless in Yerevan. The very procedure of transferring the city space, already flooded with all kinds of shops, construction sites owned by the business elite, which had enriched dramatically, caused resentment of the citizens, and all kinds of corruption schemes and nepotism, which were flourishing at that time, played a role in the conclusion of contracts, resulted in dissatisfaction of the citizens and protests. The most vivid such episode can be called the passions around "Mashtots Square", which, according to the plan of the mayor's office, was also to be transferred to the ownership of private business and to be built up with all kinds of objects (Saroyan, 2016).

These protests were characterized by spontaneity, the absence of leaders and political parties, strong solidarity among protesters, and, of course, the role of the Internet. The initiative "We own this city" emerged on Facebook, and as a result of its activity, the threat of demolishing the public garden became, for a time, the most discussed event in the country.

Another feature of the protests was that citizens felt empowered and the police – who arrived on the scene very quickly – found themselves having to negotiate with the protesters. The result was inspiring. The protesters not only managed to preserve the square but also turned it into a center – a platform for various activities and political debates. The communities that formed around these protests have survived and become the authors of various initiatives to this day. It is also worth mentioning that the protests were increasingly attended by young people, who, disillusioned with existing political brands, did not stop participating in street protests but rather became more creative in their approach. Here, we should also recall the protests in Yerevan in the summer of 2013 related to the transportation reform, which can hardly be called popular. As a result of the reform, the fare for public transportation was to be raised from 100 drams to 150 drams. The protests quickly became massive. Protesters partially blocked the central streets, walked around the city

center, and urged citizens not to pay and public transport drivers not to charge 150 drams!

The protests were also accompanied by many grassroots initiatives. For example, many people with passenger cars offered to transport their fellow citizens for free. But undoubtedly, the main internal motive of the protests was to once again express distrust in the government at the time and to show that public discontent had only grown stronger.

The summer protests of 2013 were also successful, and the reform was canceled. As of 2024, the fare for public transportation remained 100 drams, which was quite comical considering a number of circumstances, such as inflation and the unprofitability of the transportation industry.

It is especially characteristic that one of the protest participants, while talking in an interview about his emotions at the news of the reform's abolition and the victory of the protesters, expressed... sadness: "We were very sad on the day the decision was suspended, although the public was very happy and excited. On the days of the movement, we thought about transforming the problem and solving as many problems as possible, such as raising gas prices, etc. And on the day the decision was suspended, it was clear that most citizens would go about their daily business with the thought of victory, and it would be very difficult to motivate them to fight injustice again" (Papazyan, 2021).

This kind of sadness and disappointment remained the main emotion of the Armenian public despite similar small victories. Having felt its own power, its huge potential, and most importantly, the great joy (one could say euphoria) from the atmosphere of solidarity and the prospects of joint action, the protesting part of the public did not get a full opportunity to apply this energy in a political direction. Disillusionment grew in society, and more radical calls to overthrow the government were heard. Successes in some local protests and failures in others led to the formation of broad networks of protesters, which politicized larger and larger spaces.

In 2015, the protests that started because of the increase in electricity prices, called "Electric Yerevan", were already very different from the protests in the 90s and even from the 2008 protests. Sociologist G. Derluguian compares these protests to the 1968 student protests in the West (Derluguian & Hovhannisyan, 2018).

In 2015, the protesters won again, and the electricity price hike was canceled. However, such a victory was again rather disappointing. Thus, the enthusiastic citizens returned to their usual lives, with the feeling that their potential had not been realized, and the unusual feelings that had united the protesters, the unusual format of the carnival, into which protests often turned and where each participant could show himself from some unexpectedly new, somewhat pathos-heroic, or theatrical side, went nowhere. In fact, as a result

of the protesters' victory, the protest sites – squares or large roadways – lost their special atmosphere.

Thus, the series of street protests actualized the great potential that had accumulated in the Armenian people for a long time. The most energetic and resourceful protesters managed to "awaken" and interest the public to participate in the life of the country, but all their efforts and initiatives remained grassroots, while negative emotions and the gap between the established elites and the ordinary people grew, and this contrast of sentiments was reinforced by the generational conflict.

The Velvet Revolution of 2018

The events of spring 2018 forever transformed the face of the country – unexpected and crucial for some observers but quite natural and expected for others. The Armenian parliamentary opposition, represented by the "My Step" initiative and headed by the opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan, managed to achieve the resignation of the then-government led by Serzh Sargsyan through street protests from April 13 to May 8 and to achieve the appointment of new elections. During these elections, the leader of the opposition was elected Prime Minister of the country.

The peculiarity of the revolution was its exceptional non-violent nature. During several weeks of protest actions, the central streets of major cities were transformed. Crowds of people walked from morning until evening, chanting the slogans of the revolution, which was also called the "Revolution of Love and Solidarity": "Take a step, reject Serzh", "Put down your weapons, reject Serzh!", "Policeman, join!". The street actions were preceded by a two-week march from Gyumri to Yerevan. The protests themselves were related to the intentions of incumbent President Serzh Sargsyan, who had been elected for two consecutive terms and had now intended to remain in power as Prime Minister. The reforms he initiated, according to which the Republic of Armenia transitioned from a presidential to a parliamentary form of government, were accompanied by his public promises not to run for another term and, most likely, to retire from politics ("Epress.am", 2014). The president, who failed to keep his promise, was elected prime minister on April 18 with the support of 77 out of 97 deputies of the National Assembly. The election of the Prime Minister, who by that time had already bored the public at large, sparked violent protests, manifested in mass marches and blocking of key streets of Yerevan. As mentioned above, the protests were peaceful. This was not the least facilitated by the actions of the opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan, who from the very beginning ruled out the violent format of the protests and accompanied every day, every public speech with this message. However, there was also merit of the authorities and the police: the authorities,

represented by the Republican Party and its leader Sargsyan, urged the opposition figures to return to the parliament to resolve the crisis, while the police reacted rather sluggishly to the protests in the first days. In later days, they began to escort the protesters (although they rarely succeeded in doing so because the procession was often divided into many different columns), and at some points used non-lethal weapons such as stun grenades, batons and arrests.

These protests exhibited many of the strategies we have seen in previous protests. The protesters developed a high degree of discipline that allowed the protesters to come together and split up again while maintaining communication and control over the situation. The protesters were diligent in creating an image of revolution, helped by famous figures in science, art, and other influential people, the so-called "opinion makers". At some point, the protesters were joined by representatives of the church and even military personnel.

Although the protests had a carnival-like atmosphere, a sense of anxiety prevailed. Many people were cautiously waiting for the strategy of pacification and dispersal of protesters to be applied by the authorities. On April 22, in an atmosphere of high tension, opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan and Armenian Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan met. Pashinyan's position was that "reality has changed" in the country, that "Sargsyan no longer has power". He therefore accepted an invitation to negotiate Sargsyan's resignation and a non-violent transfer of power, followed by a new vote. Sargsyan, however, reminded that the "Exodus" faction (which Pashinyan led), which had scored only 7% in the parliamentary elections, had no mandate to speak on behalf of the people. Sargsyan then added that Pashinyan had not learned the lessons of the tragic events of March 1, 2008, and saying that he had no intention to listen to ultimatums in his address left the meeting. The arguments for Sargsyan's staying in power were also the difficult political situation, the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis. In the face of such a major challenge, Sargsyan considered the opposition' actions as deeply irresponsible.

Anyway, in April 2018, Pashinyan, the leader of the protests, after a meeting with Sargsyan, called for a redoubling of the protesters' efforts. On the same day, police arrested Pashinyan and took him to an unknown destination. However, after his arrest, the protests continued with even greater effort and participation, with the number at the rally reaching up to 200,000 according to various estimates. A day later, on April 23, Nikol Pashinyan and his arrested associates were released, and a few hours later Serzh Sargsyan announced his resignation: "Nikol Pashinyan was right. I was wrong. There are several solutions to the current situation, but I will not go for any of them. It is not mine. I am leaving the position of the leader of our country... The

"street" movement is against my staying in this position, I fulfill your demand. Peace, harmony and logic to our country" ("Hetq.am", 2018).

However, the protests did not end with Sargsyan's resignation. Then they demanded the resignation of the incumbent ruling party and the rescheduling of new elections. Karen Karapetyan, the former general director of ArmRosgazprom CJSC, who tried to pacify the protesters and apparently had ambitions to stay in power, became the country's prime minister for a short period of time.

On May 8, Nikol Pashinyan was elected Prime Minister of the country by the National Assembly to the tumultuous cheers of the citizens, which marked the victory of the Velvet Revolution.

The period of 2018-2019 was quite turbulent in terms of statements and new initiatives. However, in reality, it found out that the old problems have not gone anywhere either. First, a small "garbage crisis" appeared, when it discovered that with the change of government, elementary amenities of life, such as the cleanliness of the city did not respect, and it was not possible to solve this crisis immediately.

The Pashinyan-led government soon declared an "economic revolution" (which, however, only achieved a noticeable effect in the form of an increase in living standards after 2022, with the influx of relocates from Russia). During this period, the euphoria subsided, and the carnival lifestyle for many was replaced by a routine series of obligations. Publicity and transparency of the authorities and politics in general, as a powerful trend achieved in 2018-2019, went into internal Internet immigration due to the outbreak of COVID-19. As a total lockdown was imposed, many initiatives and civic communities lost momentum, unable to function in a live, interactive format. Then the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war caused a great shock. The war, which had seemed impossible in this form yesterday, became the most tragic event in the history of 21st century Armenia, traumatizing and killing thousands of young men and plunging the public into a deep mourning, depression and crisis from which it cannot recover to this day.

The faded, devalued and seemingly insignificant acquisitions of the Velvet Revolution have already left the spaces of public interest and discussion. However, as it often happens, failures, defeats, and general pain became the background for public reflection: reflection on the mistakes of the past, on the challenges of the present, and on the challenges of the future. This form of public reflection is already characterized by greater maturity, not naivety.

Part 2. Reflections on Revolution

The term "revolution" has been at the center of attention of many thinkers of the last centuries. The epoch itself, from the Great French Revolution

(1789) to the October Revolution (1917) was so saturated with events that claimed to be revolutionary that the term revolution (from Late Latin revolution) became a kind of marker of the epoch, or as we would probably say today, a brand of the epoch. The most striking in this respect was the Great French Revolution, which, we can safely say, gave rise to a whole genre of intellectual excursions, reconstructions, and reflections on its causes, outcome, and influence in the European perspective. Revolutionary were events, regimes, self-names of parties or elites, revolutionary could be decisions, actions, counteractions, speeches, programs, and of course it is not only about political connotations of the term, but also in a number of spheres of human relations, including the sphere of culture, economy, art, science, ideas about beauty, fashion, technology, the world – modern or future, and many others. Finally, the notion of "revolution" has fostered a rich field of debate and discussion about this concept. We can see that in this epoch there are many works on the essence of the term, on the content of the concept of revolution, and a rich palette of forms of attitude (subjectivation) to it. In different societies, (pro) revolutionary, counter revolutionary, skeptical and other political camps appeared.

The era of revolutions has been replaced by the era of world wars, the emergence of mass regimes, totalitarianism, great historical narratives, their (probable?) collapse, and much more. However, interest in the concept of "revolution" has not disappeared. Moreover, in the modern world we notice that the events that are marked by the word "revolution" or "revolutionary" have significantly expanded their localization and play a major role not only in the bosom of European societies and cultures. Here, for example, it is appropriate to recall the revolutions in Iran, of which there were as many as three in the twentieth century, and the most significant today is the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The term revolution was also used to describe a series of ideological and political campaigns in China called the Cultural Revolution in 1966-1976. We can also think of the events of the Arab Spring since 2010, to which the term is also often applied, as are numerous others across the world.

And all these events raise the question about the meaning of the term revolution, its content, or rather the appropriateness of its use after the era of revolutions. Moreover, the fact that many people around the world continue to think about the events around them and themselves, including through this term, already indicates that the term is in great demand, if not to say that it has a great influence on the minds and moods of contemporaries.

And here I would like to ask a question about the relevance and meaning of the term in the perspective of the Armenian Velvet Revolution. On the surface, the question is "what did the Velvet Revolution change? (of course, if it changed at all)". What fundamental shifts did it bring that could not have been

achieved by other means? Does it make sense to speak of a revolutionary regime or a revolutionary agenda in this perspective? Does the revolution have a beginning but no ... end? And how did it happen that the revolution took place fundamentally without violence, without a major political vendetta against the old elites, and even without a formal violation or abolition of the current Constitution of the Republic of Armenia? Such and other questions are very often addressed, for example, in various articles, mostly small, of the world's authoritative political, news, and analytical journals, when they refer to these events.

Hannah Arendt on Revolution: The American Revolution and the Great French Revolution

Of course, the answer to such a question would not only be related to the description of the situation but also to the lens through which we look at the concept of revolution. And here, within the framework of this research, I would like to look through those ways of understanding revolution that Hannah Arendt developed over a long period of time. The notion of revolution plays a large, very ambiguous, and complex role in Arendt's creative legacy; revolution becomes the subject of reflection in many of her works, including "The Human Condition"*, "The Promise of Politics"*, and the work "On Revolution", in this sense, becomes the culmination of these reflections.

In many ways, however, in order to understand Arendt's complex, ambiguous vision of revolution, it is necessary to take into account the multifaceted nature of this concept. Moreover, what is very important, through this concept Arendt forms, as we would say today – a positive political program, the theory of elementary republic, the foundation of which is connected with the system of power of councils, which, if we already speak in an antique way, in Arendt's perspective is the best form of government.

The work "On Revolution" compositionally consists of contrasting the two revolutions, the Great French Revolution and the American Revolution, and what legacy (Ethos of Revolution) they left, and how they influenced subsequent generations.

Arendt begins with the history of the concept of revolution and tries to trace how the meaning of the term has historically changed, and then gives her own formulation. The term itself, being borrowed from astronomy, paradoxically meant not a radical change, but on the contrary a return or circular movement, and it was closer in meaning to the notion of restoration – the return of the old order. Arendt insists that up to the 19th century, the authors of the revolutions

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* See more in detail in Arendt. (1998).
* See more in detail in Arendt. (2005).

really thought of their actions in this way – as restoration. When they became convinced of the impossibility of revolution as restoration, they came up with the idea of a new beginning, something that had not existed before (Arendt, 1990). The idea is somewhat paradoxical, but it is confirmed by the fact that many of the current leaders of the revolutions did indeed very often, at a certain point in their lives, consider themselves royalists – Robespierre being a prime example. But in the future, they became convinced of the value of seeking other, not necessarily existing forms of political existence.

And this is the first very important feature and content of the revolution – novelty, the need to lay the foundation for something new, a new beginning. The second important feature is the motive of freedom. In all the diversity of this term, freedom was declared the main goal, the main result of the revolution. Whether it was the despotic arbitrariness of the absolute monarchy or the colonial authorities, they would be accused of trampling on (old) freedoms. And it is the union of these two categories – novelty and freedom – that characterizes the trends of the epoch and revolution.

Arendt explains that freedom and emancipation are far from being identical concepts, although the latter gravitates towards the former. The motives of the struggle for freedom, which were in fact a struggle for liberation, have been known since antiquity, but it is in the new times and revolutions that the establishment of freedom as a principle becomes a central demand: "This pathos of novelty connected with the idea of freedom is necessary for the idea of revolution. Though the ancients had experienced insurrections, this pathos sets apart revolutions. Though these insurrections share with the violence included in revolutions, 'only where change occurs in the sense of a new beginning, where violence is used to constitute an altogether different form of government, to bring about the formation of a new body politic, where the liberation from oppression aims at least at the constitution of freedom can we speak of revolution.' And this is 'unprecedented and unequalled in all prior history'" (Arendt, 1990).

Arendt names the American Revolution as an example of such a revolution and, unlike the French Revolution, she calls it a successful revolution. The success of the American Revolution, which, as Arendt writes, did not receive due attention and recognition of the world, unlike the Great French Revolution, consisted of several very important achievements.

The first major achievement was the establishment of liberty. It was encapsulated in the creation of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States (then thirteen colonies). During the French Revolution, the constitution had been rewritten 14 times, causing it to be seen as just a "piece of paper".

The second achievement of the American Revolution was that violence did not become the way to hold on to power. The revolution did not "devour its children", nor did it turn into tyranny. Violence was used here to defend independence and political space, but not to fill it with violence, to make violence the main content of politics, here already meant in domestic politics.

A third very important and not obvious at first glance achievement was what Arendt calls fixing the present state of affairs, or one could say how the American Revolution knew where and where to stop. It is known that after independence, the fathers of the American Revolution were puzzled about their future, and even considered the option within the framework of the revolution, as a restoration, to invite the monarchy and the aristocracy. However, all this did not happen, and the Americans legitimized the current situation, the post-revolutionary government, which was actually the power of the most influential, authoritative, very different people with very different political views, who using the support of the people conducted public policy, public debates. And this Arendt calls it a happy accident, because, as we will see below, for most revolutionary enterprises, including the French Revolution, establishing freedom would not be enough. There were often additional motives to reorganize the new order that emerged as a result of the revolution, sometimes to such an (anti-)utopian degree that the revolution ultimately turned into the opposite of what it originally sought to achieve. To put it very coarsely, it turns out that the American Revolution not only succeeded in its goals, but also clearly articulated them, and making them a principle for the entire community and with the consent of the entire community, whose political participation in the life of the community was preserved and became central.

Arendt describes the main tragedy of the French Revolution as the fact that at some point the essence and content of the revolution becomes the notion of happiness. It is very important to record here that the revolution did not begin with a call to "make everyone happy" or to create an administration that would make everyone happy accordingly. The motif of happiness was invented during the revolution. Arendt consistently shows this in Robespierre's addresses. Moreover, happiness here was understood as providing for the physical wants and needs of the poor.

The social question (and its solution) became especially closely linked to the notion of revolution and, thanks to the great influence of Marx, to the objective course of history – progress.

Thus, we see two aims of revolution, two very different contents of the concept: the foundation of freedom in the American perspective and the building of a society of abundance in the European perspective.

A series of revolutions in Europe, mostly unsuccessful, led to the emergence of a whole class of revolutionaries, mostly of the Marxist persuasion. Revolutionaries are no longer active freedom fighters, but rather wait-and-see intellectuals and agitators who wait for the moment when the centralized government weakens and falls for reasons independent of them (such as economic crises, wars, or the objective course of history) and they will be able to seize and hold power.

The Ethos of Revolution: The Power of Councils, the Elementary Republic

The key to understanding Arendt's attitude to revolution, revolutionary projects and their prospects is to understand the power of the councils as a form of government in Arendt's perspective.

On the one hand, as has been noted, there are two mainstream visions of revolution and the one that originated from the Great French Revolution and then had as its main goal to solve the social question and became dominant in Europe and then the rest of the world, including America. Moreover, having experienced a strong Marxist influence, this understanding of revolution began to understand the political sphere in a very peculiar way and to appeal to such categories as human nature (it is important to emphasize that we mean man in the singular, human plurality has a much smaller role here), the objective course of history – progress, (universal or class) happiness, and others.

Still, Arendt insists that, historically, almost every time, such a vision of revolution is shattered when it meets reality. That such an optic cannot and does not provide for such an important category of human existence as spontaneity. And here Arendt's perspective is very interesting. Arendt shows that almost every time we talk about revolution, we notice this phenomenon of spontaneity – spontaneity in politics. In the collapse of the previous weak, unauthorized government, which has no credibility in the eyes of the citizens and, as a result, is powerless, in what is probably a short-lived, fleeting but very meaningful period in the history of revolutions, we see that new forms of political experience emerge – councils. The power of councils emerges not as a result of seizing power and/or trying to hold it, but as a spontaneous grassroots initiative, where the most interested, authoritative people try to act as creators of political reality themselves at localized levels.

Councils are spaces where fundamentally different people, in their diversity and with very different beliefs and views on reality, enter the public arena and try to orient themselves in a rapidly changing reality through words, persuasion, agonal debates, speeches and actions to manage the community. In such councils, the central category is not a place in the hierarchy (which most likely collapsed with the previous regime-government) but the ability to

influence the minds and hearts of the public. The public is not just a silent observing public, but a living, active environment that very closely follows, reacts to and participates in the activities of councils. And the councils have power, and only that power, which is not based on violence against dissenters, but the power of joint action, action with consent, which will echo in the hearts of the people, and actions that will not be forgotten or confused in the chaos of the revolution. And has as its model the power of the councils not utopian vision of the future but rather the polis of ancient Greece, with its agonal politics. And this is the true spirit of the revolution. The power of the soviets always means unpredictability, because the person who reveals himself to the public is both recognized and recognizes the perspective of another, the perspective of a person who is not identical to himself. The fruits of people's joint activity on the political stage are not a fulfilled testament, a forecast, a program, but a space where action is not predetermined – a space of freedom. Political freedom, where man himself is the master of his own destiny, for once he has tasted it, he will not wish for another.

The power of councils, through this form of experience, has been known to all truly revolutionary enterprises. During the American Revolution, the so-called "town hall meetings" appeared, as well as the "ward-republic" system, the convention system and others, where local initiatives were used to make decisions at the different levels of cities, as communities and then states. It was the power of these platforms that formed the basis of the American model of government – the United States.

We see the fleeting appearance of the council system during the Paris Commune and the 1905 Revolution in Russia, as well as the power of the councils during the February Revolution of 1917. The system of soviets had a great influence on Lenin, who spoke with the slogan "All power to the soviets!" Moreover, as Arendt points out, we know his definition of communism as the power of the soviets plus the electrification of the country (Arendt, 2013). However, coming to power, Lenin faced the problem of preserving his power and the power of the Bolsheviks. During the Kronstadt Uprising, the soviets formed there from former military sailors with a true spirit of revolution, even called by Trotsky "the beauty and pride of the Russian Revolution", opposed the party dictatorship of the Bolsheviks. And here was the key moment for the whole revolution – the confrontation of the (decrepit) hierarchical party system against the new agonal system of the soviets. As a result of heavy fighting, the Bolshevik troops took Kronstadt and drowned the city in blood. From that point on, the Soviet power was only in words Soviet, the rule of the Soviets was out of the question, in reality it was, of course, a totalitarian system born of terror.

Arendt's solution, however, is to realize an elementary republic, where the power of councils is fixed and spreads further at different levels. The elementary republic is well within the spirit of the American Revolution, in the Jeffersonian perspective, which sees this model as a system where the activity of the political field and community participation on many levels are ensured, and moreover, secured for generations to come.

Such ideas of an elementary republic, that of Arendt and that of Jefferson may seem somewhat utopian. There are very few examples of the power of councils being consolidated and then remaining as an elementary republic in history. Furthermore, history shows that the power of soviets, alas, has always been short-lived. Even after the American Revolution, later, we see how centralization – the strengthening of the centralized state – gradually takes place, and local initiatives lose their power (although some echoes, of course, remain in the system of states and their autonomy). Politics becomes the domain of professionals. The sphere of political life becomes poorer, and the prospects for political participation – as a form of power over one's own destiny and as a form of public reality that manifests itself, being shared, with the others – become rarer.

Conclusion

In the first part of this paper, we tried to reconstruct the course of events of the Velvet Revolution in Armenia – its preconditions and consequences. In the second part, we turned to Hannah Arendt's political theory, her understanding of revolution as presented in the opposition of two revolutions – the American and the French. In conclusion, it remains for us to compare Arendt's models of political theory with the actual events of the Velvet Revolution in Armenia.

The first variant, when the revolution sets one goal, very quickly mobilizes the broad masses and then, failing to fix them, changes the goals and so on until it is quite difficult to find out what the revolution was about. Most often, the motive of freedom is replaced by the motive of happiness, and happiness is understood here as abundance, availability of material goods. As a result, at some point there remains a bare necessity to retain power, to create such an administration that would satisfy the (material, not political) needs of the people. Further, with the collapse of such a project, there is the need to put an end to the revolution with an iron hand to avoid even greater sacrifices. A revolution that is replaced by a counter-revolution, and the counter-revolution is followed by a civil war, and after the war by a vertical of power, terror, tyranny, which already uses violence for self-reproduction. This was the model of revolution in the French Revolution, the October Revolution, and many others. From Arendt's perspective, such a model of revolution, because

of its destructiveness and fruitlessness, can be seen as a failure, as a catastrophe.

To what extent can the Velvet Revolution in Armenia be characterized by such a model, which we have also considered above?

There is probably an interesting point here: the fundamentally non-violent nature of the revolution – its course and consequences, the absence of major political vendetta and repressions – highlighted the fact that the revolution, in the sense of the first model, was avoided. The revolution did not intensify the crisis, deep disagreement, and confrontation within society, but on the contrary, it contributed to a relative de-escalation of the situation. Conflicts were resolved at least without violating or rewriting the constitution.

Moreover, which is not often the case, the revolution knew where to stop, and managed to fix certain gains. Here we do not see radical leaps, a reorganization of the world, of the state, of identities, we do not see a redistribution of capital, a social revolution. Rather, we see the "normalization" of several everyday practices, primarily political or, one could even say, psychological, in the form of no pressure on the media, on the rights of parties or other political groups; no more arrests or beatings of civil activists; no more direct pressure on the courts, honesty and transparency of election procedures. On the economic front, the practice of taking bribes at various levels became less frequent, the country began to grow in macroeconomic indicators, first of all, salaries and pensions were raised, corruption decreased significantly, etc. And if you look at all these processes and a number of others, the revolution here was that the parties resolved the crisis without resorting to the traditional for revolutionary enterprises (in the sense of the first model) of sacrifice and destruction. And if we simplify it even further, from the perspective of the first model, there was no revolution at all, but only the change of an illegitimate government with a legitimate one in a rather colorful, carnival-like way. And in this sense, the joy, euphoria from the (non-)revolution can be perceived as the fact that the revolution (as a source of potential destruction) was avoided. Having solved the issue of the legitimacy of the government, which was lost somewhere at the turn of the millennium and was clearly usurped during the tragic events of March 1, 2008, society had to develop towards the same stated goals, in the same direction, but now with a more or less legitimate government.

The second model of revolution, designed to be a beginning, to establish institutions of freedom, to build power based on local initiatives, platforms, the power of councils, which will become the foundation for the political community, as noted above. A revolution that possesses the true spirit of the political, as Arendt notes. The model here is the American Revolution. This

understanding of revolution is what Arendt calls the true understanding of revolution. How true is it in the case of the Armenian Velvet Revolution?

It is worth noting that the revolution was indeed largely inspired by grassroots initiatives, a number of other protests and discourses about them. Many of the protests that we examined in the beginning turned into localized political platforms that were already setting their own agenda. The Velvet Revolution managed to unite and interest many political activists, concerned citizens, academics and cultural figures. However, after the resignation of Sargsyan's government and the Republican Party of Armenia, the most important thing in Arendt's perspective did not happen in the American Revolution – namely the power of local grassroots initiatives, with their inherent spontaneity and agonality – was not fixed. It did not become the central, determining factor of the political field. In this sense, the old system, where professional politicians (systemic or institutional) were in charge of the future of the country, taking care of the people's welfare, and the people could only passively observe and occasionally participate in elections, has not changed. Moreover, the very institution of elections, although it became more transparent and fair, almost completely lost its competitiveness. Five years after the revolution, we see that the same old political brands, now called by the people simply "current and former", perform with the same methods and goals. As a result, we see that the interest in politics is strongly declining, the existing brands do not have much support.

Thus, five years after the Velvet Revolution, we can see that the interest not only in political brands, but also in politics in general has decreased among the citizens of Armenia. The very low turnout at the elections and sociological surveys* can be considered as confirmation here.

Several factors contributed to this. First and foremost, a series of crises followed the Velvet Revolution. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Armenia and worldwide, we see that public actions become impossible. The new revolutionary government, which built its image on publicity, transparency, and people's participation in governing has now been forced to impose quarantine, curfews, and restricted movement of citizens. The 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh showed that security and stability are more important than democratic transformation. The very policy of the ruling forces began to rely more and more on the authority of the head of state, Nikol Pashinyan, to legitimize their power. The government's logic and rhetoric have become increasingly in the vein of political pragmatism, realism and cynicism. In a sense, the old regime with its categories of politics was recreated – now with other faces.

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* See more in detail in IRI Center for Insights in Survey Research. (2023).

Still, certain gains of the revolution remained, although they were not fixed. Perhaps the main achievement of the revolution is that the notion of power was perceived differently that violence was rejected as a political means, but that no other sustainable institutional means of politics has yet been developed.

Looking at the Velvet Revolution in Armenia from Hannah Arendt's perspective, the main conclusion is the concept of movement from grassroots initiatives and the creation of spaces, platforms in which political freedom could exist. Arendt shows that historically such spaces – councils – emerged during revolutions, but most often were not fixed, were lost. Once fixed, such spaces do not need to be legitimized by hierarchy and do not need violence. Such spaces do not need legitimization through elections, because their legitimacy and power come from a living, active public environment in which human plurality can manifest itself. Once fixed, such spaces together constitute what Arendt sees in Jefferson's ideas as an elementary republic. As noted, this perspective may seem utopian and may contrast with the dire situation in the world and in the region, but it holds great potential, it holds the solution to the demand made during the Velvet Revolution – "We are the masters of our country".

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