



Analytical Bulletin

ISSN: 1829-4502

e-ISSN: 2953-8254

Journal homepage: <https://analytical-bulletin.ccs.am/index.php/ab/index>



CENTER FOR CULTURE
AND
CIVILIZATION STUDIES
FOUNDATION

Gevorg Avetikyan

Anna Ohanyan, *The Neighborhood Effect: The Imperial Roots of Regional Fracture in Eurasia*, Stanford University Press, 2022. 312 pp. \$65.00. ISBN: 9781503632059

Գևորգ Ավետիսյան

Աննա Օհանյան, *Հարևանության էֆեկտը. Եվրասիայում տարածաշրջանային մասնատվածության կայսերական արմատները*. Մթենֆորդի համալսարանի հրատարակչություն, 2022. 312 էջ. \$65.00. ISBN: 9781503632059

To cite this article: Gevorg Avetikyan. "The Neighborhood Effect: The Imperial Roots of Regional Fracture in Eurasia by Anna Ohanyan." *Analytical Bulletin (CCCS)* 17 (2023): 66-68 DOI: 10.56673/18294502-23.17-66

To link to this article: **DOI:** 10.56673/18294502-23.17-66



Published online:

23 December



[Submit your article to
this journal](#)



BOOK REVIEW

Anna Ohanyan, The Neighborhood Effect: The Imperial Roots of Regional Fracture in Eurasia, Stanford University Press, 2022. 312 pp. \$65.00. ISBN: 9781503632059

DOI: 10.56673/18294502-23.17-66

Received 12 December 2023

Accepted 21 December 2023

For those who are familiar with Anna Ohanyan's research of the past two decades, *The Neighborhood Effect* reads as a classic prequel of the four books she has written or edited before. Ohanyan employs comparative historical methods, creating not a conventional history book, but rather a contemporary and urgent exploration to understand and prevent armed conflict in former imperial peripheries. To elegantly justify her approach, she references an astrophysicist who likened space to a time machine, elucidating that our night sky comprises 'light originally emitted in vastly different eras by different stars.' By looking at today's Eurasia as the night sky, she departs from the more common 'lessons of history' approach of describing linear conflict evolutions. In a way, these conflicts and related phenomena are past and present simultaneously.

At the core of Ohanyan's thesis is the concept of 'region-before-states,' asserting that the nature of connectivity within imperial peripheries significantly shapes modern conflicts. The region is fractured when connectivity is weak, clustered, or non-existent, whereas regional resilience, its antithesis, fosters conditions conducive to peace. Whether resilient or fractured, regions often predate state formation. Regional resilience, distinct from integration, commonly associated with state-centric contexts like the European Union, can precede states, institutions, and bureaucracies. It is often grassroots and multilevel, transcending ethnic, social, religious, class, and geographic boundaries.

Beyond the preface and acknowledgments, the book contains eight chapters, a rather minimalistic notes section, and a much more extensive bibliography of secondary sources and index. Since this is not a history book,

there are essentially no primary sources in this work. The first three chapters introduce the main arguments, define core concepts, and prepare grounds for a novel reading of the empirical chapters with special attention to the imperial roots of conflicts in Eurasian peripheries. Thus, in chapters four, five, and six the author meticulously navigates through the historical contexts of the Habsburg, Ottoman, and Russian empires, focusing on regions like the Balkans, Eastern Anatolia, and the South Caucasus. Ohanyan contends that the weakness of social fabrics on peripheries renders them susceptible to external pressures.

Chapter six stands out as a pivotal chapter, providing a rare focus on the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic (TDFR). Ohanyan argues that the TDFR's short-lived existence was a result of civic depth and institutional connectivity, evolving in opposition to imperial policies. Transcaucasia, according to the author, boasted extensive reserves of bridging social capital, hinting at the potential for regional unity. However, external forces such as the Ottoman Empire, Bolshevik Russia, Germany, and Britain are identified as undermining regional resilience in Transcaucasia. When applied to the current state of affairs in the South Caucasus (to replace the outdated name of Transcaucasia), this may mean there is room for hopeful optimism that the region may once find the key to resiliency even after the latest violent outcomes of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and the ethnic cleansing of Armenians. In *The Neighborhood Effect* this optimism is supported with relatively concrete policy suggestions for both local and external actors. The question remains whether all parties genuinely appreciate the value of achieving such resilience.

Chapter seven scrutinises some of the current conflicts. It is rather challenging and risky for any author to make premature generalisations in situations when crucial events may happen at a much faster pace than the writing and publication process of a book. For example, when discussing Ukraine (certainly writing before February 2022), Ohanyan argues that regions resilient in their imperial pasts are better equipped to avoid armed conflict in the post-Cold War era. However, in light of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine that followed soon afterwards, her assertion that conflicts in resilient regions have lower severity and delayed onsets is

challenged by the current death toll in Ukraine. In exploring the Kurdish conflict, Ohanyan enters a complex terrain where the applicability of the regional resilience theory seems strained. From the analysis of the case of Eastern Anatolia and the Kurdish conflict it is not quite clear how the erosion of intercommunal connectivity between Kurds and Christians has direct relation to the more recent Kurdish conflict with the Turkish state.

The book concludes with valuable policy implications that resonate with contemporary geopolitical challenges. Throughout the book, but especially in the final chapter, Ohanyan consistently emphasises the agency of local peoples and states in regional resilience. The notion that there are many challenges to peacebuilding, particularly in a post-pandemic world marked by declining international support for democratic norms, introduces a thought-provoking perspective. The author proposes supporting clusters of democratization, confronting aspirant regional hegemons (Turkey and Russia), providing regionally wired support for peacebuilding initiatives, and cultivating deeply regional alliances. Ohanyan's regional resilience theory introduces a fresh perspective, challenging deterministic views on the role of great powers that often dominate geopolitical analyses.

In a world grappling with the emergence of new global powers, the book's concluding remarks on China's potential role and the need for a nuanced understanding of its influence contribute to ongoing discussions. The call for supporting ongoing peacebuilding initiatives and fostering regional alliances aligns with the evolving realities of international relations.

The Neighborhood Effect's strengths lie in its fresh perspective, emphasis on agency, and valuable policy implications. Ohanyan's work stands as an invitation for scholars and policymakers alike to engage critically with the complexities of regional resilience in an ever-changing global landscape.

Gevorg Avetikyan
Research Fellow, Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO)
gevorg.avaxetikian@gmail.com