

**Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University**

**Sophio Tskhvariashvili**

**Gender Implications of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict:**

**Alternative Feminist Perspectives**

**Eurasian and Caucasian Studies**

**A thesis submitted for the degree of**

**Master of Social Sciences**

**Maia Barkaia Doctor of Philosophy**

**in Gender Studies**

**Tbilisi, 2018**

## **Annotation**

The research paper “Gender Implications of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Alternative Feminist Perspectives” focuses on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and on women, who have been affected by it and are still living in the conflicting territories.

It has already been 30 years since the first ethno-territorial clashes have occurred in this region and the toll of victims, traumas and death has been innumerable for all sides of this unsettled tension. Dominant perspectives on academic, as well as on state level, do not view women at the center of analysis or the history of the conflict, and are mainly constructed and articulated by masculine politics, while experience, knowledge, perspectives and voices of women in war are silenced and disregarded.

Bringing feminist perspective, aims at humanizing dominant politics, concentrating on social aspects and pushing for positive transformation. However, in the most cases women’s experiences and feminist perspectives on the Nagorno-Karabakh context are less researched and available.

The main goal of the research is to explore what are gender dimensions and implications of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The main objectives are to investigate and advance general knowledge about the positions and conditions of women, affected by the conflict, and to analyze women’s experiences through feminist perspective.

The main findings of the research reveal how the conflict and production of the nationalist narratives shape women’s lives in both private (inner) and public (outer) domains, and the forms and ways in which women’s oppression is multiplied.

## ანოტაცია

კვლევა „ყარაბაღის კონფლიქტის გენდერული იმპლიკაციები: ალტერნატიული ფემინისტური პერსპექტივები“ აქცენტს აკეთებს მთიანი ყარაბაღის კონფლიქტში მონაწილე და კონფლიქტის შედეგად დაზარალებულ ქალებზე, რომლებიც დღესაც ამ ტერიტორიებზე ცხოვრობენ.

უკვე 30 წელზე მეტია გასული ამ რეგიონში პირველი ეთნო-ტერიტორიული შეტაკებების შემდეგ და მსხვერპლთა და გარდაცვლილთა რიცხვი ძალიან დიდია კონფლიქტის ყველა მხარეს. დომინანტური მასკულინური პოლიტიკური ხედვა, როგორც აკადემიურ ისე სახელმწიფო დონეებზე, არ აყენებს ქალებს კონფლიქტის ანალიზის ცენტრში, და ისტორიაც ძირითადად აგებული და გამოხატულია ისეთი პოლიტიკის მიერ, რომელიც ქალთა გამოცდილებას, ცოდნას, ხედვებსა და ხმას უგულვებელყოფს.

ანალიზში ფემინისტური ხედვის შემოტანა ემსახურება დომინანტური პოლიტიკის ჰუმანიზებას, სოციალურ საკითხებზე კონცენტრირებასა და კონფლიქტის პოზიტიური ტრანსფორმაციისთვის ბიძგის მიცემას. ამის მიუხედავად, ქალთა გამოცდილება და ფემინისტური პერსპექტივები მთიანი ყარაბაღის კონტექსტში ნაკლებად გამოკვლეული და ხელმისაწვდომია.

ამ კვლევის მთავარ მიზანს წარმოადგენს მთიანი ყარაბაღის კონფლიქტის გენდერული ასპექტებისა და შედეგების შესწავლა. მთავარი ამოცანები კი, ერთის მხრივ, კონფლიქტის შედეგად დაზარალებულ ქალთა მდგომარეობასა და პოზიციებზე საერთო ცოდნის გაზრდა და, მეორე მხრივ, ამ ქალთა გამოცდილებების ფემინისტური ანალიზია.

თემის ძირითადი მიგნებები აღწერს კონფლიქტისა და ნაციონალისტური ნარატივების ჩამოყალიბების შედეგად, ქალთა მდგომარეობის ცვლილებას საჯარო და კერძო სფეროებში, და ქალთა ჩაგვრის ახალი შრეების თორმირების პროცესს.

## Table of Content

<i>Annotation</i> .....	2
<b>Chapter 1 - Introduction</b> .....	6
1.1 Methodology and Hypothesis.....	9
<b>Chapter 2 - Literature Review</b> .....	12
2.1 Postcolonial Feminism.....	12
2.2 Nationalism and Gender Relations.....	15
<b>Chapter 3 - Historical Narratives and Context of the Conflict</b> .....	23
3.1 Constructed Nationalistic Narratives .....	23
3.2 Genocide Narratives.....	27
3.3 Under the Soviet Union Rule .....	28
3.4 The Artsakh Liberation War or/and Annexation of Azerbaijani Territories.....	30
3.5 Nationalism in Armenia and Azerbaijan .....	32
3.6 Conflict without Compromise.....	34
<b>Chapter 4 – Main Findings: Positions and Conditions of Women Affected by the Conflict</b> .....	36
4.1 Patriarchal Power Relations and Women in Caucasus .....	36
4.2 Nationalism and Womanhood.....	38
4.3 Gender-Based Violence .....	44
4.4 Socio-economic Conditions and Subversion of the Traditional Roles .....	48

4.5 Vulnerable Groups and Sub-collectives.....	53
4.6 Women in Military Structures.....	61
<b>Chapter 5 - Conclusion.....</b>	<b>70</b>
<i>References:.....</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>Appendix A.....</i>	<i>77</i>
<i>Appendix B.....</i>	<i>79</i>

## Chapter 1 - Introduction

In the post-Soviet societies, the state-building and nation formation was accompanied by the construction and re-construction of new national identities and dichotomies, such as “self” and “other”. These processes, in the newly created state-projects in the areas of multi-ethnic population, often trigger ethno-nationalism and provoke brutal ethno-territorial conflicts, which are causing years and years of violence, oppression and historical hatred.

Scholarly literature identifies man as a normative subject of conflict participant, while women are invisible actors (Youngs, 2004; Chakraborty, 2017). As a result of conflict, the forms of oppression women experience are multiplied and excluded from mainstream conflict analysis. Female subjects in conflict are forced to navigate through their femininity, as the masculine environment requires repressing any kind of femininity. Moreover, as a result of conflict, the division of the inner-domestic and outer-social spaces is exaggerated and in inner space oppression of women is becoming more prevalent.

Since dissolution of the Soviet Union, one of the unresolved security tensions in the South Caucasus region remains to be Armenian-Azerbaijani ethno-territorial conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Important geopolitical location, rich energy resources and role of strategic corridor placed the South Caucasus on a crossroad of multiple international interests. In parallel with state building and identity defining processes, the origins of the unsettled conflict can be found deeper in analyzing nationalist narratives, which are constructed around historical memory, traumas and myths about “ancient enemy” and have been instrumentalized for political purposes.

After the independence of the South Caucasus states, the Nagorno-Karabakh case has been one of the most important factors influencing the established foreign policies of Armenia and Azerbaijan, and political map of the region in general. Negotiations for a peaceful settlement have been underway within the framework of the Organization for Security and Co-operation

in Europe Minsk Group co-chaired by the U.S., Russia, and France since 1992, but society and the political elite in Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Azerbaijan remain largely unprepared for a compromise.

Since the most brutal military clashes escalated from first inter-ethnic Armenian-Azerbaijani violence in 1987 (Oct/Nov) and the ceasefire agreement signed for Nagorno-Karabakh on May 1994, the conflict remains to be unresolved. It has already been almost 30 years since people on both sides of the conflict live in instability and war, experiencing emergency state and tension in their everyday life. Beyond the battleground, generations have been born and raised, strategies of survival elaborated and everyday social life got adapted to the conflict condition.

Historically predominantly patriarchal societies in the Caucasus region, dominated by masculine politics, do not allow women to be on the leading or equal position on social, political and domestic level or at the peace negotiations processes.

Throughout the time of implementing masculine political projects of war, military confrontations and temporary peace, women's role in the conflict was vital but invisible. From the beginning of the tension some women started to be involved in formation of underground liberation movement and engaged in military forces, while others, in parallel with household work, family and child-caring, committed themselves to humanitarian work. Since 1990s involvement of women in peace-building processes and negotiations for exchange of war prisoners and hostages demonstrated that the politics of the conflict was not exclusively masculine sphere (Walsh, 2015), however their role, experiences and perspectives are underestimated and unheard till nowadays.

From the first ethnic clashes till now, amount of loss, number of victims of the war, traumas and death is huge for all sides of the conflict and as a result of emergency state and brutal escalations from time to time, it has been rapidly growing. "To Many estimates [the war] claimed 40 000 lives, those being only military casualties, as there are no clear number of

victims among civilians” (Sarkisyan, A. 2014, p.4). Number of refugees and Internally Displaced People (IDPs) from occupied territories grows every year.

The experience and attitude of every woman individual concerning the war, will it be the female-fighters, doctors, housewives, refugees, IDPs or any others affected by the conflict, is quite contrasting with the experience of man. In patriarchal society, the role of women is strictly defined and controlled by masculine environment. And in the times of crisis, different kinds of pressure, such as striving hard for physical survival, taking care of children and disabled during crisis and starvation, being involved in fighting in parallel to dealing with gender-specific violence - stigmas, stereotypes and sexual harassment, fall heavily on woman's back.

Because of traditional division of gender roles in the society, on one hand, women are mostly less involved in decision making processes and their positions on number of issues are unknown. However, silence does not mean that they agree/disagree on violence produced by the dominant masculine politics which directly affects every individual in the community. On the other hand, constructing the history of a conflict and war is mainly done and articulated by masculine politics, while the experiences, knowledge, perspectives and voices of women in war are silenced and disregarded. Bringing feminist perspective is considered and expected to be the way to humanize dominant politics, concentrate on social issues and push for positive transformation. However, in the most cases women perspectives on the conflict are less researched and not available.

In the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, I am willing to investigate positions and conditions of women individuals affected by the conflict, in order to define what kind of invisible gendered dimensions of oppression are created and experienced by women in postcolonial (post-Soviet) patriarchal societies. The main goal of my research is to explore what are gender dimensions and implications of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and accordingly the study focuses on the women who participated and were affected by the conflict. Respectively,



main objectives of the paper are to investigate and advance general knowledge about the positions and conditions of women affected by the conflict and analyze women's experiences through feminist perspective.

On one hand, postcolonial feminist theoretical framework and, on the other hand, scope of nationalism and gender theories give us opportunities to analyze new perspectives concerning the current situation through gender lens and construct in mind what the demasculinization of the politics can bring in this direction.

The study attempted to answer the following research questions: How did the conflict subvert /challenge established gender roles in pre-conflict society? As a result of the conflict, in which ways have the oppression on female subjects been multiplied or changed?

## **1.1 Methodology and Hypothesis**

The research on the gendered dimensions of conflict mainly explores women's experiences in war and its social aspects. Beyond any political frame or analysis, research aims to find out what are women's experiences in war, their different and unique perspectives and perceptions.

Positioning as an outsider and non-native researcher was important when presenting myself in order to be perceived as a third neutral eye, free from social, emotional and political insides and influences. However, as a feminist researcher I am analyzing the obtained data through gendered lens bringing feminist perspectives.

In order to obtain maximum information within limited time, qualitative methods of social study was used. For the theoretical framework the study includes analysis of the scholarly literature on postcolonial feminism and gender and nationalism theories. And for learning more about the context, mainstream literature about this conflict has been analyzed and 13 qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews have been conducted.

Initial desk research includes critical analyses of relevant secondary sources including official documents, previous researches, articles and other materials for understanding local historical and current contexts of the conflict. As the main objectives of the study are to advance general knowledge about the women affected by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and provide them with a voice to express their experiences on conflict through their thoughts and words, in-depth interviews were conducted in Armenia as well as in Azerbaijan. At the initial phase, the semi-structured interview guideline (Appendix A) was elaborated. And as for the second stage, the in-depth interviews (Appendix B) were conducted in Armenia (6) and Azerbaijan (7) mainly with women - peace activists, IDPs, refugees, experts and others who were directly involved and affected by conflict.

The respondents were selected through the snowball sampling, which is a type of purposive sampling, meaning that the researcher identifies someone who meets the criteria for inclusion in the study. The identified respondent recommends others who might also meet the criteria. Snowball sampling aims at locating key informants, who have particular knowledge, characteristics and experience.

Moreover, with a permission of the authors, interviews with women in Nagorno-Karabakh, from the documentary movie "Recordless" (2016) was used as the secondary source for the analysis. The documentary consists of six individual and two group interviews which presents portraits of 11 women living in the frozen conflict zone. The movie presents everyday life, struggles and resistance of women in patriarchal oppression during imposed military context. The movie tells us personal stories of the women who were directly involved and affected by the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Minimalist editorial way of the producers and their decision to avoid any invasion in the narratives by sound or visual effects helps us to see pure portraits and go deeper for understanding everyday reality of the respondents.

The hypothesis of the research is the following - As a result of the conflict, the division of the inner-domestic and outer-public spaces has become prominent. While the conflict in the outer-

space renders the masculinity of the male subject at risk, the inner space remains the only domain where men can unequivocally exercise their power, which in turn renders women more vulnerable to the multiple forms of oppression.

I would like to outline that, during analysis I have not divided narratives and stories of women based on their origins (Armenia, Azerbaijan or Nagorno-Karabakh) in separate sections deliberately, since I believe that because of common context and historical developments, experiences and challenges of women from this region are not very different from one another. However, certainly, each citation from the interviews contains in brackets information about age, status and citizenship of the respondents.

Limitations of the research are scarce available data on the topic and limited resources to hold more comprehensive field study. Due to the limited resources, time, and format of the research, the paper does not include more comprehensive aspects covering women's perspectives and visions on the conflict transformation process and the future of the regional cooperation. However, I consider these issues can become the topic of my future research.

## **Chapter 2 - Literature Review**

The narratives of the masculine political projects from each side of the conflict are quite diverse and complex, however, as the whole territory of the South Caucasus shares common historical background and social and political developments, the discourse of nationhood and masculinity are quite similarly instrumentalized and used for maintaining current status quo of tension and emergency.

First of all, the paper explores the main literature on postcolonial feminist perspectives and constructs the theoretical framework based on gender and nationalism concepts. Furthermore, the research analyzes the literature on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and women in this conflict.

### **2.1 Postcolonial Feminism**

Postcolonial Feminist International Relations Theory questions traditional realist IR's depiction of the state as a unified actor with no internal social content, and the assumption of the "state interest" as naturally and universally one of military security. Standpoint of this theory is built on social constructivist positions by revealing how power, authority and influence are used in social contexts. (Hayhurst et al, 2018)

This perspective extends traditional IR theory by upholding: questions of inequality and powerlessness; historical processes that contribute to the production of (gendered) global hierarchies and focus on representation, resistance and agency. It decolonizes the international relations away from singular, hypermasculine models - for instance, the neo-realist approaches to world politics only focus on power and uphold a singular hypermasculinity as a normative value, where feminized, weaker „others“ are often deemed inferior, emotional, ineffective. (Hayhurst et al, 2018)

Postcolonial Feminist International Relations perspective, which my research focuses on suggests that neo-realist perspectives tend to: ignore alternative (non-Western) ways of understanding global politics; fail to address issues of women's representation; use universal language and do not pay attention to how post-coloniality (in my case post-soviet) and gender are taken up and implicated in a multitude of practices that structure power relations globally and locally (Chowdhry & Nair, 2002). By focusing on Postcolonial Feminist Perspective the research aims revealing how gender is deployed in the conflict and how gendered are its implications.

Post-colonialism and feminism is intersectional in many ways and provides arena for deeper, complex analysis. International relation theories are often criticized for Eurocentric and masculine scope as they become irrelevant for the ongoing international processes and are not inclusive enough, while postcolonial feminism gives a birth to new perspectives and directions to them. Exploring the effect of conflict on women in post-colonial areas illustrate how this new perspective could open doors for analyzing present issues through international relations theories by including the contexts of colonial and imperial heritage and gendered vertical power structures. (Chakraborty, 2017)

Based on Feminist criticism, as a sphere of male influence and action (Youngs, 2004) and with the traditional discourse of dealing with the state as the main actor, international relation theories are ignorant towards experiences of domination, oppression and power structures, and exclude the real life implications of the security, war and violence on women as subjects. As well as neglect their autonomous agency in this process.

The inherently masculine and gendered nature of the discipline meant that the perspectives of women were absent, both as actors as well as passive recipients of the repercussions of international relations across the world. (Chakraborty, 2017)

Existing patriarchal society can be well illustrated while exploring gendered nature of power structures and showing state relations through their constructed bodies and function. Feminist theorists of international relations show how the inherent idea of masculinity is constructing the state structures and relations and the gendered aspect of such structures in terms of the women participation and how gendered assumptions affect the decision-making processes, choices and perceptions. Including the experiences of women in international relations theories helps to understand the world as it is today, with the unequal power relations. The discipline needs a clearer perspective on how individuals contribute to their state's position.

The need for postcolonial feminism does not only come from a lack of representation of the postcolonial woman as a subject in the international relations discourse, but complete absence of acknowledgement of the fact that the globalised neoliberal world of today is based on unequal power structures, where women from the developing countries are at the base of the hierarchy (Chakraborty, A. 2017). As a result, existing imperial and patriarchal systems of power, women are remaining at the bottom of the hierarchy in the post-colonial world and accordingly, experience the worst kinds of oppression not only on domestic but on social, political and economic level. And furthermore, they are excluded from the dominant discourses of history and analysis.

The attempts to add voice of women on international arena was done by adopting Resolution 1325, by UN Security Council in 2000. The passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, on "Women, Peace and Security", represents the first time, when the UN Security Council have discussed women and gender in relation to peace and security. The resolution addresses role of women in the preventing armed conflicts, contributing to peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, and post-conflict reconstruction. And provides support for equal participation in the post-conflict development and revival. The resolution is an attempt to mainstream a gender perspective into conflict, peace, and international security. However, through postcolonial feminist lens, it is not seen as constructive move for transformation, as it is considered that

instead of supporting anti-war feminist agenda it seems to legitimize and normalize militarist practices. “The UNSCR 1325, initially appearing to subvert patriarchal configurations, has become one of those hidden strategies of masculinised militarisation.” (Nikoghosyan, 2018, p.8)

Since 2000, six additional resolutions had been adopted by the Security Council after the UNSCR 1325 which shapes the “women, peace and security” (WPS) agenda in the United Nations (Shepherd, 2015). The agenda, which contains three main pillars - protection, prevention, and participation - is seen quite problematic, because they seem to assist with justifying militarization and recruitment for more people in the military sphere. The first argument concerning this issue from Anna Nikoghosyan (2018) is that gender understanding of women as victim who needs to be protected, can be used for justification of foreign military interventions and need to enhance the military. Moreover, women’s inclusion in armed forces reinforces the power structures even more. Moreover, according to Nicola Pratt (2013), agenda suggested by the Resolution 1325 is not able to equally represent positions of all women:

A lack of attention to the relations between gender, race, and sexuality has concrete implications in the case of Resolution 1325 - a project that aims to transform material realities rather than merely understanding or explaining them. The implications are the exclusion of the voices of those women who do not subscribe to the “1325 agenda,” a backlash against women’s agency in conflict zones. (Pratt, 2013, p.780)

She claims that, rather than prioritizing gender over other social power relations, feminist should construct alternative counter-hegemonic project, which can confront war and militarist agendas. (Pratt, 2013)

## **2.2 Nationalism and Gender Relations**

Since desolation of the Soviet Union, the countries of the South Caucasus together with other post-Soviet states were launched into new state-building and identity-defining processes. The

process of transformation and deep identity crisis was accompanied by brutal ethno-territorial conflicts, which unequivocally led to the developments of particular ethno-nationalisms in the area.

Like any other state, the South Caucasus states are inherently masculine and patriarchal. However, their establishments are particular, based on post-Soviet, post-colonial legacy. The violence and bloodshed the states undergo on the way of nation-building process was extremely brutal and the civilians were the first victims of these events. However, the developed ethno-nationalist narratives produced and are currently reproducing hostilities, not leaving space for finding common ground.

The most of the literature on nation and nationalism disregard gender relations from their area of analysis. To start with, Primordialist theoreticians of nationalism argue that:

The nations not only are eternal and universal but also constitute a natural extension of family and kinship relations. The family and kinship units in these constructions are based on natural sexual divisions of labor, in which the men protect the “women and children. (Enloe, 1990; Yuvas-Devis, 1997, p.1)

Opposing to this naturalized notion of nation, Benedict Anderson (1983) suggests his theory of nation as “imagined community”. He claims that nation is not universal phenomenon - it is result of modernity: technological development, massification of printed media and publications on common language, which caused attachment of people to their nations. Modernist theoreticians stress the importance of intelligentsia and intellectuals in formation and reproduction of national ideologies. These intellectuals, with the aim to integrate the people under one politically unity, create new nationalist narratives by rediscovering “collective memories”. (Geller, 1983; Smith, 1996)

Moreover, while creation of boundaries between in-group (self) and out-group (others), ethno-symbolist approach, concentrates on importance of myths, symbols and memories in the process



of modern nation formation. These symbols are selected and utilized through the imaginary reconstruction of the past and ancient myth-making by intellectuals and intelligentsia in the national-formation process. Anthony D. Smith (1996) argues that the resurgence of nationalist movements in the modern world can be explained by the power of the resources which reproduces the nationalism. And these resources include, first of all, ethno-histories and memories of the golden age which are unevenly distributed between nations; moreover, “politicization of myths of ethnic election” and “the power of territorial attachment to ancestral homelands and sacred sites”. According to the author, more-well-documented these memories are, more impact they have on later generations. The ideal golden age(s) have function of setting the aim for regeneration of glorious past and bringing the sense of common destiny. Combination of these three sets of resources produces great resilience of the national community. Intensively of the national revival and resilience highly depends on the depth and significance of these ethno-symbolic resources. However, these memories of golden ages of different nations can be overlapping or contradictory to each other and can become source of unsettled conflict.

The most of these theorizations are considered to be gender-blind, not taking into account what role do gender relations play in these processes. However, the major questions asked by feminist theorists are about “why/how women are oppressed?” and this question concerns power relations between men and women in existing sex/gender systems - patriarchy; “Are differences between men and women determined biologically, socially, or by a combination of the two?” and this question is appealing to the gender as social construct; and “how difference among men and among women effects upon generalized notions of gender relations?” (Yuvas-Devis, 1997, p.5)

In her book Yuvas-Devis (1997) suggests the theoretical framework of analysis of how gender relations affect and are affected by national projects by focusing on positions and positioning of women in these processes. The author builds the debate around the issue by asking: “It is

women – and not (just?) the bureaucracy and the intelligentsia – who reproduce nations, biologically, culturally and symbolically. Why, then, are women usually “hidden” in the various theorizations of the nationalist phenomena?” (Yuvas-Devis, 1997, p.2). She argues that in the process of construction of nationhood, concept of “womanhood” and “manhood” is very specifically represented. Notion of gender and notion of nation are interconnected and are constructing by one another. Analyzing relation between womanhood and manhood, femininity and masculinity and how they affect nationalism projects and how they are affected by nationalist discourse is essential. The notion of “the nation” is interconnected with nationalist ideologies, national movements and institutions of the states. These “Nations are situated in specific historical moments and are constructed by shifting nationalist discourses promotes by different groupings competing for hegemony. Their gendered character should be understood only within such a contextualization.” (Yuvas-Devis, 1997, p.4).

According to Judith Butler “when “gender” is understood to be constructed by “culture” in the same way that “sex” is constructed by “nature”, then “not biology but culture becomes destiny” (Judith Butler, 1990; Yuvas-Devis, 1997, p.8). By differentiation between biological –“sex” and socially constructed “gender”, feminist scholars claim that sexual division of labor, unequal distribution of power and material resources, economic positions is unequivocally social phenomena, that makes women oppression integral part of social relations.

Yuvas-Devis (1997) promotes analytical project of gendered understanding of nationalism and nations by looking at the gender relations into several dimensions of nationalist projects. There dimensions are - natural reproduction, national culture, national citizenship and national conflicts and wars.

To start with, in genealogical dimension of nationalist projects, which constructs the most homogeneous vision of the nation – people with shared blood and genes - gives women “naturalized” roles connected to the biological reproduction of the nation. Women who are members of national collective, in particular historical circumstances are pressured to have

more or fewer children. There are three discourses concerning this issue – “people as power”, the Malthusian discourse and eugenicist discourse. Interesting for us, in this case, can be “people in power” discourse, which presents „maintaining and enlarging the population of the national collectivity as vital for the national interest“(Yuvas-Devis, 1997, p.22). This discourse presents exclusive “genetic pool” of nation, where one needs to be born in collectivity to become part of it. And accordingly, control of marriage, reproduction and sexuality are tends to be highly present in the collectivity.

To continue with, another dimension of nationalist projects is cultural - where special importance is given to symbolic culture represented in language, religion and traditions. Here the mythical unity of national “imagined communities” allocates “us” and “them” – members and non-members of the communities and manhood and womanhood concepts are given particular importance determining gendered relations of power. Women’s role in this dimension can be “a symbolic guards and as embodiments of the collectivity” and reproducer of the culture. “The patriarchal extended family is the central social unit, in which the senior man rules everyone else and family honor is closely linked to women’s controlled “virtue” (Kandiyoti, 1988. Yuvas-Devis, 1997, p.7).

In addition, the civil dimension of nationalist project is more focused on determining boundaries by sovereignty and specific territoriality of the nation. Here we can discuss women’s rights and duties of citizenship and role in construction of civil nationhood. In this dimension, the center of focus is on private/public and passive/active dichotomies on citizenship.

The classical theories of “the social contract” divide the society in public and private domain, where men are considered to have naturalized location in public sphere and women belonged to private domain. Many feminists challenged the validity of this model, arguing that public/private assumption is not politically relevant. “The public realm cannot be fully understood in the absence of the private sphere, and similarly, the meaning of the original contract is misinterpreted within both. Civil freedom depends on patriarchal right.” (Paterman,

1989; Yuvas-Devis, 1997, p.79) The authors argue that as the nationalism and nations are considered to be public domain – political sphere, the exclusion of women from public domain resulted excluding them from the whole discourse.

Moreover, family domain cannot always be considered to be private, as the women, children and elderly are usually not in charge of determining their lives, because it is done by the “heads of the family” or even by outside – collective’s ideologies and practices.

On the other hand, passive/active citizenship dichotomy is defined “whether the citizen is conceptualized as merely a subject of an absolute authority or as an active political agent” (Turner, 1990; Yuvas-Devis, 1997). Here the citizenship itself means participating in some forms of ruling and being ruled and we can say that gender, class, ethnicity, age and language are important attributes, which can defines specific positioning in the community and degree of involvement.

In this case we should consider, as well, the boundaries between the civil society and hegemonic national collectives. Within the whole collectivity we can find “[...] sub-collectivities which experience informal and formal discrimination consonant with their credited lower social worth” (Evans, 1993; Yuvas-Devis, 1997, p.74). And the criteria of being excluded or included in the main collective can depend on class, gender, ethnicity and etc. and oppression of individuals can be realized with a name of culture and traditions.

One more aspect of the citizenship is the right to employment and gender segregation on the labor market. According to Carole Pateman:

A time when architects of the warfare state were constructing men as breadwinner-worker and women as dependent-wife. A major fight of the feminist movement has been for equal pay and equal opportunities in employment. In spite of certain achievements in this field, the gender gap and the segregated labor market have largely remained and

women continue to be primarily constructed as wives and mothers. (Pateman, 1989. Yuvas-Devis, 1997, p.90)

As for the duties of citizenship defending the country has been seen as an ultimate citizen's duty, where s/he should be ready to die and as to kill, for their homeland or the nation (Yuvas-Davis, 1985; 1991). Kathleen Jones (1990) claims that "traditionally, citizenship has linked with the ability to take part in armed struggle for national defense; this ability has been equaled with maleness, while femaleness has been equated with weakness and the need for male protection" (Jones, 1990; Yuvas-Devis, 1997, p.89).

Even if some feminists fought for women's inclusion in the military structures with the idea that it can result gaining equal citizenship rights for female subjects, it is clear that it cannot be considered the way for empowering women, because, first of all, inclusion of female objects in these structures creates more pressure on women, power relations between women and men remains to be same (there are still cases of sexual harassment) and this argument tend to ignore general social and political context of the military. Moreover, the gendered character of the war is quite vivid in every contexts and we can see sexual division among fighters and among war victims - murdered, raped, interned and refugees (Yuvas-Devis, 1997).

To sum up, on the on hand the Post-colonial feminist theories give us tools for deconstructing the dominant discourses and build alternative perspectives, whereas the theories of nationalism and gendered relations in the conflict provide analytical framework and opportunity to think about this conflict through different gendered dimensions.



## **Chapter 3 - Historical Narratives and Context of the Conflict**

For gendered dimension analysis, it is important to make short historical overview and follow the main developments of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which is largely intertwined with evolution of nationalisms, state and national building of the conflicting parties.

Through the history, Armenia and Azerbaijan established their claims to Nagorno-Karabakh territory mainly based on contradictory historiographies, in which both groups insist to be early settlers and owners of the land. This ongoing dispute goes back to ancient times with a question, who were the first indigenous settlers of the region: the Caucasian Albanians or ancestors of Armenian nation. Undoubtedly, during the centuries, racial and ethnic composition on the whole territory of the South Caucasus region was diversified and mixed.

### **3.1 Constructed Nationalistic Narratives**

In the national building and identity defining process the national history and particular constructed narratives about the historical events play central role in national mobilization process and in building of “imagined communities”. However, these narratives and constructed historical role and belonging of the nations can be contradictory and overlapping in multiple ways. The official narratives of the three involved parties in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict significantly differ.

Based on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia sources, Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh in Armenian) is a historical part of the country. It was only in 1813 that as a result of Gulistan treaty Arstakh-Karabakh was annexed by Russia. When Russian Empire collapsed 95% of population was Armenian, however by 1989 it was reduced to 76% because of ethnic cleansing and discrimination from Azerbaijan side. The Republic of Armenia states that, after collapse of the Soviet Union, Republic of Azerbaijan and Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh were established on the equal legal grounds, however, Azerbaijan started military intervention in order to keep

control of the territory. Therefore, contemporary official view of Armenia can be summarized in the following:

Nagorno-Karabakh has no future as a part of Azerbaijan and whatever is the solution, it must emanate from the will of the Karabakh people. That is essence of the right of peoples to self-determination. Azerbaijan has neither legal nor political or moral grounds to claim over Nagorno-Karabakh. (MFA of Armenia)

Based on Azerbaijan's official position, Armenian claims are unlawful and violates the international law. More specifically, based on Azerbaijan's explanation, when the Soviet Union collapsed Azerbaijan became independent with its territorial boundaries which included Nagorno-Karabakh. Accordingly, NK and Azerbaijan could not have equal legal status as Armenia claims. With respect to this Azerbaijan side quotes the International Court "The essence of this principle (Uti Possidetis) lies in its primary aim of securing respect of the territorial boundaries at the moment when independence is achieved." Azerbaijan also brings the number of UNSC resolutions to support its statement and claims that for more than twenty years Armenia has occupied internationally accepted territories of Azerbaijan and has been trying to avoid the peace negotiations artificially. (MFA of Azerbaijan)

As for the Nagorno-Karabakh's position itself, its official view not surprisingly coincides with the view of the Republic of Armenia, stating that Stalin's decision to put the territory under the Azerbaijan SSR was illegal and after collapse of the Soviet Union 98.98% population in Nagorno-Karabakh voted in favor of independence from Azerbaijan. The state prioritizes the peaceful settlement of the conflict between Azerbaijan and NK, as well as, considers it essential to international recognize the Republic so that long term peace can be established in the region. (MFA of the Nagorno-Karabakh)

As we can see, the official positions of the conflicting parties have quite contradictory character. But apart from the official statements, in is interesting to observe how these



contradictory narratives are translated in social and culture context, where formation of the nationalist-projects are massively based on confrontation between the notion of “self” and “others”.

On the one hand, in Armenia, the identity defining process is largely influenced by the hostilities the nation went through during the centuries, and especially by collective memory about the Armenian Genocide. According to the Olya:

The only thing that everyone agreed about Armenian identity is that we had genocide, if you just remove the genocide there is nothing under it. Everyone claims that we are the first country having Christianity and we have all these values, but they fail to really understand and that's why this Armenian identity issue is undecided. (O.A. 37, Political Analyst, Armenia)

On the other hand, in Azerbaijan, the national identity is largely determined by constructing “others” who are “the enemies” and the occupants-of-homeland. According to Leyla, the most influential in these processes are the collective memories connected to the hostilities which occurred during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict:

Sometimes when sitting with the people we might say that "we are brothers, we were living in peace and we will be able to live in peace" but unfortunately often someone stands up and says "no, Armenians are our enemies, they killed thousands of people, in Kojali". (L.J. 36, IDP from NK, Peace Activist, Azerbaijan)

The nationalist historical narratives about the conflict are learned during the school times, in the family and society, where the national consciousness is formed and reproduced. For example, in Azerbaijan school Gulnara learned that:

From childhood they were explaining to us that Karabakh is ours and we allowed them to live in our territory and they turned out to be unfaithful friends - they betrayed us. (G.M. 27, Second-Generation-Refugee-Women, Azerbaijan)

In contrary, Armenian schools are teaching the students about the historical injustice, which Armenian nation was forced to go through and importance of reclaiming historical homeland. Hasmik learned at school, that:

If Stalin didn't give the Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan we will not have this kind of problem and some elderly people [...] are even criticizing Stalin with bad words. So, from my childhood and my school years I just heard that if Stalin didn't gave this territory to Azerbaijan we will not have this kind of problem. (H.M. 23, Journalist, Armenia)

Constructing the image of an enemy in Armenian case was made through collective memory of Armenian Genocide and perceiving Azerbaijani people as "Turks", who are considered to be ancient enemies who had killed and exiled millions of Armenians from Anatolia, one century ago. Even now, this kind of narrative about the conflict is central, and Armenians very often use the term "Turk" while referring to Azerbaijanis. In the Armenian language word "Turk" is used to refer to "the enemy".

On the contrary, in Azerbaijan the image of the enemy is constructed around the notion of the occupants-of-homeland and the violent neighbors who showed aggression. And here as well, we can observe the similar attitude - in Gulnara's words: "When we want to insult someone we say they are "Armenians". (G.M. 27, Second-Generation-Refugee-Women, Azerbaijan)

For the better understanding of the nationalist sentiments and pillars of nationalist-projects, which largely influences the political processes around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, it is important to outline the most important historical events and occasions which have significant influence on national-identity-formation process till nowadays.

### 3.2 Genocide Narratives

April 24 - 1915 is considered to be the date when the Armenian genocide began. The Turkish government arrested and executed the able-bodied male population of indigenous Christian ethnic groups such as Ottoman Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks. The action was followed by deportation of women, children, and the elderly on death marches leading to the Mesopotamian desert in dreadful conditions. Most sources report that there were about 2 million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire at the time of the massacre. By the early 1920s, when the massacres and deportations ended, more than 90% of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire were gone, and traces of their former presence had been erased. (MFA of Armenia)

The most Armenian Diaspora communities around the world are direct result of the genocide. These events also caused a new wave of Armenian migration in the Caucasus, including Nagorno-Karabakh territory. Armenian Diaspora communities distributed around the world still play very important role in the nationalist narratives reproduction as well as in overall country's politics.

The official Armenian position portrays the 1915 events as an organized genocide carried out by Ottoman Turks against ethnic Armenians population (MFA of Armenia). While, the official Turkish position discredits the genocide, claims and calls it expulsion of Armenians from Eastern Anatolia resulting death of many due to harsh conditions (MFA of Turkey).

Since that time, the terms such as "genocide" and "massacre" have been linked with 1915 events for Armenian nation. And the Azerbaijanis, who are related to the Turks by race, language and culture, were associated with the same "cold-blooded" enemies who had participated in the genocide.

On the other hand, Azerbaijan has its own story of Genocide from Armenian people. March 31 is declared as the Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis, which commemorates bloody massacre of

March 1918 against Azerbaijani population by Armenians. More specifically, Armenian workers moved to Azerbaijan late 19th century as a result of oil boom and as their numbers increased they got actively involved in revolutionary and socialist movements in Baku. First attacks against Azerbaijanis started during the first Russian Revolution in 1905-1907 when Armenian nationalist Dashnaksutyun Party started to spread nationalistic ideas among Armenian workers in Baku such as creating "Greater Armenia". Thousands of civilians were brutally killed (MFA of Azerbaijan). Afterwards it was in 1917 when during Bolshevik revolution interests of Bolsheviks and Dashnaksutyun Party followers coincided and both sides wanted to abolish Azerbaijani national party – Musavat in Baku. As a result, starting from March 31 Armenian and Bolshevik units slaughtered estimated 12,000 to 30,000 Azerbaijani civilians only in Baku. Next several months massacres by Armenians were committed in the regions of Shamakhy, Guba, Irevan, Zengezur, Karabakh, Nakhchivan and Kars. (MFA of Azerbaijan)

### **3.3 Under the Soviet Union Rule**

After the Bolshevik revolution, under the Soviet rule, the situation around the Nagorno-Karabakh issue was more or less non-violent. Despite the fact that the ethnic composition of Nagorno-Karabakh at that time was the following: Armenians 77%, Azerbaijanis 22%, and the other ethnicities such as Kurds, Russians, Greeks and Assyrians, the region was included in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan.

On the initial meeting revolutionary committee, Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhichevan were transferred to Armenian administration, however, this decision was denied by Azerbaijani authorities and a year later both territories were put under the jurisdiction of the Soviet Azerbaijan. Many Armenians assumed that this decision was highly influenced by the good relationship between the Soviet Union and Kemalist Turkey at that time. Later, in 1923 the region received autonomy status, and was referred as the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast - NKAO. (Mirzayev, 2007)

Changing the status of Nagorno-Karabakh into Autonomous Oblast did not change the real status quo of the region belonging. Structure of the Soviet ethno-federal arrangement was hierarchical and divided into administrative units and sub-units in the following order: Union Center, Union Republic, Autonomous Republic, and Autonomous Oblast. Autonomous Oblast was supposed to have considerable cultural and administrative autonomy and was distinguished by a particular national composition and way of life, while the autonomous republic, which was structured as semi-sovereign state, was supposed to have greater political clout and prestige. In reality, both autonomous oblasts and autonomous republics were highly dependent on the republic to which they were subordinated.

Armenians considered that, Nagorno-Karabakh was promised to Armenians by Bolsheviks before the invasion of the Red Army, and inclusion of this territory in Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) caused massive disappointment on the part of Armenians. (Mirzayev, 2007)

The official politics of the Soviet Union towards ethnic minorities, nationality and identity politics during Stalin rule is largely criticized till nowadays, claiming that mostly, the conflict spots were artificially fomented in the area in order to gain political benefits and stability of centralized government. Despite, multiple calls from the Armenian side, the successors of Stalin throughout Soviet history refused to return to the Nagorno-Karabakh question.

Reforms within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union during the 1980s known as Perestroika and Glasnost policy, widely associated with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, was a political movement aiming at restructuring the Soviet political and economic system. Reforms Gorbachev intended to implement eventually promoted directly or indirectly the rise of nationalism. The escalation of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was one of such cases. (Zürcher, 2007)

In the second half of 1980s Armenian demands for unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia were intensified, and mass rallies and protests were organized. The intensification of the protest activities was attributed to Gorbachev's policy of Glasnost. On 20 February 1988 under the influence of the Armenian population the Soviet of Nagorno-Karabakh Oblast officially demanded from Supreme of Armenia, Azerbaijan and the USSR to be transferred to Armenian SSR. The demand was rejected and massive demonstrations started. Tensions continually increased until September, when authorities in Moscow declared a "state of emergency" in the NKAO. On 12 January 1989 Gorbachev assigned a new interim government for the administration in Nagorno-Karabakh directly responsible to Moscow. The attempt to stabilize situation did not appear to be effective and Nagorno-Karabakh was returned to Azerbaijan SSR. In response, Armenian government decided to create a joint budget for Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, in order to support incorporating the region to Armenia. (Zürcher, 2007)

As the two sides of the conflict started to see military intervention as a solution, both parts established paramilitary formations and engaged in regular violence. During this period brutal clashes like "Operation Ring", "Black January", "Sumgait pogrom" and "Khojaly Massacre" took place. These tragic events had the large impact on the "collective memories" of the Armenian and Azerbaijani nation.

### **3.4 The Artsakh Liberation War or/and Annexation of Azerbaijani Territories**

During 1987-91 periods, various political and paramilitary forces, independent from the official ruling party structures, emerged in Caucasus. These forces referred to the idea of nation, as defined within the Soviet system and required more power, rights and freedoms in the name of the nation.

National movements in Armenia were frustrated that the center could not satisfy their demand, concerning Nagorno-Karabakh. Formation of the first de facto government of Nagorno-Karabakh was followed by the first brutal inter-ethnic Armenian-Azerbaijani violence reported on 1987 (Oct-Nov), and in February 1988 Nagorno-Karabakh crisis began. At the end of 1989, “the Armenian National Movement and the Azerbaijani Popular Front had become legal mass movements dictating to their communist regimes the political agenda on the Karabakh question” (Zürcher, 2007, p.165).

Furthermore, a devastating and deadly earthquake in Armenia 1988 (25 000 reported casualties and more than 100 000 homes destroyed), “Sumgait pogroms” and “Black January” in Baku in 1990, further consolidated the Armenia’s unity towards the Nagorno-Karabakh matter. In April 1991, “Operation Ring” by joint military effort of Soviet and Azerbaijani security forces was the last attempt by the Soviet Union to solve Nagorno-Karabakh issue.

After the collapse of the USSR confronted sides were left on their own and communal clashes were shifted into full-scale inter-state war. The most recalled tragedy which happened during the war for Azerbaijani people was on 26 February 1992, when the Armenian armed forces seizure Khojaly. The incident which claimed the death of 613 people, including peaceful population, is known in Azerbaijan as “Khojaly Massacre”. (MFA of Azerbaijan)

As a result of the war, forced exchange of population took place: 160 000 Azerbaijanis left Armenia and 180 000 Armenians fled Azerbaijan (Rudolph, 2016). In 1993 when Armenians captured Azerbaijani region Kellbajar, Turkey closed the border with Armenia. Till present time, Turkey does not recognize the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic which was established on May 16, 1994 Russian mediated cease-fire to the Nagorno-Karabakh War. Furthermore, it continues to openly support Azerbaijan side in the frozen conflict and had set Armenian withdrawal from the disputed oblast and seven surrounding districts, as a precondition for establishing diplomatic relations and reopening joint border. (MFA of Turkey) Till 2009,

normalizing of the diplomatic relations between these two countries was not present in political agenda.

### **3.5 Nationalism in Armenia and Azerbaijan**

The trauma of the past repression, massacres, deportations and genocide are considered to be a one of the key factors leading to mass mobilization of the Caucasus nations around the idea of resistance and self-determination in the form of separate independent states.

During the turbulences in the Soviet Union at the end of 1980s, as the Soviet empire was getting less and less capable to guarantee national security to the member states, national movements in Armenia and Azerbaijan strengthened. Therefore, it can be concluded that the processes were led more by the necessity to ensure national security and self-determination rather than “ancient hatred” between one another.

According to Michael Brown (1993) “The most aggressive nationalist movements arise when states fail to carry out tasks, spurring people to create more effective states” (p.81). So emergence of the nationalist groups could be considered as the attempt to reform destabilized existing political arrangements and marginalized ruling elite within the hegemonic party in order meet economic and security needs of the states.

Frustrations that were accumulated because of the Genocide, the decision of Soviet authorities to place Nakhchevan and Karabakh – both with substantial Armenian populations – within the Azerbaijani SSR in 1923, and the Soviet repression, found expression in mass movement striving for unification under the banner of Miatsoum.

Initial mobilization of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians were directed against decades of political repression and discrimination experienced in daily politics by the Soviet Azerbaijani authorities and long-term fear of losing control over the territory, with the increase in the



ethnic Azerbaijani population of Nagorno-Karabakh. The anti-Armenian programs in Sumgait in the last days of February 1988 sent a shockwave throughout the nation and magnified the fears, transposing them to collective memory of the huge suffering of Armenians in Turkey during and after World War I. (Cheterian, 2008)

The nationalist sentiments are well represented in the statement of Samvel Babayan the head of the Nagorno-Karabakh military forces:

Today, they [Azeris] are hurting our fatherland, we should not swallow this. Having separated us for more than 70 years, they have hurt us, insulted us. Perhaps, they committed the Genocide [of Armenians] because we did not fight, we were defeated, and we were spread all over the world. Today we do not have the right to behave like that. We must fight. If we do not defend our lands today, a new Genocide will take place; we cannot turn and blame others for that. (Cheterian, 2008, 304)

On the other hand, after the collapse of USSR, Russian impartiality in Azerbaijan was changed with nationalist Azeri leader Elchibey, who swept into power with totally new program portraying Turkey as the main strategic partner, development model and ally, in contrary to Russian political interests. The debate on national identity in Azerbaijan was highly political and while the Azerbaijani Popular Front (PFA) was in power, they pushed the idea of Turkism quite strongly. (Cheterian, 2008)

Like the Karabakh committee, the APF drew its leadership from nationalist intellectuals. After becoming umbrella organization for the spectrum of groups in opposition to Communist regime, the APF first settled on to throw out Committee in the NKAO and then pressured the government to establish direct rule.

The official Turkic ideology in Azerbaijan under the PFA only added to Armenians mental amalgamation of the Turkey of 1915 with the Azerbaijan of the Nagorno-Karabakh war. It was fear of a threat of annihilation which explains more than other factors the strong mobilization

and militancy of Karabakh Armenians and their determination in the battlefield against an enemy which was not moved by similar instincts, similar fear, and past experience of near annihilation. And on the other hand, Azerbaijan saw Armenia as threat to its territorial integrity and “traitor neighbor” because of the events which occurred during the Nagorno-Karabakh escalations. (Cheterian, 2008)

### **3.6 Conflict without Compromise**

Up to present day, the Armenian forces control an area that is far larger than the territory of the former NKAO and around 16% of territory of Azerbaijan remains occupied.

The military victories of the Karabakh Armenians turned the previous understanding of minorities and victims upside down. Now, for the first time in history, the Karabakh minorities were no more minority groups ruled by “foreign” powers, but had established self-rule, and were trying to build up institutions imitating state structure elsewhere.

The Nagorno-Karabakh Armenian military drove out the entire ethnic Azerbaijani and Kurdish population not only from Nagorno-Karabakh, but also from six Azerbaijani districts outside the former administrative regions within Azerbaijan which they occupied during the war. More than 10 years after signing the ceasefire agreement, the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities have made no gesture to bring back the original Azerbaijani population of those occupied regions, linking this with the final peace agreement and regulation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Nowadays, the position of Armenia on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains unchangeable - claiming that the conflict settlement should be based on the recognition of the Nagorno-Karabakh people's right to self-determination and the security of Nagorno-Karabakh should be internationally guaranteed. Moreover, Azerbaijan's attempts to get unilateral concessions by the threat of using force are continue to be the main obstacle for the settlement through compromise.

Nowadays, the tension is still highly present between the conflicting countries, and on bordering areas from time to time we witness the military escalations, causing more loss and killings. Instead of trying to find common ground for conflict transformation, both states continue massive militarization process.

## **Chapter 4 – Main Findings: Positions and Conditions of Women Affected by the Conflict**

The dominant narratives about the origins of the conflict articulated by the mainstream political forces and media are largely reflected on the understanding of the conflict by men and women living on each side of the battlefield. However, we can say that, women's perspectives about present situation and ongoing processes, which are practically invisible on the surface, are differently stressing the reasons, outcomes and visions of the conflict and underline more defensive and humanized approaches.

Based on obtained data of the study, we can look at the gendered relations and implications of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through the scope, which was suggested by the theoretical framework. By looking at the gendered dimensions of natural reproduction, national culture, national citizenship and national conflict and war, we can analyze how the positions and conditions of women have changed and in which ways and forms the oppression of women has multiplied or transformed in the context of massive militarization and tension.

### **4.1 Patriarchal Power Relations and Women in Caucasus**

It is indisputable, that the Caucasus region is distinguished by its traditional societies with particular patriarchal mentality. It is interesting to observe and analyze, on one hand, what are the gender specific roles and how they change and are challenged in times of crisis and on the other hand, to study how different the experiences can be based on gender identity.

The very first and not surprising observation at the initial stage of the research was while visiting an IDP family of Ilgar & Firuze, in order to conduct an interview with a woman in the family. The meeting was held in Baku suburb, in their modest house near abandoned factory building. The meeting, full of hospitality and generosity ended up with me interviewing the

husband, who appeared to be a veteran from the Nagorno-Karabakh war, while wife was standing at the kitchen door providing us with tea and sweets. I think, these sweet people were a good example of the typical Caucasian family, where gender roles are traditionally distributed between breadwinner husband and caregiver housewife.

It appeared that they had quite difficult experiences of escaping the Nagorno-Karabakh war and finally getting settled in the capital. Still not having the best conditions of living, they seemed to be very hard-working, striving for better future. After resettlement husband managed to find a job as a distributor of agricultural products at Baku market and the wife mainly took care of household work, and that is how they made their living.

After the comprehensive interview, I was still left with number of questions - the questions which I try to answer in this paper. On the one hand, what are the stories and experiences of a woman standing and smiling near the kitchen door, who was silenced because of the man's presence there - Does the story her husband told us about her fully represents her experience? Does she agree with all the opinions her husband shared with us? How she escaped the war? What were her strategies of survival? What are her narratives, opinions and positions about the conflict? On the other hand, what happens when these traditional gender roles are challenged - For instance husband gets lost in a war and children left with housewife mother? Or what if based on traumatic experiences husband mental health is damaged? Or simply, what happens if men did not manage to find proper job, do women's role sub-verse and she becomes breadwinner? And etc. These were the questions I did not manage to ask her, but I tried to ask other respondents and find out alternative narratives of this conflict from the perspectives of female subjects.

## 4.2 Nationalism and Womanhood

Role of women as bearer and reproducer of nation in the natural and cultural terms can be considered, undoubtedly, as a central part of the dominant national-project narrative in the Caucasus. The militarized contexts make this role even more pronounced in these regions. As the interviewed political analyst notes:

In Armenian society, in military terms women are considered as soldier-making-machines, considering that on every party there is a special toast to the hostess of the family for raising good sons and good future mothers of the soldiers. This culture is being reproduced and whoever wants to resist are considered to be “anti-Armenians”. (O.A. 37, Political Analyst, Armenia)

It is interesting to observe the paradigms of self/others in case of mixed Armenian-Azerbaijani families, who managed to stay together in one county by changing surnames and hiding their identities. In these cases, if a woman is not “reproducing” the members of the nation, they can lose national value and even national identity:

Concerning women - they are not "carriers of the nation" and they are not subject of nationality. So on the one hand, she is not Armenian woman, if she is a mother of Azeri children, wife of Azeri, grandmother of Azeri and etc. [...]. [Women who are married to Azeri] are called "sluts", “traders”, "not-Armenians". (Y.M. 35, Armenian-Refugee-from-Azerbaijan, Journalist-Men, Armenia)

In the patriarchal system women's subordinate position implies the full vertical control over their social and economic performance, morality, dignity, sexuality and decisions, by the family and society. There are different directions to show how this attitude causes multiplication of the forms and ways of women oppression in the times of crisis.

To start with, it is already couple of decades that the South Caucasus region is named as "male-dominated region" based on the statistics of Gender-biased sex selection (UNFPA), where

Armenia and Azerbaijan share leading positions. And according to the respondents, the issue of son preference is quite problematic concern and a form of discrimination in both countries.

To continue with, we can discuss the most common traditional role women can obtain - being a mother - and bring up reproduction “natural” dimension in analysis. Generally, if in the society it is considered that being a mother and producing offspring is the main function of a female, during the warfare crisis, women are considered to have obligation for national reproduction - to give a birth to as many children as possible to bring up “dignified son soldiers” and “future mothers of the soldiers”. Accordingly, reproductive function of the female subjects protrudes forward the “people in power” discourse, which sees enlargement of the population as the primary interest of nations.

Anna, who is 33 years old feminist activist, has a very critical opinion about this topic. She considers such attitude towards women quite widespread and problematic, as it nourishes and reproduces other structural oppressions as well.

[Warfare crisis] totally changed entire social fabric and turned women solely into mothers and the men - heroes. That, as a direct violence, brings all this other structural violence. You are just there to give birth and you don't need to be involved in any decision making, you don't need to be involved in the social life. The women are forced to become just factories of soldier production, they are just bodies, they are not perceived as humans. (A.Sh. 33, Feminist Activist, Armenia)

In this discourse, the role of women is represented as the mother of nation, however, women as a subject should be part of the inner-family structure, where she is protected and controlled by men. In the war context, these possibilities can be challenged in multiple directions and one of such challenges is a simple concern that - after losing generation of men in the conflict, women are left without “protector” husbands:

Any death is a tragedy, tragedy for Azerbaijan and tragedy for Armenia. And for the generation of girls who were left without husbands. [...] We even made monitoring on how many girls got married and how many have not. (N.J. 76, Chairwomen of the Society for the Protection of Women's Rights, Azerbaijan)

Moreover, on the cultural level, the body of the women is not only considered to be an object for reproduction of the nation and controlled virtue, but also as a symbol of dignity and pride of its people. At a first glance, this appreciation of women cannot be perceived negatively, but it remains as far as it is under control and protection of “the nation”. However, what can happen if the-symbol-of-the-national-dignity falls into “the enemy’s hands?!”

In gendered dimensions of the conflict, we can observe not only sexual division of the labor, and social positions in inner-family and outer-public domain, but sexual division of the fighters and war victims – murdered, raped, interned and refugees. Even though it is the most tabooed and the least researched topic on all sides of the conflict, the absolute majority of the respondents confirmed that there were brutal violence and sexual harassments against women, since the beginning of the conflict. Arzu, 52 years old woman who was involved in the process of exchange of hostages and war prisoners confirms: “Yes, capturing the women always ended with rape.” (Ar.A. 52, Chairwoman of Azerbaijan Committee of Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, Azerbaijan)

We can see from the obtained data, that in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, rape as a gender-specific weapon of war, was extremely commonly used against “enemies” for humiliation and revenge. And the rape, as a weapon, was used exclusively against people of the female sex, for abusing the symbolic significance, which they carry for the nations. This topic is highly stigmatized and widely instrumentalized for national mobilization.

Yes, women were raped... [...] Just to show, that you are humiliating the opponent. There were lots of women, who were raped, but for us it is a closed topic, it is a tabooed issue,



there can be very few who will ever admit it. Practically nobody speaks about this topic. (D.E. Head of the Center of Women, Peace and Security, Azerbaijan)

This practice of violence, sexual harassment and rape was used by all sides of the conflict and perpetrators were justifying their actions as revenge and response to the same behavior of the opponent side. It was even perceived as the way of defeating the enemy and source of pride.

Now women have started to talk about the rapes in the NK. Not only about the rapes, that they have experienced... but about their husbands and brothers who were proudly admitting raping Azerbaijani or Turkish, because it was considered to be something good, each man or each soldier would have to do. (O.A. 37, Political Analyst, Armenia)

The victims of these oppressions and violence were mostly peaceful population living in the conflict areas, war hostages, refugees and IDPs. The perpetrators who participated in violence were acting like the packs of predators, not taking responsibility for their individual actions.

[No one talks] about these kind of stories - how they were entering a settlement, where peaceful population was living and starting to rape, to mock. [...] there were people who were doing it... as if they didn't exist... as if they were doing something else... it goes till the point of absurdity. (Y.M. 35, Armenian-Refugee-from-Azerbaijan, Journalist-Men, Armenia)

These massive silenced tragedies causing deaths, psychological and physical disorders, and lifetime traumas are the most unspoken and unreached topics throughout the whole timeline of the conflict. The patriarchal power systems - by shaming and marginalizing the victims of the violence - are pushing them back to the unopened box, in order to maintain silence and not to speak up for changes.

After the war there was no psychological assistance for people. We met a woman, who was a hostage for about 4 or 5 years in the Army [...] Even if we look at her, her eyes or her appearance everything about her reflects the nightmare she went through. We told

her that she should speak about her problems. And she said "no, I cannot", "never". No one worked with her for rehabilitation. (L.A. 42, Psychologist-Peace Activist, Armenia)

In addition, the cases and the image of "violated women" are used for reproducing the nationalist narratives pushing for more violence, on one hand, by national mobilization against insulting the-symbols-of-the-national-dignity and on the other hand by using the same tools of violence to revenge and win over "the enemies". These narratives are produced in every social direction, including art and culture. In the story told by Leyla, we can clearly see how the symbolic approach to a women's body, as dignity of nation can be used for national mobilization:

There is one painter - artist, I was at his house and I saw one big drawing. On this drawing woman is naked, she is sitting on her knees and is covering her body with her hands. On her body, she has a lot of Armenian words written and she is crying... She is raped and beaten... They wrote on her lot of bad words and the drawing is called "Women from Khojali". This painter was asking to get permission for exhibition. [...] I asked him "why did you create this? You are artist you should create art, fine art" and he replied "this is art!! You see it is our women! They were killing our women. (L.J. 36, IDP from NK, Peace Activist, Azerbaijan)

According to the respondent, fortunately this painting was rejected to be exhibited for the wider audience. However, still this attitude is very common and widespread in the society. One side of the conflict always outlines and talks about the tragic events, killings and rapes of women and children, which took place in Sumgait, and the other side only talks about tragic events which took place in Khojali.

That is how they see our war nowadays - with the image of women. If someone insulted our woman, she is carrying certain, how to say... certain symbol... and if she was raped

it means that person defeated the whole Azerbaijan. (L.J. 36, IDP from NK, Peace Activist, Azerbaijan)

We can see that in current context of the conflict, the two major tragic events, which people recall while talking about “the enemies”, are Khojali events in case of Azerbaijan and Sumgait events in case of Armenia: “In the war, woman is seen as easy target for enemy to revenge with. These kinds of cases were even in pogrom of Sumgait... they were raping, burning, letting in the street naked.” (Y.M. 35, Armenian-Refugee-from-Azerbaijan, Journalist-Men, Armenia)

This brutal attitude, especially, towards women has caused number of suicides for dignity – when women were killing themselves not to be captured by “the enemy” and murder of dignity - when women were killed not to be taken as a hostage. And these kinds of suicides and murders even became part of heroic nationalist narratives of the war. According to Gulnara, in the Caucasian mentality, preserving the dignity and protecting “your women” represents the central value of the nations and in the military context women mainly take role of victims or hostages, who heroically sacrifice themselves to protect their dignity rather than heroes who take part in military actions.

[Nationalist narratives are] presenting our women as women with a dignity and pride, who did not surrender to the enemies, were killing themselves not to be captured by them. And most of all, they were presented as victims and hostages. I have not heard women names in any military actions. If I have heard, it was very few. (G.M. 27, Second-Generation-Refugee-Women, Azerbaijan)

Yuri believes that, this kind of distribution of gendered roles - women being a victim and men being a hero is quite common and, generally, nationalism is gendered in a specific way in this context, where again, women do not own their agency, they are not subject of nationality and history, they are just objects who needs protection.

[It is considered that] as a woman does not carry true nationality, she is not creating the history, she is not deciding anything, and she is not starting the war or finishing it, she knows nothing about war and politics. She has specific obligations and if she does not carry out her obligations, it is better that she dies. If she was taken as war prisoner or hostage, than it is her fault. (Y.M. 35, Armenian-Refugee-from-Azerbaijan, Journalist-Men, Armenia)

As we can observe, these attitudes are common during the conflict, as well as, in the post-conflict times, when forms of violence against women are multiplied and become even more brutal, but not by the “enemies” but inside the family domain and in the society.

### **4.3 Gender-Based Violence**

In the militarized environment and post-conflict context the violence behavior and brutality enters everyday life of the society and becomes normalized. The strong vertical power structures, build on top-down control and domination, reproduces the same kind of systems on the smaller scales. A man who feels defeated, humiliated and controlled on public outer-space, brings the same frame of hierarchy at home – in inner-space, and plays role of controller.

According to Olya, in Armenian culture, once women are getting married, divorce and going back to parents’ house is considered to be extremely shameful act and what is more, women usually cannot afford economically to live independently. Because of this culture, in militarized context, if violent vertical power relations are getting internalized in the inner-family domain, women are getting trapped in the violent relationships without way-out.

If a man is working as a sniper and he has been on the border for 15 years and coming back home in next 15 years all he is doing is reproducing the same culture and education, and passing the traumas to his wife and kids. (O.A. 37, Political Analyst, Armenia)

Through analyzing conducted interviews, the hypothesis of the paper that - as a result of conflict the division of the inner-domestic and outer-public spaces has become prominent - is confirmed. And the assumption that, while the conflict in the outer-space renders the masculinity of the male subject at risk, the inner space remains the only domain where men can unequivocally exercise their power, which in turn renders women more vulnerable to the multiple forms of oppression, was proven in numerous directions.

As a result of developed militarized masculinities, situations in private as well as public spaces are evidently changing. Anna remembers, how brutal the transformation was, starting from the first years of the conflict:

They [ex-soldiers] would come back with this very wild and violent behavior, especially, when they were armed. So everyone who had access to weapons would want to show off in the square. They could take the machine gun and show off and even kill each other publicly when there were fights. So these are the things I remember from my childhood.  
(A.Sh. 33, Feminist Activist, Armenia)

According to Dilara the conflict and war actions not only changed common condition of women in social and economical terms, but influenced general situation within the families and in wider communities. In her words:

Men - who came back from the war, were considering themselves as the heroes of the war - felt themselves more masculine. And when they came back to their families physiologically changed, they felt the need to seize the dominant position. And statistics show that violence in the family at that time rose very much. (D.E. Head of the Center of Women, Peace and Security, Azerbaijan)

According to her, all the psychological problems men got during the war were ripped out on their wives and their children. Since no physiological rehabilitation was given to them, the wives were the ones who were forced to deal with these problems and difficulties alone. This

situation caused exceptionally high level of gender based violence and a lot of families collapsed. Moreover, there were women who could not cope with these situations alone and were deeply traumatized and closed into themselves.

The same situations were faced on another side of the conflict, where ex-militants who were in need of special psychological support did not go through any kind of rehabilitation process and were directly appointed on the positions in the Army.

The people, who after the war, are in essential need of medical-physiological help and who have seen everything and went through all of the violence, stayed as officers in the Army and all of this violence is reflected on the soldiers and at home. Unfortunately they do not recognize that they are aggressive and neurotic. (Y.M. 35, Armenian-Refugee-from-Azerbaijan, Journalist-Men, Armenia)

The majority of the respondents believe that, the most challenging part of aforementioned situation is that, in general the violence is not recognized and problematised in the society:

The most of the people think that "ok, there is a fight in the family, this is not a problem" and even if man beats woman twice a month this is not a problem. [...] There was a research in Armenia looking at why women divorced? What were circumstances? They look the data from the Ministry of Justice – in the cases of divorce initiated by women, 76% of the divorces women started when they were economically independent from their husbands, and this is a huge indicator. (O.A. 37, Political Analyst, Armenia)

Usually, people are calling this situation "domestic violence" or "violence in the family", but Lala thinks that, it is not correctly articulated, because as this behavior is very widespread and takes place everywhere, it should be referred as "violence against women". (L.A. 42, Psychologist-Peace Activist, Armenia)

According to obtained data multiple physical and psychological forms of violence against women in the family domain became prominent not only during direct conflict, but in post-

conflict period and still nowadays it remains to be a widely spread problem. Julietta shares with us the context of Nagorno-Karabakh, about this issue.

The fact that after the war our men - the ones that survived - did not receive psychological rehabilitation, had a catastrophic effect on their families. First of all, there is no culture of sitting down and talking about it. Everything is hush, hush... Thanks god it never happened to me, no one ever laid a hand on me, but there was and is a real a need for rehabilitation. Even now it is not too late. But it's not being done. (J.A. Refugee Women, Nagorno-Karabakh, "Recordless", 2016)

As in the cases of the violence against women during war-time, the topic of gender violence in post-conflict contexts is a taboo and not loudly discussed or properly addressed as a problem. In addition, because of the highly militarized context and massive nationalist rhetoric, status of being a soldier gains national importance and in case of the domestic violence - if the former soldier happens to be abusive husband - there can be fewer charges against him, because of his status as the Army veteran. To demonstrate this situation Anna brings an example:

One male, brutal man was beating his wife for seventeen years and his daughter as well, in the most humiliating, unbelievable, inhuman ways. The wife ran away from him and found refuge in the Women's Refuge Center. There was a court and eventually his penalty was just a fine, equivalent of 100 dollars - 50 000 drams. And the justification was that "well, he deserves a lot of respect as he is a member of the Veteran Union", he cannot be imprisoned - he fought in the war. And this is what the face of militarization looks like. (A.Sh. 33, Feminist Activist, Armenia)

Besides, the psychological and physical oppressions, combination of various social, economic and cultural aspects help the patriarchal system to remain women on the subordinate position in private, as well as, in public domain.

#### 4.4 Socio-economic Conditions and Subversion of the Traditional Roles

One of the most immediate results of the conflict is socio-economic and humanitarian crisis, which concerns not only communities which were directly affected by the conflict, but wider populations of the conflicting countries. Especially vulnerable in these times are refugees and IDPs who lose their houses, properties, all the sources of income, familiar environments, relatives, friends and etc. and the people who live in the conflict zone and in bordering villages, where the tension of the war and militarism has everyday presence.

In the middle of the crisis, when the states are not able to provide people with immediate care or sometimes even fail to support their living on any level, these traumatized and marginalized groups of people are pushed to strive for survival, to build their life from empty page and find shelters and source for living individually. In this contexts, as man is a normative object of warfare, majority of them are getting involved in military actions leaving behind their families, possibly without any proper financial and physical support. And in these situations, the traditional role of a woman as caregiver and household-worker is extended in different directions, and sometimes she becomes the only protector and breadwinner for the family.

The first time my husband went, the movement had just started... I told him that it was impossible - he was leaving four children in my care and leaving. I told him "At least give me a gun. If something would happen should not I be able to save at least one child?" (Civilians Women #1, Nagorno-Karabakh, "Recordless", 2016)

Leyla, 36 years old peace activist, who was raised up in an IDP family from the Nagorno-Karabakh recalls her childhood memories about the years of crisis, when her mother was struggling to save her children during displacement:

I remember, we were three children 9-10 years old, and we saw only our mother. She was alone dealing with the concerns about - where was her husband? What we would have for lunch? Where would we live tomorrow or day after tomorrow? [...] In the 90s,



it was very difficult to find antibiotics for sick children. My brother had asthma and it was very difficult. My mother saved the family, she saved children. Father did a lot as well, but mother for family, father for homeland. (L.J. 36, IDP from NK, Peace Activist, Azerbaijan)

The majority of the respondents emphasize that experiences of men in the conflict were extremely traumatic and dreadful. However, they had different battlefield and strategies of survival, which are quite in contrast with experiences of women in conflict. Suddenly, women were left alone and pushed to take universal responsibility for children, elderly, caring, earning, finding shelter and food, and etc.

Shortly, lots of problems fell on women's back in this period. It does not apply only to the refugees. It applies practically all the women because there was no family, who didn't have a family member participating in war actions. (D.E. Head of the Center of Women, Peace and Security, Azerbaijan)

After ceasefire was reached and some of men were able to return to their families, for some of them it become difficult to find a job or get adopted and integrated to the new living environment, so they migrated from the newly inhabited place to bigger cities and abroad with a hope to find a job. These cases also demonstrate different mobility opportunities for men and women - as with traditional thinking, women are the ones who are supposed to always be attached to their children and house-base, while men enjoy more freedom for travel within the countries and abroad for finding new opportunities. Family experience of Ahmed - who has IDP family from the Nagorno-Karabakh - represents a good example of this case:

All I remember, my mother never worked, she worked before the marriage. She was working at home to take care of 6 children. [...] After the conflict officially ended in 1994, my father left us because he cannot find a job in Barda. And he decided to move in Baku for work and send money to us in the region and it continued for 4 years. But at

the same time my mother and grandmother worked in the field. At that time, without working of women it was impossible to live, to get money or to eat something. (Ah.A. 34, IDP from NK, Journalist-Men, Azerbaijan)

It seems that, mobility to the bigger cities and immigrating abroad of men was and still is very common in Armenia, Azerbaijan, as well as in Nagorno-Karabakh. The main reasons for it remain to be difficulties in social and economic integration. At this time, women showed better abilities to integrate in new environment.

Women were learning the language easier and faster, started to find ways... and men refugees, those who didn't leave the country soon enough, experienced a huge decline, started drinking and so on. And they were trying to leave the county, because it was more difficult for them to integrate here. For them, it was easier to be Armenian men with lost status somewhere else. There was more pressure in Armenia (Y.M. 35, Armenian-Refugee-from-Azerbaijan, Journalist-Men, Armenia)

Another scenario of these situations was development of “traumatic masculinities” (Kabachnik, 2013) this condition represents the cases when a man could not adapt and integrate to the new environment, was not able to find occupation or did not agree to low-paid or inappropriate jobs and remains at home, losing the function and role as a breadwinner. In these situations, we can observe that in majority of these cases women were more likely to overtake this role, as more of them agreed to take any kind of low-paid or low-rank, even humiliating jobs.

Mother of my friend - whose family escaped the NK through Iran - was a nurse before war, and after she came to Baku she started selling products to earn money. Her father is such a shy person, he was not able to do that - first he started to sell products in the marketplace but his wife saw that he was not able to work properly because he was ashamed, so she took over. (A.S. 25, Second-Generation-IDP-Women, Azerbaijan)

Leyla sees the reason of this situation is differences in priorities for men and women, or even the belonging of male and female subjects to different social domains. While women naturally have the role of caregiver of children and family in the inner-family domain they are strongly attached to this environment and are more aware of the needs of family, while men are subjects of the nation - “protectors of the country” and their role belongs more to outer - public domain.

My father was arriving and only talking about war - we went there, we went here. And my mother was sitting home with two children - she was baking cookies and sweets and selling them. For her [priority] was home, family, and children and for him it was the homeland. Whose load was heavier?! (L.J. 36, IDP from NK, Peace Activist, Azerbaijan)

We can observe that gendered division of the labor of work was quite important issue, as according to the respondents men were massively left without work because there were no work places, which could be acceptable and appropriate for them.

In the regions men were building houses, working on a land, planting trees and here they were left without a job. Woman took all this heaviness on her. She was going to the marketplace, buying vegetables, coming near the house and putting it there and selling. Adaptation process for men was worse than for women. (N.J. 76, Chairwomen of the Society for the Protection of Women's Rights, Azerbaijan)

Sometimes it is even considered that, times of crisis push women to be more involved in social, economic and political environment - going out from private to public domain, and from passive to active citizens. According to respondents, women started to be more active in political processes, more interested to get education and jobs. And this process sometimes is even considered to be empowering for them. According to Dilara, “the functions of women have changed - they went to different levels of work, they even started to participate more in

political level” (D.E. Head of the Center of Women, Peace and Security, Azerbaijan). Novella believes that:

Conflict gave opportunity to girls to stand forward, find jobs and support families. In our mentality, men are the heads of the family and during the war women found strength in themselves to stand forward. [...] It was a serious subversive/leap. (N.J. 76, Chairwomen of the Society for the Protection of Women's Rights, Azerbaijan)

But according to other respondents, we cannot consider this process as step towards the empowerment of women, because first of all, these were only individual cases when women actually became slightly independent, but the overall vertical power structures became even stronger and more oppressive in militarized environment.

It changed situation for some women individually who were left without husbands, but in the whole society I don't think that women started to feel stronger. The ones who were forced to, they did, they were stronger, they worked different jobs, sometimes the dirtiest ones. But I don't think it influenced thinking of the whole society. (G.M. 27, Second-Generation-Refugee-Women, Azerbaijan)

One more issue, which we can observe about the unequal conditions of women in the post-war crisis is the lack of opportunities on a social level - specifically, educational opportunities. Because of the dominant gender roles in the society, men are getting priority to get education because they are supposed to build a family of their own in the future, while women are supposed to get married and be-given-away.

Of course my sisters stopped education, because there was no opportunity... but I and my brother studied. [Education was] expensive, they [my sisters] need different clothes, bags... there were 6 children in the family and we lost our home and everything. [...] [Before the war] my father had a good job, he earned good money and we lived in very

good conditions. After this we lost everything. But even after the war he said that "you have to be graduate student! (Ah.A. 34, IDP from NK, Journalist-Men, Azerbaijan)

Analyzing social and economical differences based on gendered roles, help us to construct the overall picture of positions and conditions on women based on these aspects. However, there are more power structures and divisions on social level, which create more and less privileged sub-groups in the societies, and bringing them into the scope of analysis help us to see broader and clearer image of ongoing processes.

#### **4.5 Vulnerable Groups and Sub-collectives**

The most vulnerable groups in the conflict named by the respondents are refugees, the internally displaced people (IDPs), and the ones who live in the bordering villages and in and around the conflict zone. Within these groups, women, children and elderly people are referred to be ones who suffer the most.

To start with, refugees who fled from Armenia to Azerbaijan and from Azerbaijan to Armenia, got into the most difficult circumstances because on one hand, they were deprived of their property, living environment and everything that they owned and on the other hand, they were pushed to start living in new surroundings where they were frequently considered as "others" because of differences in language and dialects, particular life-styles and etc. These differences caused challenging process of their integration to new living habitats.

Furthermore, IDPs are the ones who were pushed to flee from the Nagorno-Karabakh territory and seven captured regions around Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan. These people were also deprived of property and belongings and furthermore, some of them who were living in rural areas were pushed to adapt to urban surroundings.

Finally, in contrast with the people who live in the centers, for communities who live in and near the conflict zones, the war is present in their everyday life. The constant tension and being-targeted is somewhat normalized in their lives. However, they regularly experience formal and informal discrimination on social, economic and cultural bases.

These groups represent the sub-collectives, whose voice is not equally heard in the centers of the conflicting countries and sometimes they are even disregarded from the national-project or/and instrumentalized for its purposes. Till nowadays, they are target for various stigmas and stereotypes, they are used for political manipulations and they are not able to gain equal living conditions. Their conditions can be analyzed within passive/active citizenship discourse.

Since, the beginning of the first ethnic clashes, thousands of people were pushed to leave their inhabited environment because of their ethnic origins. In the very challenging socio-economic conditions they settled in different areas in refugee camps, dormitories, other state or private properties and in the places which were abandoned because of the occurred population exchange. Yuri, who is a refugee from Azerbaijan to Armenia, thinks that the approximate statistics about the number of refugees and IDPs exists. However, the problem is that there is not reliable source of information in the region, as one can encounter information which is pro-Armenian or pro-Azerbaijani. And in fact, this data is used by governments to “prove something” rather than to show the reality. Moreover, he thinks that, number, positions and conditions of the refugees and IDPs are largely instrumentalized for political proposes and the real needs and problems of these people are mainly ignored.

In reality no one cares about the refugees. I mean the government and the rest of the organizations. They are always referred in framework of propaganda - to say that e.g. Azerbaijan people and Turks are barbarians. They can show how refugees were killed, raped and tortured. But in reality, if we look at the majority of the refugees who stayed in Armenia, they are people who say that they were not treated like that in Azerbaijan. (Y.M. 35, Armenian-Refugee-from-Azerbaijan, Journalist-Men, Armenia)

Leyla, the IDP from the Nagorno-Karabakh living in Baku, says that people who fled earlier - when the conflict started - are considered to be luckier, because they managed to bring some of their properties, get better housing and conditions. However, the people who left the conflict zone on the last days – including her family - ended up in the worst conditions:

Our family stayed there till the end. I remember when we were coming out they were shooting. And we are considered to be the least lucky, because we went out without anything, my parents left absolutely everything there. And that is why it was very difficult for us to live after war, because my parents started living from zero. (L.J. 36, IDP from NK, Peace Activist, Azerbaijan)

According to the respondents, in fact, refugees and IDPs were not very welcomed in new communities, and they experienced number of challenges to get integrated into the new environment. For example, in Armenia, people who came from big cities like Baku, were stigmatized because of their origin. Yuri explains that, as Baku is a big and more international city, people there had different lifestyle, which was in contrast with new inhabited areas and because of it, especially, women refugees were stigmatized.

The condition of women refugees is really terrible, because there are also these kinds of popular opinions, stereotypes about Armenian women from Baku that they are [...] easily accessible, frivolous. Plus they lost all their property and moved to live in some kinds of dormitories and so, they were considered to be second degree citizens. (Y.M. 35, Armenian-Refugee-from-Azerbaijan, Journalist-Men, Armenia)

Moreover, the language difference between the locals and newcomers was another big issue for “othering”. Sveta, who is refugee from Azerbaijan currently living in Nagorno-Karabakh, shared her childhood memories of displacement, when she was targeted because she was Azeri-speaking child.

During the war we moved to Stepanakert, we stayed there for two years until the war ended. I remember that I went to buy bread. My mom was walking and I was following her, speaking in Turkish. They caught me at that moment, the Armenians, saying that “this is a Turkish child”. My mother said “no, my child just attended a Turkish kindergarten for years. She knows everything because of that”. From that time on, my mother forced me to start to speak in Armenian. (S.A. Ethnic Armenian Refugee from Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh, "Recordless", 2016)

The problem with the language is relevant nowadays as well, as those refugees, who did not manage to learn “proper” state language, are deprived of their citizenship rights. Yuri, who is a journalist and writes about problems of refugees in Armenia, remembers one these kinds of cases:

One woman said, that when she is writing to some institutions, such as the police or to the social agency in Russian, on the template which is in three languages (Russian, Armenian and English) they reply to her in Armenian, saying "we don't understand other language”. According to the law they need to translate for her. (Y.M. 35, Armenian-Refugee-from-Azerbaijan, Journalist-Men, Armenia)

According to Novella, who works at the Society for the Protection of Women's Rights, Armenian women from the mixed families who stayed to live in Azerbaijan had specific problems because of their ethnicity even from the state institutions, and her organization was trying to protect and help them for years.

Many of [Armenian women living in Azerbaijan] were hiding their names. There are women who cannot go to police because in the police - there is officer who was in the war, someone died from his surroundings and - she can have problems. But if they contact us, through the Ministry of Internal Affairs, we help. (N.J. 76, Chairwomen of the Society for the Protection of Women's Rights, Azerbaijan)



According to Arzu, receiving huge number of refugees and IDPs was very difficult in Azerbaijan as well. In search for shelter many refugees and IDPs occupied some of residential and state buildings and the attitude towards them became negative. The newcomers, who were used to agricultural work suddenly, appeared in urban environment and it was difficult for them to find jobs in first few years. As a result, there were problems of “othering” and difficulties to be integrated.

Frankly saying they were not received very positively. People from Baku were always different from the rest of Azerbaijan. They are much more snobbish. And when we saw people who came from rural places and their behavior, there was some distance. (Ar.A. 52, Chairwoman of Azerbaijan Committee of Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, Azerbaijan)

Leyla remembers that on the first years living as an IDP, the economic situation for her family was very hard, and she often felt ashamed and stigmatized because of her social status:

Before it was very shameful for me to talk about this - that my mother is working day and night and my father is working, there and here and there. [...] We had very poor conditions of living and environment - people around us were looking at us as second class citizens. We had lice in our heads and for local people it was very disgusting, they were not friends with us. (L.J. 36, IDP from NK, Peace Activist, Azerbaijan)

The refugees, who were given citizenship of Azerbaijan immediately and the IDPs who ended up living in Baku and other big cities, got more privilege and support to get integrated. However, the ones who were settled in different areas far from the center are more vulnerable till nowadays.

For those, who live in other cities, houses were built as settlement - such as in Buchur and others... They live in their own environment and that's why they didn't integrate, they have their own rules, their own behavior, own understanding. They are

absolutely different. (Ar.A. 52, Chairwoman of Azerbaijan Committee of Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, Azerbaijan)

The most recent escalation which caused displacement of people from their homes happened in April 2016. Lala remembers that during the last big escalations of the conflict in April 2016, people who fled from the conflict were met more openly at initial phase and lots of people were trying to help these new-IDPs with housing, food and etc. However, four-three months later that attitude changed by the rhetoric, like: "Go! And keep your Karabakh!", "Go to your Karabakh, live there and keep it! It is your land, it is not mine to do that". (L.A. 42, Psychologist-Peace Activist, Armenia)

According to her, the people who were displaced in April 2016 were not socially and economically protected, because officially they were not able to receive social or medical allowances from Armenian state and because of that they were sent to live in Nagorno-Karabakh.

It seemed like it was the politics of Armenia and the politics of Karabakh to keep people there. Because once they would receive medical or social allowances or help in Armenia all of them would come there [from Karabakh]. So they were trying to keep people there and they were really rejecting to give any help. (L.A. 42, Psychologist-Peace Activist, Armenia)

The main problems of the people who are living in the conflict zone and in the bordering villages are: isolation, constant fear of conflict escalation and presence of the war in their everyday life. Lyudmila who is living in Nagorno-Karabakh expresses concerns about isolation of the region and not equal rights for travelling in and out of the conflict zone:

We are Armenians, they are Armenians and there is a barrier between us. Is it right? [Why do] I need to go through customs to go to Armenia? Or why does someone have to

go through customs to come to Karabakh from Armenia? I don't know. (Civilians Women 1, Nagorno-Karabakh, "Recordless", 2016)

Because of the frozen conflict and escalations from time to time, the militarization of the both states is increasing – more and more people go to service and get killed to the Army. Svetlana says that situation is becoming worse:

Now it is worse. We did not lose so many soldiers during the war, we lost more in the, so called, peaceful times. Is this peace? We can't sleep or live normal lives. We hear about new cases every day. [...] The sad part is that the war didn't end with us, 18 year old innocent soldiers and kids die on the military post. (Civilians Women 2, Nagorno-Karabakh, "Recordless", 2016)

Especially after April 2016 escalation, which is known as “four days war”, threat of war became more tangible for local population and it expanded the feeling of instability and insecurity. If during the war times, people from both countries fall into deep economic crisis and they were trying to survive in any ways possible, nowadays, condition of the people who live in the conflict zone, and especially women and elderly still remains critical:

“Every time I go to Krasni Bazaar, to the cemetery, I don't have money to go. I cry and laugh. I receive 20 monets (42\$) [...] How can I afford a living for 20 monets - to eat, to drink and to go to Krasni Bazar for a flower?” (Y.S. Former War Hostage, Nagorno-Karabakh, "Recordless", 2016)

The villages of the bordering areas are considered to be targeted from the both sides and communities whose main income depends on agriculture are not able to perform their job on the fields, because they are afraid of being killed by snipers. Leyla believes that people at the bordering villages want to have peace more than anyone else.

They are already so tired of it, our side is shooting and their side is shooting, they are killing livestock. Now there is a season - they want to go out and plant something. Our

side is saying that Armenian side is creating big fires and from there lots of snakes are coming to us. [...]They are repairing their houses because every-time there is a shooting someone's house is damaged glasses are broken or roof. They are so tired of it. (L.J. 36, IDP from NK, Peace Activist, Azerbaijan)

In addition to the fact that people from the both sides of the borders are not able to use their lands for agriculture purposes and livestock breeding, because they live under the shootings, the states do not provide adequate social programmers and support for them. And often they are even pushed to pay the tax of the land, which they are not able to use, because of the conflict. Lala says that: "In Tavush region of Armenia, they cannot use lands but they are paying the tax for that land. It is officially their property but they are afraid to go there, because they can be killed. (L.A. 42, Psychologist-Peace Activist, Armenia)

Yuri thinks that the needs and socio-economic struggles of bordering communities are neglected and invisible on the state level. However, they are quite actively used for the propagandistic purposes on nationalist projects.

They have problems with harvesting, they have problems with credits, and they are forced to sell their whole harvest for the cheapest price. [...] And there are some people coming, giving them microphones, and they only need to talk that "Armenians are like this, Turks are like that, and we will win". (Y.M. 35, Armenian-Refugee-from-Azerbaijan, Journalist-Men, Armenia)

Because of these socio-economic conditions and high level of unemployment, the only real career and employment opportunities these communities are left with is military service. The vast majority of the people from conflict zones and bordering villages are enrolled in the Armies. And the employment conditions within the structure do not give them chance to leave the service.

The state is making people to serve in the Army, because you need to have this 20 years agreement with the state and to serve in the Army. If you decide to reject - to break the contract you need to pay a lot of money, that these people usually don't have, they are poor. (L.A. 42, Psychologist-Peace Activist, Armenia)

Despite the fact that the situation is so critical, these vulnerable groups and sub-collectives are not able to self-organize and mobilize to fight for their rights and they remain being passive citizens. Although, respondents think that, the large number of migration from these areas is the most widespread form of protest against the exclusion and inequality. According to the them, people who still stayed to live in these areas probably are ones who have economically poorest condition and they cannot afford to escape, because the most of the refugees, IDPs and members of sub-collectives who afforded, have already migrated to Russia or to other places abroad.

#### **4.6 Women in Military Structures**

Apart from the back-frontline support as humanitarian-medical aid and general military labor, women were involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh underground liberation movement, as well as, participating in war as snipers and militants in Armenia and Azerbaijan. In contrast to old times, when women participation in the military structures was not very common, nowadays, the doors of military academies are open for women in Armenia as well as in Azerbaijan, and presence of women in the Army becomes more and more persistent.

As we have discussed in the literature review, the United Nations 'women, peace and security' (WPS) agenda - which contains three main pillars - protection, prevention, and participation, - has been somewhat followed by the National Security Action Plans of Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, the policies adopted and implemented in these countries are less targeted to the prevention aspect and are more concentrated on protection and participation parts. Directions

chosen by the governments are less helpful for transformation of the conflict and peace-building processes, but rather promoting more militarization for protection and participation with involvement of more women in military structures. Olya, the political analyst from Armenia, expressed deep concerns with this regard:

I think that they are reproducing this Macho-culture, when they want to create spaces for women to be involved in militarism, in a very certain way. For me the UN 1325 is totally unacceptable. [...] Militarization and involving women in military structures, of course, does not give women access to high-level decision making posts. First of all, [the resolution] promotes war. And secondly the attitude is - "you [women] are just technical work for us, because you really don't have brains". (O.A. 37, Political Analyst, Armenia)

Besides criticism, the reality is that women were and are involved in the Armies and in our case it is important to: Who are the women who become part of the Armies? How they manage to become parts of these highly masculine structures? How they navigate their femininity in these environments?

These are several dimensions which should be discussed while analyzing positions and conditions of women in military structures. First of all, we should question why women actually start to be involved in the militarism and this question goes to position and goals of the state, social and economic environment and personal goals and opportunities. Furthermore, I would like to overview the challenges of the women, who are getting involved in these masculine military structures, on personal and social levels. And finally, I would like to explore, what are the positions, conditions and recognition of their service.

As it seems from the interviews, that in Nagorno-Karabakh women who got involved in the first military actions were mainly the ones who lost their brothers, fathers, husbands, closed friends and relatives in this conflict. First reason listed by the respondents regarding why women are more involved in the military nowadays is connected to the states' overall

promotion and support of this direction. In Armenian case, respondents believe that the call for women participation in the Army is partially caused by lack of human resources, which is inherently induced because of the massive migration. Anna believes that female fighters have not really gotten inside the structure till the times of depopulation, when the Army really needed to maintain the headcount and actual number of soldiers. And that is when the new image of women soldiers has been promoted.

The government is manipulating "the new gender image" and they are shifting from their super traditional narrative of women being only mother to the safeguards of the home-earth. Now they are making even the social ads of women as soldiers. But they presented it in this very capitalist way - you can become a paid conscript, not mandatory but like you can be a paid soldier. Women are presented as a cool soldier. (A.Sh. 33, Feminist Activist, Armenia)

In case of Azerbaijan, according to Leyla, media is promoting image of women soldiers, however in social life they are less visible.

[Women soldiers] exist, but they are not in public. Maybe they are not allowed to speak, they keep silence. But there are lots of photos in the media, where women are with military forms, guns. [...] There are legends about Armenian and Azeri women snipers. They say that on the border there are lots of women snipers. I don't know why, I have not seen them. (L.J. 36, IDP from NK, Peace Activist, Azerbaijan)

Respondents agree that nowadays, being a soldier becomes social status for women, because in the military they have more connections, healthcare and social benefits. And indeed, another aspect of women participation in the military structures is economic and social conditions they live in. According to Olya, when she looked at the backgrounds of the women who went to military school, she clearly saw that at least half of them were from the orphanages and she thinks that, in fact, the women who get enrolled in the academies do not have much political

understanding - the interest to study there is caused by free housing and career opportunities which this places provide for people in need. It is the case also in bordering villages, as well as, in Nagorno-Karabakh. According to her:

In Nagorno-Karabakh there is really no space for civil society because half is employed within government and half in employed within the military. And basically there are at least two people from each family that are working either here or there. (O.A. 37, Political Analyst, Armenia)

Anna, thinks that, on the one hand, there are social conditions which make women choose to go to the Army and on the other hand, government is highly promoting the image of women soldiers based on the nationalist narratives: “What is happening now is this very big flow of nationalism. The government wants to subvert the image of the women from a mother to a mother and a soldier” ( A.Sh. 33, Feminist Activist, Armenia).

Even though, the most of the respondents of the research consider that, military service should not be mandatory for neither for women nor for men, existing stereotype that the women should keep the home-front and men should keep the war-front is considered to be quite problematic. If woman decides to be part of the Army, they are often stigmatized and marginalized among men colleagues and in the society, they are not given high ranks and are not appreciated as much as male comrades. Depending on their achievement and social status, they can be considered to be not-well-behaved, immoral and not-real-women with dignity. They are asked to prove themselves and are not given appreciation as they deserve and etc.

If a woman is strong, educated, wise, everyone will respect her. I think, it depends on a person. A man I know also served in Nagorno-Karabakh, and he said that with him there were a lot of women officers. He said, they are so ‘vulgar’, they behave badly. [...] Yes, they are strong but they are becoming like boys. Not physically but also how they act



how they present themselves. How they speak with each other. (H.M. 23, Journalist, Armenia)

Gender segregation of the military labor, difficulties to achieve higher ranks and uneven positions and conditions of women in military structure are undoubted concerns. But another important matter is that even women who manage to climb the career ladder and achieve success in their sphere, are still more likely missing from the history and conflict narratives.

When there is a woman in the military primarily they will think badly about her. [...] They [war veterans] are always criticizing others and if this someone is a woman than they will be the most misogynic in the world. (Y.M. 35, Armenian-Refugee-from-Azerbaijan, Journalist-Men, Armenia)

According to the respondents, even if at some point women had achieved the status of appreciation, they still remained more vulnerable as female objects and they were more likely predisposed to sexual violence. Moreover, suicide and killing for dignity are more common with female comrades. From many other examples, Dilara, shared one story of a suicide:

In 1993 was established women battalion, which was filled up with women who were ready to go to fight. And one woman, member of our organization, got to the siege and shoot herself. Before that she was fighting side by side with men. And attitude towards her is as to legendary women who have taken part in military actions. (D.E. Head of the Center of Women, Peace and Security, Azerbaijan)

At the initial stage of the conflict when participation of women in military actions was not as common as it is nowadays, the women who were willing to get engage in military actions were challenged because of their gender identity and they were pushed to develop various strategies in order to get involved and be accepted. First struggle for these women often occurred with their family members, who considered that the best way for helping the nation from their side was getting married and raising children rather than going to the battlefield.

When mom was alive back then [...] she was telling me that as a girl I can get married and have a child - if I love my nation so much, I could be helpful in that way. I told her I would not get married before the war ended. [...] To tell the truth, I could never imagine that I would get married. (V.D. (Non-formal) Head of First Women's Division, Nagorno-Karabakh, "Recordless", 2016)

Because of the family objections, many women even escaped home and registered in the battalions secretly. However, convincing the heads of the battalions to accept women comrades was the second big struggle for them. And once more the reason from rejection to be accepted was based in traditional "natural" thinking of women's role in the national-projects.

I went there and he said "sister go and have a child, we will fight" and I said "sure, the ones who want to have children, let them do so, but I don't want that". Not that I don't need a child, but that was not the time for a marriage. But, he rejected me. Several people told me, "No, it is a man's job!" (K.D. Female Fighter 1, Nagorno-Karabakh, "Recordless", 2016)

Good example of this kind of struggle is story of Varduhi, who got involved in the conflict since the initial stage and in order to be allowed to go, she needed to pretend that she was going as a cook for the soldiers, but when she finally got there she relieved her real motivation:

When I went there I said I would not cook and we should make the duty list, everyone should have their day in order. After that we put a target in front of me and I said that if I do not hit the target, then I would agree to cook, but, since I was good with the gun, I hit the target. (V.D. (Non-formal) Head of First Women's Division, Nagorno-Karabakh, "Recordless", 2016)

As we see from Varduhi's story, she needed to prove that she was good enough for the army by demonstrating her shooting skills. In the other stories, we can see that sometimes women had challenges to following the dominant order as they were somewhat more sensitive in number

of issues such as leaving wounded soldiers behind, torturing the war prisoners and etc. Varduhi tells us that she has not followed the order of the commander when she was asked to leave the wounded soldier on the way:

There was Gena, a wounded boy. We were carrying him out on a cold in the snow and our commander told us to leave him and run, the Turks were coming. They would catch us. They were ready to shoot us not to let them take us hostage. The bullet was in boy's artery, he was bleeding heavily and we had quickly put bandages on his leg and given injections. So commander was telling me to leave the boy and run. He was shooting on the ground under my feet to make me run. I told him I would not leave the boy. (V.D. (Non-formal) Head of First Women's Division, Nagorno-Karabakh, "Recordless", 2016)

During the clashes first paramilitary formations were often involved in capturing war prisoners and hostages and then sometimes exchanging them with their own people, who were taken as hostages by the opposing side. There is no doubt, there were some ill-treatment and violence done towards these imprisoned people. However, Varduhi said she never saw someone harming the hostages, because she never let anyone to do so.

There was one person, we had caught him. I don't know what they did to him, but when I approached, I sent the offender off and made them give him bread, tea, butter and sweets to eat. They said he should not eat, I said he should. [...] I said one should not kill another with hunger. This is our trophy, we didn't brought food here once we liberated it. The bread is theirs and the butter is theirs, you will not get rich or become poor because of it. "Several hours ago he was going to kill me", but he did not manage it. (K.D. Female Fighter 1, Nagorno-Karabakh, "Recordless", 2016)

By all means, based only on these two episodes we cannot conclude that women in military structures tend to have more humanized behavior. However, certainly the subordinated

positions of female subjects make them to be more sensitive and have different approach and attitude towards number of issues, in contrast with male subjects.

The relations inside the military units were gendered in different manner. Sometimes women even needed to protect themselves and each other from the abuses with sexual content, even from their comrade male subjects. Apart from the open discrimination cases, general attitude of society towards women soldiers sometimes was not very respectful and there were lots of rumors about them in these small communities.

Even when women are inside the structure, the power and positions are still unevenly distributed, and women remain to be on subordinated positions, reproducing the mainstream masculine politics. Yuri calls reproduction of the masculine politics by female subjects “the institute of-mother-in-law”.

If we look at women in the Army on good positions, or there are women as ministers, you cannot say that the woman is on the power – but this is a woman who is reproducing power of her chief. It is the institute of mother-in-law, as it is women in the family the mother-in-law or aunt is reproduction of male authority - patriarchal authority - on another woman. (Y.M. 35, Armenian-Refugee-from-Azerbaijan, Journalist-Men, Armenia)

According to the interviews, after the war, contribution of the most of women who were voluntarily fighting or being involved in humanitarian work had not been properly recognized, some of them are not given proper pension or social aid. The nurse who was working during the war feels disappointed by the lake of attention by the state to war veterans.

We have done all those things and gone through so much, but nobody knows us now. On March 8, on our Army Day, on the Independence Day, at New Year’s, you cannot find our names anywhere. I have one military merit medal, which they gave me in 2003. And another one for Maternal gratitude – two medals. Nothing else. You can go pay

1000 drams (2\$) and get one. (I.H. & E.G. Nurse #1, Nagorno-Karabakh, "Recordless", 2016)

The situation is more critical when we look at women whose health was permanently damaged during the conflict and who are in need of constant medical assistance and special care and the state health programmers fail to support them. Generally, according to them, the benefits are not evenly distributed. Men even with no war participation can get more benefit, while veteran women who got disabled because of the war not given any benefits:

There is Slavik who is missing an arm, gets benefits, but he was not wounded in battle. He was standing in front of his shop and a bomb exploded, severing his arm. He receives benefits, he even has a Combat Cross medal. But I do not have one, even though I was a sniper during the war. (Y.A. Female Fighter 2, Nagorno-Karabakh, "Recordless", 2016)

As we see the roles, positions and conditions of women in the military structures is a multidimensional issue which is still based on patriarchal power relations and vertical structures, where women tried to find their way either with copying the masculinized behavior or trying to include aspects of feminist politics in these structures.

## Chapter 5 - Conclusion

Analyzing context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through postcolonial feminism discourse concentrating on gender and nationalism scope, gives opportunity to explore gender dimensions and implications of the conflict with alternative feminist perspectives.

Looking at the historical narratives of the conflict from different angles, on the one hand, it shows how the new nation-projects were constructed in Armenia and Azerbaijan after the desolation of the Soviet Union, and on the other hand, help us to understand what are the main pillars of nationalist agendas in these countries at the present time. Evidently, these constructed national-projects influence the gendered dimensions of the natural reproduction, national culture, national citizenship and national conflict in various ways and form the positions and conditions of women affected by the conflict.

The dominant patriarchal power relations in the Caucasus region is nothing new to be surprised of, however, the militarized contexts transforms the gendered power relations on different levels and we can observe that the oppression of women in these contexts multiplies in different ways and forms in inner-private, as well as outer-public domain.

In the national-projects, where the notions of womanhood and manhood are constructed in particular way based on traditional understanding of gender roles in the society, women are seen as reproducers of the nation, however, they can be deprived from being carriers of national-identity if they do not contribute to development of the “national pool” and does not fit to the mainstream national narratives.

Moreover, as women are often seen as the symbols of the dignity of the nations, in the militarized conflict contexts, their bodies are used as the battlefield of nationalist clashes, where they become target for humiliation and revenge against enemies. That is why female subjects become more vulnerable towards sexual violence, rape and torture and are tend to commit suicide-for-dignity or are victims of killing-for-dignity. The study relived that gender-based

violence against women got more frequent and prevalent because of the conflict and the reason for it can be considered the strengthening of vertical militarized powers in public spaces, which became internalized in the private-family domain.

The deep social-economic crisis and enrollment of men in the war-fare processes have caused subversion of the traditional roles of women and men in the conflicting societies. At the initial stage of the conflict women were pushed to leave the private-family domain and extend their traditional roles of caregivers and household-workers to bread-feeders for the family. After the cease-fire agreement, when men returned to their families, the situation has changed in different ways. First of all, non-existence of psychological rehabilitation programmes for post-conflict traumas left women alone to cope with male subjects who in some cases become brutal and violent. Secondly, the inability of men to adapt to the new living environments, especially in the case of refugees and IDPs, made them immigrate in different cities/countries or develop “traumatic masculinities”, while women were, again, left alone with the family duties.

The most vulnerable groups in the conflicting societies are considered to be refugees, IDPs and communities who live in and around the conflict zone. These communities represent sub-collectives of the society who often do not fit to the mainstream nationalism narratives, are deprived from equal social rights, experience formal and informal discrimination and are the targets of stigmatization. In these communities women, children and elderly people were named as the sub-groups who suffer the most.

Recent international (Resolution 1325) and local (Security NAPs) policies promote incorporation of women issues in peace and security agendas. However, they fail to push conflict transformation and peace-building processes and seem to be more successful in direction of more militarization-for-protection and enrolling women in military structures. As a result, more women in Armenia and Azerbaijan are recruited in the national Armies. Based on the results of the study, the reasons of why women are becoming part of military structures can

be found in their difficult social and economic conditions, influential propagandas of the states and expected social and career benefits.

However, being part of these masculine structures does not protect female subject from being targets of stereotypes, stigmatization and sexual harassment. They are pushed to navigate through their femininity to get accepted to the militarist environment and they are asked to prove themselves as worthy comrades. However, often they are not given high ranks and positions and in general their contribution and success is less valued and recognized.

Bringing the feminist perspectives into the conflict context and analyzing women's positions and conditions in ongoing processes, help to construct alternative invisible aspects and narratives different from the dominant discourse. And it is first step towards developing feminist agenda of the conflict transformation which aims promote more humanized politics and demilitarization.



## References:

- Anderson, Benedict (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.
- Benhabib, S and D Cornell (eds) (1987): "*The Generalized and the Concrete Other*," *Feminism as Critique: Essays on the Politics of Gender in Late-Capitalist Societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press,
- Brown, M. E. (1993). *Ethnic conflict and international security*. Princeton (N.J.): Princeton University Press.
- Chakraborty, Arpita (2017, May 19). *Can Postcolonial Feminism Revive International Relations?* Published by Journal of Economic and Political Weekly. Retrieved from: <http://www.epw.in/journal/2017/20/special-articles/can-postcolonial-feminism-revive-international-relations.html>
- Cheterian, Vicken (2008). *War and Peace in the Caucasus: Ethnic Conflict and the New Geopolitics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Chowdhry, G., & Ling, L. (2018). *Race(ing) International Relations: A Critical Overview of Postcolonial Feminism in International Relations*. Retrieved from <http://internationalstudies.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-413>

- Chowdhry, G., & Nair, S. (2002). *Power, postcolonialism, and international relations*. London: Routledge.
- E. Cornell, Svante (2011). *Azerbaijan since Independence*. New York, London: M.E. Sharpe.
- Geller, E. (1983). *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Hayhurst, L. M., Sundstrom, L. M., & Waldman, D. (2018) *Post-colonial Feminist International Relations Theory and Sport for Development and Peace*. Retrieved from [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/978-1-137-53318-0\\_37](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/978-1-137-53318-0_37)
- Lowell W. Barrington, Ed. (2006). *After Independence: Making and Protecting the Nation in Postcolonial and Postcommunist States*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2006.
- Mirzayev, S. (2007). *The Conflicting Theories of Ethnic Conflicts: The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh*.
- Nikoghosyan, A. (2018) *Co-optation of feminism: Gender, Militarism and the UNSC Resolution 1325*. Eastern European Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies.
- Pratt, N. (2013) *Reconceptualizing Gender and Reinscribing Racial–Sexual Boundaries in International Security: The Case of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on “Women, Peace and Security”*. International Studies Quarterly, doi: 10.1111/isqu.12032
- Rudolph, J. R. (2016). *Encyclopedia of Modern Ethnic Conflicts* [2nd Edition]. ABC-CLIO. Santa Barbara, United States.

- Sarkisyan, Anna (2014). *Security Issues from Gender Perspectives: Nagorno-Karabakh through the Eyes of Armenian and Azerbaijani Women*. Center for Gender and Leadership Studies. Yerevan
- Shepherd, L. J. (2015). Peacebuilding. In: Shepherd, L. J. (ed.) *Gender Matters in Global Politics: A Feminist Introduction to International Relations*. New York: Routledge.
- Smith, A. D. (1996). LSE Centennial Lecture: *The Resurgence of Nationalism? Myth and Memory in the Renewal of Nations*. *The British Journal of Sociology*,
- The De Collective, & Lusine Chergeshtyan (Editor) (2016) Documentary film: *Recordless. Armenia*
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (MFA of NKR). *ARMENIAN GENOCIDE CENTENNIAL*. Retrieved from <http://www.nkr.am/en/armenian-genocide-centennial/164/>
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia (MFA of Armenia). *Nagorno-Karabakh issue*. Retrieved from <https://www.mfa.am/en/nagorno-karabakh-issue/>
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia (MFA of Armenia). *Genocide*. Retrieved from <https://www.mfa.am/en/genocide/>
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan (MFA of Azerbaijan). *Aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan*. Retrieved from <http://mfa.gov.az/en/content/632>

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan (MFA of Azerbaijan). *31 March - Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis*. Retrieved from [http://mfa.gov.az/files/file/31\\_March\\_-\\_Day\\_of\\_Genocide\\_of\\_Azerbaijanis.pdf](http://mfa.gov.az/files/file/31_March_-_Day_of_Genocide_of_Azerbaijanis.pdf)

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey (MFA of Turkey). *The Armenian Allegation of Genocide: The issue and the facts*. Retrieved from <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-armenian-allegation-of-genocide-the-issue-and-the-facts.en.mfa>

The United Nations General Assembly Resolutions. Retrieved from:

<http://www.un.org/en/sections/documents/general-assembly-resolutions/index.html>

The United Nations Reproductive Health and Rights Agency (UNFPA). *Gender-biased Sex Selection*. Retrieved from <https://www.unfpa.org/gender-biased-sex-selection>

Thomas, De Waal (2010). *Armenia and Azerbaijan: An Intimate Quarrel in Caucasus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Walsh, S. (2015). *Women, Violence and Peace in the South Caucasus: a Regional Perspective*.

Published by Peace Direct. Retrieved from:

<https://www.insightonconflict.org/blog/2015/09/women-violence-and-peace-in-the-south-caucasus-a-regional-perspective/>

Youngs, G. (2004). International Affairs. *Feminist International Relations: a contradiction in terms? Or: why women and gender are essential to understanding the world "we live in"*.

Yuval-Davis, N. (1997). *Gender and Nation*. London: Sage.

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

## Appendix A

### Semi-structured Interview Guideline

**Date:**

**Name:**

**Resident of:**

**Age:**

**Occupation:**

**Education:**

#### **Section A. Personal**

A1. Tell me little bit about yourself

A2. How you first got interested in peace and conflict issues?

A3. What are your childhood memories about the war? And what they are mainly connected with?

#### **Section B. Generally about the Conflict**

B1. What is your view about the conflict? What were the origins and causes of it?

B2. From your point of view who were the main actors in the conflict? (external or internal) and what were their roles?

B3. Were/are women visible as actors? In which roles and what ways

#### **Section C. Personal encounters/observations of the conflict**

C1. What were the most striking stories you have heard about/written about?

C2. Why these stories were important for you?

C3. Which were the most affected vulnerable groups of the conflict?

C4. What makes them vulnerable and why?

C5. What are the needs they have?

C6. How their situation changes by the course of the time?

C7. What are their demands and their main target (government, local institutions..)

C8. Have there been any facts of stigmatization and marginalization based on social statuses? stigmas? "othering"?

C9. How integrated are the IDPs and refugees in the society? Women

C10. Do they have any kind of organization?

#### **Section D. Women and Gender Roles**

D1. How did the conflict subvert/establish gender roles in the society in conflict?

D2. What are the new images/roles adopted by women in conflict society?

D3. How they negotiate their role in environment where man is a normative subject of conflict participation?

D4. How do their everyday life look like and how does unstable situation and emergency state in reflected on it?

D5. From your point of view, what are the forms of oppression women experiences in conflict which are different from violence on man?

D6. Which could be oppressions on inner/domestic level?

D7. Have you heard about these kinds of cases in conflict?

D7. Which could be oppressions on outer/social, political and economic level?

D8. How can you evaluate the participation of women in conflict analysis? Are they involved? Active?

D9. What skills and characteristics should women have/adopt for being able to participate in conflict? Be a part of army?

D10. How the society view women soldiers? Negative or positive perceptions?

D11. Have there been any facts of stigmatization and marginalization based on gender and social statues? stigmas of "othering"?

D12. How they see their role in past, present and the future?

## Appendix B

### List of the Interviews

#### Azerbaijan

#	Name	Status	Sex	Age
1	S.A	Second-Generation-IDP-Women	F	25
2	M.G	Second-Generation-Refugee-Women	F	27
3	Ar.A.	Chairwoman of Azerbaijan Committee of Helsinki Citizens' Assembly	F	52
4	E.D.	Head of the Center of Women, Peace and Security	F	58
5	J.N.	Chairwomen of the Society for the Protection of Women's Rights	F	76
6	J.L.	IDP from NK, Peace Activist	F	36
7	Ah.A.	IDP from NK, Journalist-Men	M	33

#### Armenia

#	Name	Status	Sex	Age
8	H.M.	Journalist	F	23
9	A.L	Psychologist-Peace Activist	F	42
10	Sh.A.	Feminist Activist	F	33
11	A.O.	Political Analyst	F	37
12	A.M	Peace and Conflict Researcher	F	31
13	M.Y	Armenian-Refugee-from-Azerbaijan, Journalist-Men	M	35

