

### Unfreezing the "other": collective trauma and psychological warfare over the Nagorno-Karabakh rivalry

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Indexing

Abstracting

## UNFREEZING THE “OTHER”: COLLECTIVE TRAUMA AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE OVER THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH RIVALRY

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### *Abstract*

*This paper aims to lead an overview on Nagorno-Karabakh rivalry between Armenia and Azerbaijan in order to highlight the frozen state of affairs through an alternative prospective left currently out within the peacekeeping operations. Therefore, main attention is not paid to OSCE-Minks attempts to unfreeze the ethnic conflict, however to the role of collective trauma and historical imaginary to point out the Other question that will be performing a structural role when the two-decades-war will be hopefully over. Hence, what is to be forgotten from wrenching past? How will the figure of the Other – no matter Armenian or Azerbaijani – affect the post-conflict scenario currently negated by cultural prejudices and political propaganda?*

*Key words: Nagorno-Karabakh; “frozen conflict”; “Otherness”; collective imaginary; psychological trauma*

## INTRODUCTION

The worsening conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh is the oldest war in the former Soviet orbit and the Europe’s longest continuous military confrontation between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In the current insecurity and uncertainty scenario over the two-decades-conflict, it is surprising that neither side are ready to compromise due to a lack of social restoration and peace agreement they should establish. However, the two Caucasian young republics’ real grievances and legitimate claims under international law have generated a “war of law-s” by which both states have been over years clinging to their “all-or-nothing” outlooks. Although Minsk Group’s mediation pays regular visits in the field, several attempts to reach a peace resolution in long-term perspective have failed due to a lack of political motivations and wills in order to definitely compromise (Ayunts, Zolyan, and Zakaryan 2016).

The European Union initiatives of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), too, in which Armenia and Azerbaijan are post-Soviet Member States, seem to be unless in their concrete application. This paper will be threefold.

Firstly, I will try to briefly unravel the historical background over territorial conflict in order to lead a general overview regarding the most important events and to step forward to the second key-area. Here, I will privilege more categories of culture and social dimensions to describe the cluster of emotions, prejudices and perceptual distortions manipulatively driven by historical imaginary and collective trauma in turn controlled by ruling élites. By doing so - according to many intellectuals, cultural historians and political experts - I will argue that political discourses, ideology and historical narrative ought to be privileged categories of social analysis (Curtis 1997, 3) in order to supplant the older view that human societies have to be studied as a realm of competing structures, contending classes and groups. Few statistical analyses will be provided in order to introduce the third part about the “Other question”, which would be fit best for the purpose of the paper. Besides open sources I below mention in the paper, interviews were conducted during my personal visit in the de facto Minister of Intern and in the rural villages of Hadrut and Shoushi with locals, of whom the majority is currently performing at the Armenian Armed Forces alongside the Line of Contact (LoC). All participants were promised anonymity, a necessary precaution in the present political climate and situation of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Therefore, through a dismantlement of the idea of national purity and the myth of exclusive belongingness, I will introduce the structural role of the Other that - no matter Armenian or Azerbaijani - will come to perform in the future post-conflict scenario despite the current negation from both sides. In conclusion, by insisting on the significance role of historical location and process of internally displacement, one point must be clear. Granted territorial ruptures over Nagorno-Karabakh explore deeply the remarking of Armenian and Azerbaijani identity, this paper aims to introduce a challenging prospective within the current peacekeeping operations by paving a sustainable way - at least theoretically - towards a future of well-living together. However, I deal with an approach based on the philosophical boundary between Self and the Other (Glavanakova 2016, 46) that could be misleading with regard to this two-decades-conflict between two states, Armenia and Azerbaijan, tied partially to other two states, namely Russia and Turkey.

## **BACKGROUND**

Since 1923, in spite the majoritarian community was Armenian before the Sovietisation of the Southern Caucasus, the Nagorno-Karabakh was administratively assigned to the Turkic-Islamic Soviet republic. Because of that, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) remained ethnically and culturally a hybrid and without a self-identification as well as recognition in terms of historical legacy and cultural heritage. It followed that a psychological model and epistemological configuration of the subjects living the enclave were considerably simplified (Tlostanova2005, 194) similarly to the entire Soviet orbit. Therefore, Armenian and Azerbaijani locals were forced to lean towards a rigid ethno-cultural model of “one Soviet people” (Kundera 1984, 1), heavily russified and without possibility to find their self-realization according to their religions or socio-cultural patterns. Due to this overwhelming Communist reduction, attempts to unravel the

enclave resettlement after the collapse of the Soviet system turned negatively enough from a considered look (Griffin 2001, 1) to ethnic uprising over mountainous region. With the collapse of Soviet system, as ideology as political regime, and the euphoria for the fall of Berlin Wall, the ethnic turmoil of Nagorno-Karabakh began to impinge the state-buildings of the formerly Armenian SSR and Azerbaijan SSR from within.

During the Soviet era, specifically with the Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev times, in Armenia there were constant attempts by students and youths to find alternative organizations to the Communist Party. In the meantime, demands and campaigns for recognition of the Ottoman genocide and the reclamation of the lost lands were at the heart of the political activity. In 1966, for sample, the National Unification Party called for an Armenia as independent state, which would include the Karabakh enclave, the Azerbaijani exclave of Nachichevan, and the Turkish controlled Western Armenia (Goldenberg 1994), namely the former Armenian millets of the Ottoman Empire in Anatolia. All those demands have been always ignored by Kremlin.

When on the 20th February 1988 the Local Council of the People's Duties of Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAO) decided to secede from Azerbaijan SSR, it was not expected that the conflict between the Caucasian young republics would take place for so long time. Overcoming the non-Armenian resistance of Azerbaijani duties and chairperson, who were loyal to the central Azerbaijani SSR government in Baku, the Armenian declaration led clashes and broad tensions among Armenian civilians within the territory of Azerbaijan SSR (Savin 2015, 106-107) and, in turn, among Azerbaijani inhabitants within the collapsing Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast. Since then, a point of no-return began to negatively shape as Armenian as Azerbaijani refusals to looking for a peaceful solution; their inability to forget and the impossibility to grasp the horror and liberation (Glavanakova 2016, 175) became collective traumas.

Throughout the sub-regional uprising, Armenia decided to bind itself to Russia, allowing military bases to remain as open displays of muted Russian influence in light of the Christian Orthodox alignment. On the other side, Azerbaijan took an even more risky path (Griffin 2001, 183) due to its bickering politicians who without Russian military aids tried to achieve benefits from the powerful economic position flirting with Turkey, United States, France, and Britain. Hence, the territorial turmoil affected deeply Azerbaijan on one side, a post-Soviet Turkic country rooted in its Persian cultural heritage and Transcaucasian powerhouse of global energy supplies thanks to the oil flowing in abundance from its shores, and Armenia on the other side, the first ever nation-state to adopt Christianity as its state religion. Although the conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh was heavily showing how ethnic issues started to be politicised and how cultural differences interplayed a fundamental role in the process of constructing societal identity and ugliness of ethnic cleansing, the wider scenario cannot be taken into the arguable account of Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*.

According to the Bulgarian expert Alexandra Glavanakova, indeed, Huntington's classification dismisses itself out from a more largely and arbitrary criteria and, specifically to Nagorno-Karabakh outbreak, the latter seems to be not aligned to his list alike a wide range of worldwide ethnic riot. Nagorno-Karabakh rivalry was not triggered neither by religious schism in the Transcaucasian region in order to reallocate the former Autonomous Oblast back to the Christian Armenia or to the Muslim kinship of Azerbaijan. However, the stress shifts on the subjective identification of individuals with their own community, in which ethnic issues address ontologically and respectively the idea of "ethnicity" (Krasteva

2015, 4) in terms of a given group with objective, existence and subjective sense of belongingness. For example, the former Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan, has rejected the idea of any religious motivation from the beginning.

Moreover, the Nagorno-Karabakh rivalry has specifically created from the beginning a mutual separation of a non-ethnic “Us” and ethnic Others (Smith 1996, 4) based on proper name; myth of common ancestry including the idea of common origin, which gives to the group a sense of kinship; shared memories of common past; heroes and events; elements of common cultures, like language, religion or customs; a link with a homeland; and, a sense of collective solidarity. In the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, both communities depict their nations as “a great family” where brothers and sisters of the motherland or fatherland evoke strong loyalties and vivid attachments. Besides, hundreds of thousands of Armenians and Azerbaijanis have lost their homes in a forced population transfer<sup>1</sup> and have been living for generations outside their own republics. In details, the first military actions of the conflict - according to the official data from the government of Azerbaijan - led to Azerbaijan 30.000 were injured, 7000 being disabled for life and 5000 citizens are reported as missing. Throughout the same period of war, the Armenian side lost 6000 citizens, 20000 people were injured and more than 5000 Armenians have gone missing (Kirvelyté, 2015).

In early April 2016, the so-called “Four-Day War” alongside the Lines of Contact (LoC) reminded the international community that this long-ignored “frozen conflict” has begun to heat drastically up without finding out a stable resolution yet. More than hundred casualties on both sides, 150 wounded among civilians and military staff, and approximately 15 tanks destroyed with a wide range of Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV), is the result of the last peak of military escalation erupted on 2nd and ceased on 6th (Lorusso 2016, 1) after the umpteenth ceasefire agreement. Until now, over 20% of *de jure* recognized territory of Azerbaijan still remains under the control of *de facto* Republic of Artsakh - Nagorno-Karabakh (Kirvelyté 2015, 24-25), including neighbouring Azerbaijani districts too. As the table indicates below, in spite it does not provide the entire scenario after the early April 2016 escalation, after which Azerbaijani troops have been retaken the control over 900 sq<sup>2</sup> of Martakert region. Armenian armed forces have occupied several *de jure* Azerbaijan regions surrounding the entire Nagorno-Karabakh in order to buffer a sanitary zone in protection of Karabakh Armenians.

**Table 1: Nagorno-Karabakh Buffer Zone Occupied by Armenian Armed Forces (Source: The Margins of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: In Search of Solution, 2015)**

	% of <i>de facto</i> territorial control by Armenian armed forces	<i>De Jure</i> Azerbaijani lost territory in Nagorno-Karabakh
Kelbajar-Karvacher	100%	1.936 km
Lachin-Abdollyar	100%	1.835 km
Kubatli-Vorotan	100%	802 km
Jebail-Jrakan	100%	1.050 km
Zangelan-Kovsakan	100%	707 km
Agdam-Akna	77%	842 km
Varanda-Fuzûlî	33%	462 km

<sup>1</sup>This phenomenon, well-known as “Internally Displaced Person-s” (IDP-s), has increased the academic literature concerning studies about migrations and conflict scenarios.

## **BEYOND THE CONFLICT: COLLECTIVE IMAGINARY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMAS**

Despite political attempts and OSCE-Minsk peacekeeping actions to unfreeze the territorial rivalry alongside the Line of Contacts (LoC), it seems no longer possible to solve the current situation within the framework of existing intergovernmental relations. The Republic of Azerbaijan declares its territorial integrity unshakeable and the full liberation of lost territories occupied by Armenians as main prerequisite condition for any substantial negotiations with Armenia, considered guilty to support an illegal occupation. Moreover, Baku claims to plenty resettle *Qarabağ* to de jure territory according to the Soviet-Russian recognition that tied the enclave to Azerbaijan SSR in light to the Mongol, Turkish, and Persian legacy that the region has had even before the *sovietization* in 1923. On the contrary, *de facto* Republic of Artsakh - Nagorno-Karabakh continues to declare that the secession from the former Azerbaijan SSR administration, understood as the “liberation of Karabakh”, is the legitimate result *ex factis jus oritur* (Krüger 2010, 89), namely a law arises from the facts. In addition, the Republic of Armenia has stubbornly pointed out that the struggle for independence and recognition brought all Armenians into a safety position (Savin 2015, 112) and guaranteed justice and protection against the whimsical appropriation of Artsakh imposed mistakenly by Stalin himself (Yunusof 2005, 28) through an incorrect placement of Karabakh Armenians under the Turkic-Muslim Azerbaijan SSR.

In the meantime, Nagorno-Karabakh rivalry has been outlining what ethnic and military hostilities come emotionally to mean for both sides. Armenians consider the 1992-94 war a succeed attempt to avoid the continuation of the 1915 “Armenocide” (Peachey 1993, 35) perpetuated by Ottomans from Istanbul to the region of Anatolia. It followed that the worldwide Armenian community began to appreciate the resistance over Nagorno-Karabakh – which tends to persist - because conducted on behalf of all Armenians. In few words, the struggle over Nagorno-Karabakh seems to interplay the role of Armenians’ Armenian-ness<sup>2</sup>. In the eyes of Armenians, the pogrom of Sumgait for sample, a soul-destroying town of Azerbaijan, was a turning point, and history has generally been turning the Armenians’ spiritual and psychological wounds into a collective trauma (Grigorian 1991, 52), bleeding and festering with self-pity and vengefulness. In early February 1988, Azerbaijani reaction to the early stages of the Karabakh Movement was to attack and murder Armenian minority’s civilians living in Azerbaijan SSR. Such cruel events have increased the Armenian fear of the Turkic-Muslim enemy and rekindled their memories to the Ottoman genocide that branded Armenian peoples’ collective consciousness in turn. The Armenian theologian Vigen Grigorian has highlighted that the burden of traumatic history rests nowadays on the memory of Armenians living the contemporary Caucasian homeland, in which *de facto* Nagorno-Karabakh Republic is understood as part of it.

According to Nagorno-Karabakh issue, the communitarian empathy for this grieving faith triggered by deportation from Ottoman millets and followed by Diaspora could serve to explain why Armenian memory runs deeper over last 170 years back the division of the Armenian Kingdom in 387 d.C. (Griffin 2002, 184). Due to all of these, Nagorno-Karabakh became the symbol of survival and revenge after the first mass-scale genocide during the

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<sup>2</sup>According to the Armenian constitution, the Article 19 regards the term Armenian-ness that draws the national identity and its millenarian heritages with a comprehensive legal usage linked with the Diaspora.

First World War and the Soviet takeover, and this is why Armenians maintain their intent clear in reclaiming what they see and understand as part of their historical legacy. Similarly, the Armenian occupation of the Lachin corridor in May 15 1992 come to geographically mean not only a conjunction between the post-Communist territory of Armenia and the oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh, but mostly a reunification for all Armenians who felt to psychologically be into a safety region surrounded and protected by Armenians. What has been representing a strong argument for allocating Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan SSR due to the lack of passable road between Armenia SSR and the Armenian enclave of Karabakh, since 1992 began to shape a new condition for securitizing a strategic mountain pass and interplay the national-building process of the former Soviet Armenia and redefine the national borders between Armenia and Azerbaijan. By contrary, Azerbaijanis feel to have been victims of theft due to the “Armenian aggression” within a region they consider their own storehouse nurturing their finest musicians and poets and composers of their national anthem (Goldenberg 1994, 156). As Sumgait for Armenians, the massacre of Khojali that broke out between 25th and 26th February 1992 was crucial for Azerbaijanis in the bigger pictures.

By 1992, Azerbaijanis and Turkic-Meshkat minority’s members living the village of Khojaly were expelled by Armenian armed forces from their homes, killed and several froze overnight to death. The frighten experience has psychologically trenched a higher barrier against Armenians, guilty for such massacre and who demonstrated their readiness to fight a full-scale war (Kirvelyté 2015, 25) while young Azerbaijani state was in a worse military position because of the political crisis in Baku of 1991-93 that stood in the way of mobilization<sup>3</sup>. The massacre of Khojaly could serve as historical proof to reveal Armenia’s inability to control over its militants (Goldenberg 1994, 156) and remember how the military takeover of the village is still the symbol of historical betrayal conducted by “loader Armenians” (Denisenko 2015, 60) with the support of the 366th motorized infantry regiment of the former Soviet Army troops. However, the Soviet regime neither supports Armenian armed forces nor Azerbaijan in the territorial riot. In fact, the events following the Sumgait pogrom have shown the Soviet inertia (Goldenberg 1994, 154) and, during the Soviet time, the Kremlin political establishment never supported the Armenian campaigns for the Karabakh reallot back to Armenian SSR. The entire was paradoxically shown by one of the first leaders of Karabakh Movement, Igor Muradyan, who leading Armenians to the square by bringing portrays of Gorbachev in order to catch public attention of the former leader of Soviet Union. “*Lenin-Party-Gorbachev!*” would be the slogan that he had come up with himself but, some weeks later, he came up with another one “*Stalin-Beria-Ligachev!*” because no answers came from Moscow.

In sum, Khojaly tragedy and Sumgait pogrom, as well as the significant capture of the town of Shoushi by Armenian forces on 9th May 1992, have significantly been crucial points for the definite resettlement of Nagorno-Karabakh to de facto Armenian authority as well as the symbol of terrible human losses and key element for claiming justice for Azerbaijan. This is why the idea that individuals responsible for the death of civilians must receive an appropriate punishment is currently expressed (Denisenko 2015, 68) in the official confrontation timeline between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Indeed, Khojaly

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<sup>3</sup>However, the young Republic of Azerbaijan tried to take more active role than Armenia did in the ethnic turmoil all over the region of North Caucasus by projecting itself almost as a protector of some Turkic groups.

tragedy is commemorated, likewise the 1915 genocide for Armenians, not only in Azerbaijan at the “Mother’s Scream” memorial in Baku, but also abroad – Istanbul, The Hague, Berlin, Sarajevo and Mexico City. All psychological and cultural aspects over Nagorno-Karabakh rivalry are painlessly holding the idea of a “society of loss” (Fedoseeva 2012, 399) since the uprising of the territorial conflict. Speaking historically, both communities involved in the conflict seem to highlight a new form of communicative mourning in deeply connection with a wealth of tumultuous, occupation, inquisitions, pogroms that have symbolically increased a more self-oriented collective faith and wrenching reality. Once again, symbols and images here connect a lot past experiences with an endless rivalry understood in terms of “perpetrators-against-victims”.

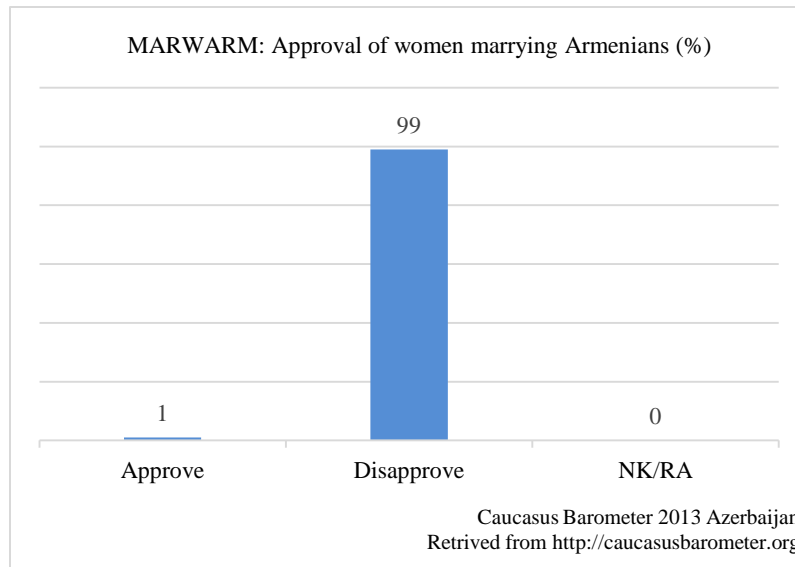
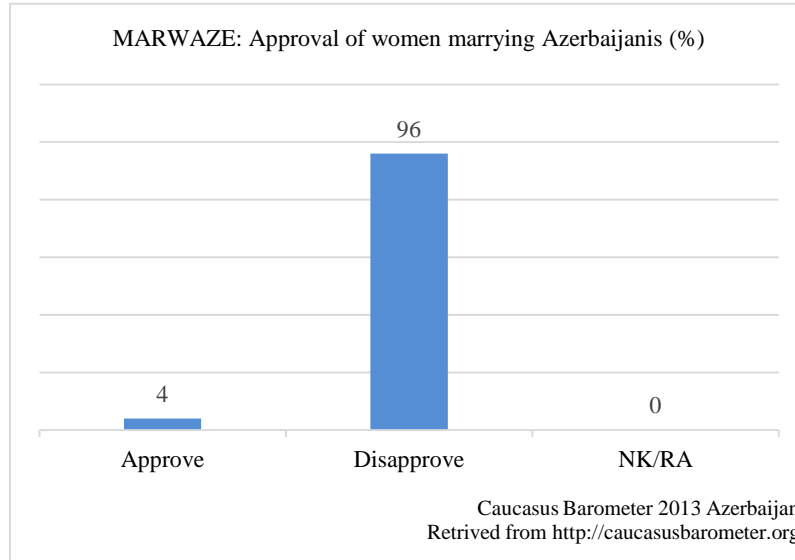
The last “Four-Day War” in early April 2016, for instance, has quickly made stronger and stronger the social relationships among Armenians due to the beheading of Karam Sloyan in the Line of Contact (LoC). The image of the Karabakh Defense Army soldier’s head, uploaded in the social media and shown publicly off to Azerbaijani audience as a “fish-trophy”, has pointed anew out a memory of tragedy that Armenians connect with their own historical faith.

All of these has shown to the international community how often threats can go forward to the sphere of human security over Nagorno-Karabakh. On one hand, for an event to interest the public opinion and the political mainstream must be something recognizable, it must affect people of whom we have heard spoken before (Gramsci 1912, 2). On the other hand, this public kind of recognition seems wrongly to affect the OSCE-Minsk operations and attempts for unfreezing the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In being hidden and concealed, collective traumas perform as structuring principles for various public discourses, socio-cultural practices and rituals, as well as political causes for the willingness to embroider marks of trauma into the structure of everyday life. In turn, by including social bonds, what arises here is an imaginary idea of “society of loss” which portrays and addresses those traumatic narratives from within. The concept of collective trauma is widely used in modern social science in order to explain many events in the collective mind. The concepts of psychoanalysis, especially those concerning the concepts of trauma or post-traumatic disorder, such as the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh for Azerbaijanis and vice versa the fear of losing the region for Armenians, are triggered by the impact of certain events connected to the feeling of pain (Ushakin 2009, 23). By translating the psychoanalytical apparatus to a sociological one and in turn to Nagorno-Karabakh issue, each collective trauma seems to set a pathway for the historical narrative, while not becoming a part of it. The traumatic experience intertwines with national identity they mutually strengthen one another and these psychological aspects upon the warfare exacerbate the image of the Other and his race of enemy through which stereotypes and prejudices intensify a feeling of pain. Hence, the communication of tragic events creates a history-oriented narrative (Glavanakova 2016, 56) because Armenians and Azerbaijanis are “imagines”, i.e. they are held together by certain common features or imagines though the resources of both antagonist narrators, who provide “images” of the Other not by the past itself and not by the discipline of history. Rather, they give a public compilation of misleading images (Štutiniéné 2011, 303) based on mythical and symbolic prejudices or stereotypes. For instance, according to the Yerevan sociologist Lyudmilla Harutyunian, who was one-time deputy in the Republic Supreme Soviet, points out that Armenians have forgotten the noble pages of their own history and they have created an



image of Armenians as victims, and it is a very deep image. During the twenty-five years, Armenian artists and writers have begun to address these problems (Guroian 1991, 52), and this is the main reason why most Armenian Church leaders have refused to recognize that the wrenching past brought the Armenian Christendom or secular legacy to an end.

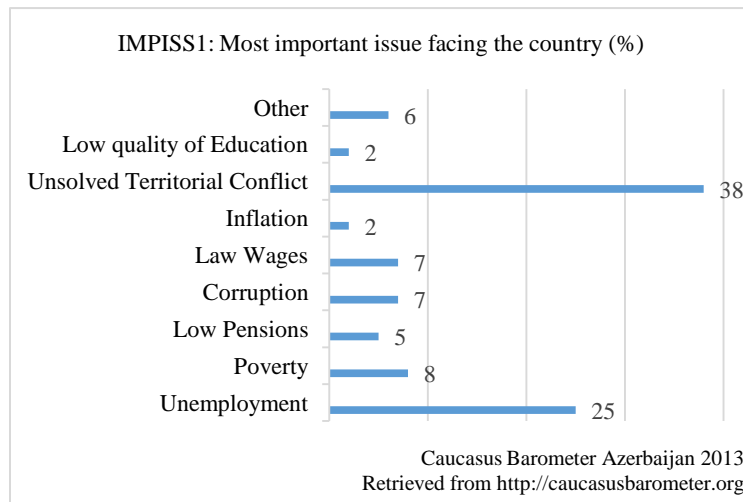
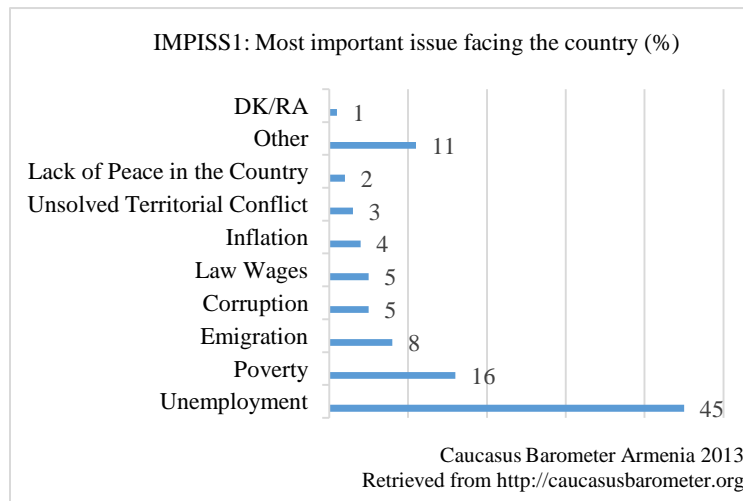
**Table 2: Question asked on approval of women of their ethnicity marrying with Armenians or Azerbaijanis (Source: Caucasus Barometer, 2013).**



As the Table 2 shows upon (CRRB Barometer, 2013), when asked “do you approve of women of your ethnicity marrying with Azerbaijanis?” 96 % of Armenians responded disapproving such possibility, whereas in Azerbaijan the figure shows a 99% of people

disappointing as well. The figure in 2015, not provided in Azerbaijan, was the same in Armenia (CRRC Barometer, 2015). In retrospect, the Table 3 below compares what Armenians and Azerbaijanis think is the most important issue their own country faces at the moment, within the answer regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, such as “unsolved territorial conflicts” and internal “lack of peace”, that matters only 3 % and 2 % for Armenians, whereas 38 % for Azerbaijanis (CRRC Barometer, 2013). Despite higher % age than Armenian one, Azerbaijani result is paradoxically twofold: it is higher than unemployment and poverty issues, respectively 25 % and 8 % (CRRC Barometer, 2013), which are concerns in the so-called “cork” or “bottle” of the Caspian (Griffin 2001, 183), however it is not that high alike the previous result about human relationships.

**Table 3: Question asked to Armenians and Azerbaijanis about the most important issue facing their own country (Source: Caucasus Barometer 2013).**



In the political circles, the Nagorno-Karabakh issues seem to consolidate those Armenian and Azerbaijani ruling élites that manipulatively controlled them by using historical memory constructed to politically re-narrate the past and label what really happened to the new generations who use to attend public schools and watch public broadcasting where this narrative against the figure of the Other is present. Although only the 6,6% of all Azerbaijani, 7,1% of Armenian broadcastings and publications (Abasov 2003, 592) are devoted to the conflict, public school curricula and mass media continuously exacerbate the tense relations, while the ruling elites use every opportunity to dehumanize the other side (Ayunts, Zolyan, and Zakaryan, 2016, 1) given back to the public consciousness. This explains the Armenian tendency to elect politicians belonging to the so-called “Karabakh Clan” (Kirvelyté 2015, 29) to the top political position. Following Ter Petrosyan, who had no personal ties with Nagorno-Karabakh, both last two Presidents of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan, who was previously president of de facto Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (1994-1997) and Prime Minister of Armenia (1997-1998), as well as the current Armenian President Serzh Sarkisyan (2008-ongoing), who the second de facto head of Karabakh Armed Forces, come originally from the disputed region. On the other side, Azerbaijani scenario is not even positive. Whether the Armenia’s institutional landscape engages with public figures as well as national organizations and parties belonging to “Karabakh Clan”, the latter displays at least a political pluralism that, despite its low level, seems to be different from the neighbouring Azerbaijan the Alyev dynasty began to rule since 1993. Alike the Armenia’s political belongingness tied with Karabakh, the former President Hydar Aliev (1993-2003) and his son Ilham Aliev, currently ruling as President of the young Republic, belong to de jure exclave of Nakhichevan, bounded by Armenia and Iran with a short-border with Turkey, which continues to suffer its geographic position and the conflict with Armenia.

### **A FROZEN RELATIONSHIP**

Although the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was never a territorial dispute based on religious issues, Christian and Muslim belongingness of Armenians and Azerbaijanis could be a concern for future confrontation. Since the 1994 Bishkek Agreement, general attempts to unfreeze the tow-decades-conflict and many sustainable projects, such as *Dreaming of a Colourful Garden*<sup>4</sup>, attempted constantly to provide alternative spaces for contact among Armenians and Azerbaijanis by replacing the Line of Contact (LoC) which physically separates both sides. Main goals remain to seek peaceful transnational spaces in order to step forward in direction of Madrid Principles and OSCE-Minsk peacekeeping operations and guarantee the redeployment to all Erazy-Azerbaijani and Armenian internally displaced persons to their former places of residence inside Nagorno-Karabakh. Therefore, the inevitable “Other question” will definitely come to perform a structural role for those generations of Armenians and Azerbaijanis who are slowly replacing the oldest ones. Their social imaginary offers negatively a counter-subjective representation of the Other through a product of the binary “Us-and-Them” opposition, which is a social construct, used in turn

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<sup>4</sup>The title of the project aims to overturn the classical idea of the region negatively accounted into a “dark zone” due to the ethnic conflict and the meaning of the prefix-*Nagorno*, which derives from Russian attributive adjective “nagorny”, literally “highland”, and the suffix-*Karabakh*, a Persian word for indicating a “Black Garden”.

to throw light on the conception of the Other in aloof way. Here, the negative mirror image of the Other seems to be clearly privileged because often expressed in terms of monstrous and alien Other (Glavanakova 2016, 45). “We’re the victims, you’re the perpetrators” could briefly serve as short quote upon the common notion of the Other originating from both sides, edited publicly out as well as partly glorified. Therefore, common empathy and sensitivity of Otherness seem thus to be internalized. Armenians bring alive for the further generations their historical plight portraying not simply as an object of distress, but through the subjects of its articulation and expression, not merely as victim but as agents, actors, and authors (Marjian 2016, 104). As the Armenian political scientist Levon Melik-Shakhnazarian speculated on the fortune of the Nagorno-Karabakh war of 1992-94, “in this case civilisation will win” (Goldenberg 1994, 154) because the Armenian past turned finally into a winning stage. Likewise, brainwashing and overwhelming political propaganda links Azerbaijani understanding with all psychological forms of war of ideas against the Other-Armenians, where the main weapons are image and sound, which organize successfully a process of negative persuasion (Martišius 2010, 195) over the territorial rivalry. All of these may affect the confrontation with the Other cementing negatively the creation of a wealthier community due to a demonization of the Other (Lorusso 2016, 5) fraught with bloody imaginary. Hence, shall Armenians and Azerbaijanis deal with historical memories and wrenching experiences, or will they crush once again when they will be living together? How do they image their everyday life after the definitive peace agreement? What is to be forgotten from the past and what is to be recorded in order to avoid future threats? Nowadays, the figure of the Other - no matter if Armenian or Azerbaijani – is permanently present in the social imaginary. Constructed by the Self in a variety of way, this perception of the Other arises a complex interaction between self-identification and definition provided by Others of oneself. On one side, internal and external impact of Otherness is simultaneously familiar and strange to everyone, however, according to Nagorno-Karabakh rivalry, it could hopefully affirm that when perspectives will be changing such holistic imaginary of the Other (Boesh 2007, 5) will change accordingly. Due to dynamism, relativity, continually fluctuating and ceaselessly reversibility of the role and figure of the Other under certain historical circumstances and cultural and socio-political extents, it may be possible to ensure the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from the risky 5 % of territorial conflict assumed as unsolvable (Ayunts, Zolyan, and Zakaryan 2016, 4). Since individuals differ in their personal experiences of intercultural exchanges and contacts, they also differ in what cultural element they choose to adopt and internalize. However, most recent pivotal studies have proven that the territorial rivalry between Armenian and Azerbaijani youths of Moscow, as well as the role of their different ethnic identities and cultures, does not affect negatively their human relationships. Interviews and discussions held in 2006-07 have pointed out that the existing tendencies of Armenians and Azerbaijani mourning and its social influence driven by collective trauma are much lower than in those groups of Armenians and Azerbaijanis living the Caucasian young republics. According to the survey conducted in Russia, ethnic identity seems to be not a concern because not eternally influenced and emotionally loaded in political rhetoric and propagandistic arguments about the atrocities of the Other (Savin, 2015) and the reference about their ethnicity seems to have not an important quality beside the brainwashing emotions by political power.

## CONCLUSION

Although the Nagorno-Karabakh rivalry is academically tagged as frozen conflict, such definition does not catch the real state of affair within the current lack of definitive solutions and political wills. Yet, this “no-war-no-peace” limbo challenges the sphere of human security for those locals living alongside the Line of Contact (LoC) on both sides, as well as the future of both Caucasian young republics in terms of political and economic development.

The question about the Other seems definitely to represent a challenging conflict (trans-)formation paradigm from the classical approaches upon conflict resolution mechanisms. According to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, the role of Other may serve as a conflict transformation approaches to the future peace agreement among embittered adversaries. Definitely, future prospects for conflict transformation should focus more at the future human relationships, which may theoretically transform the sense of Armenian-Azerbaijani Self alongside the examination of the conditioned and motivated biases of the Self towards the Other. Over Nagorno-Karabakh, future forms of involvement with the Other will be not reducible to simply binary opposition “us-against-them”, nowadays in the political and social mainstream manifested in traumatic acts of self-identification against the Other, but as a new relation between self-ness and Otherness based on intricate constellation of interconnectedness (Glavanakova 2016, 19).

The mirror of wrenching situations shattered and battered by two-decades-war, in which it might find such answers from history and it might find also find again our humanity through reconciliation, hence repentance, forgiveness, healing and renewal, that in the first instance nation-building may be at the heart of the communitarian vocation of Nagorno-Karabakh in the future. 

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