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**Gender, Ethnicity and Peacebuilding in the
Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict**

Diploma Thesis

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Ramil Zamanov

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Mən, araşdırmada iştirak etmək istəyən və tezisimi bitirməyə kömək edən tədqiqat iştirakçlarına çox minnətdaram. Onların töhfələri çox dəyərlidir və onlar olmadan mən bu tezisi tamamlaya bilməzdim. Buna görə də bu tezisi bütün tədqiqat iştirakçılara həsr edirəm!

Ես շատ շնորհակալ եմ հետազոտության մասնակիցներին, ովքեր պատրաստակամ էին մասնակցել հետազոտությանը և օգնել ինձ ավարտել իմ թեզը: Նրանց ներդրումը միանշանակ անգնահատելի է, և առանց դրա ես երբեք չէի կարողանա ավարտին հասցնել այս թեզը: Հետևաբար, ես այս թեզը նվիրում եմ իմ հետազոտության բոլոր մասնակիցներին:

Abstract

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a territorial and ethnic conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh that has led to war, displacement, trauma and continuing animosities. This thesis examines the differential long-term effects of the conflict in the lives of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and refugees from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh who have remained largely excluded from current peacebuilding initiatives. Ethnographic fieldwork and interviews were conducted with displaced and refugee women and with queers in Sumgayit and Baku in Azerbaijan and around Tbilisi in Georgia. The research uses an intersectional sensibility to explore the constitution and effects of economic hardship, ill-health and social exclusion as well the militarization in the life histories and everyday experiences of IDP and refugee women and queers. On this basis, it reflects what their participation, insights and concerns could contribute to the stalled peace processes and what cultural and societal changes will be required for peacebuilding and a more lasting resolution of this frozen conflict.

Key words: Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, gender, ethnicity, intersectionality, peacebuilding, militarization, queer community, IDP and refugee women

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Introduction

The Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict is a territorial and ethnic conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding districts, which are *de facto* controlled by the self-declared Republic of Artsakh but are internationally recognized as *de jure* part of Azerbaijan (Cornell, 1999). Between 1988 and 1994 the armed conflict has led to over 20 000 casualties and displaced almost one and a half million people: Internally Displaced Persons¹ (IDPs) and refugees² not only from the region of NK, but as a ripple effect of the hostilities also from Armenia and Azerbaijan (Selimovic et al., 2012). Even though the first peacebuilding initiatives started in the early 1990s (Najafizadeh, 2013), the NK conflict still remains a ‘frozen conflict’ among Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh where ‘frozen’ refers to a situation in which active armed conflict has been ended but hostilities continue.

Since my childhood the NK conflict has reverberated in Azerbaijani society in the form of mistrust, hate, and the conception of Armenians as an enemy. When I started to travel as a student and attend conferences in Europe and met Armenians, I realized that Armenians were just as friendly, helpful, trustworthy and emotional as Azerbaijanis. As a queer researcher from Azerbaijan, the militarization of the Azerbaijani society and mandatory military service have negatively shaped my life and thus, on an academic level, I aim to understand and analyse the experiences of other marginalised and queer people concerning NK conflict and militarization. This informed the focus on the under-researched issues such as gender, ethnicity, IDP and refugee women and queer community in the context of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The work is fuelled by the belief that the underprivileged experiences of IDP and refugee women and queer community can inform and contribute to resolving the NK conflict in a peaceful way.

One of the important reasons for considering peacebuilding is its continuing significance in the current frozen peace negotiations among the governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan

¹ Internally Displaced Persons stay within their own country and remain under the protection of its government, even if the government is the reason for displacement. They often move to areas where it is difficult to deliver humanitarian help and they are among the most vulnerable in the world (UNHCR, 2019).

² A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries (UNHCR, 2018).

and Nagorno Karabakh. For more than thirty years, people have been living in uncertainty and often precarity while in recent years the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan have increased their military spending (Mutschler, 2017). This can be considered an indirect sign for gradually stopping the peace negotiations and resolving the conflict with military means. To contribute to preventing such events, I aim to focus on the visions of the peace process by reflecting it from the perspectives of IDP and refugee women and LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) /queer³ community.

The importance of considering gender relations in peacebuilding has been recognised internationally. In 2000 the UN Security Council adopted the resolution S/RES/1325 on women and peace and security. The document confirms the vital role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, negotiation processes, peacebuilding in post-conflict situations and emphasises the significance of women's equal involvement in efforts for protection and advocating of peace and security (Reimann, 2014). Despite the plea to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in peace and security efforts Armenia and Azerbaijan still do not have a National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of UNSCR 1325. NAPs are official documents defining policy of countries to comply with the Women, Peace and Security objectives: women's participation, conflict prevention, post-conflict peacebuilding and other relevant peace processes (Trojanowska, 2015). Partly as a result of weakening formal peace negotiations of the NK conflict, attention to women and issues of gender and sexuality have been largely absent (Selimovic 2012). To date little is known about the lives and concerns of refugee and internally displaced people and those who identify as lesbian, gay, queer or transgender and their experience and insights and experience for peacebuilding. In the context of the NK conflict, the lives of IDP and refugee women and LGBT/queer community have not been investigated in depth by international and local scholars. Therefore, the life stories of these marginalized people are not accessible in international western journals. This is one of the signs which indicate how the topic still remains under-researched among feminist scholars.

It is these minoritized people who are at the centre of this thesis that explores the role of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the lives of IDP and refugee women and queers from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh. I examine the differential effects of this

³ Even though, as a researcher I am against actively using terms such as 'LGBT', I shall use these terms in order to represent the current situation of the region.

conflict from an intersectional perspective that focuses on the interrelations between gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. I am particularly interested in how Armenian and Azerbaijani IDP and refugee women and LGBT/queers might be differently affected and how these effects contribute to their exclusion from the current peace processes? How might more inclusionary peace processes in the context of NK conflict be enabled?

The thesis is organised around the following four questions: First, in what ways are the lives of Armenian, Azerbaijani and Karabakh displaced women differentially impacted by the ongoing conflict? How are their socioeconomic and health conditions intersectionally constituted by gender and ethnicity? Second, does the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict influence the lives of the LGBT/queer community in Armenia and Azerbaijan? How might the militarization of society shape gender, class and ethnicity differently? Third, why and how are IDP and refugee women and LGBT/queer community excluded from the current peacebuilding initiatives? And fourth, how does the peace process have to be re-imagined and re-designed to take the intersectional experiences and positionalities of IDP and refugee women and queer community into account?

In addressing these questions, I use intersectionality as an analytical tool. The heuristic assumption is that an intersectional sensibility will help to address the contradictory constitution of the current peace processes. The concept of intersectionality builds on the conception of intersectionality by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) who conceives intersectionality as a form of oppression that ‘promotes inequalities at the personal level and division at the social level’ (p. 1242). The concept of intersectionality has emerged as a significant concept to understanding the complex levels of discrimination and exclusion in a society whose members with complex racial, gender, or sexual identities can experience bias in multiple ways (ibid).

In line with the research questions, the thesis is structured as follows: the first chapter reviews the literature on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the role of ethnicity and gender, lays out a literature review of the thesis, grounded in theories of gender, ethnicity, peacebuilding and intersectionality. The chapter introduces an intersectional approach to the NK conflict for understanding gender, ethnicity and peace as intersecting categories in the context of NK conflict.

The second chapter focuses on the research design and methodology by detailing the field sites, the research participants and methods deployed. The chapter also reflects on the positionality of the researcher and, the experience and challenges of my fieldwork.

The third chapter analyses the long-term impacts of the NK conflict on the lives of my IDP and refugee women participants by taking their intersecting subject positions into account. I uncover to what extent the lives of Armenian, Azerbaijani and Karabakh women participants are still impacted by the ongoing conflict and how it influences their socioeconomic conditions from the intersectional perspectives. I examine the precarious living conditions by analysing cultural discrimination, social support, ill-health conditions and militarization as the main categories in this chapter. The reluctance or inability to talk about sexual violence also is addressed and I explore the reasons behind this silence.

The fourth chapter turns to the challenges which the militarization and NK conflict brought to the lives of queer community in Armenia and Azerbaijan. I examine the modes of discrimination in the lives of the queer community in Armenia and Azerbaijan. In this context, I analyse the current situation of queer community in the context of militarization of society: the economic repercussions of not serving in the military and the heteronormative ideology of pronatalist policies as population growth. I show how these concepts reinforce the exclusion of queer community in the peace processes and increase hate against them in Armenian and Azerbaijani societies.

The final chapter seeks to uncover the male-dominated peace resolution and its exclusionary practices against working class IDP and refugee women and queers in the current peace processes. I aim to analyse on what basis IDP, and refugee women and queers are excluded and how this negatively influence the current dynamics of the NK conflict. The chapter culminates in suggestions for re-designing the current peace initiatives by considering the needs of participants for establishing more inclusionary peace processes. The main findings of the thesis are summarized in the Conclusion which also proposes ideas for further research.

Chapter 1: State of the Art: Gender, Ethnicity and Peacebuilding in Nagorno-Karabakh

1.1 Introduction

In recent years, feminist theorists have renewed their involvement with matters of gender and peacebuilding by engaging work undertaken in the social sciences and conducting new empirical research. Women and their life stories became a significant issue in feminist scholarships on peacebuilding even though the conflicts of former Soviet states and Eastern Europe are less investigated (see, for example, Reimann 2014; Kvinna till Kvinna 2019). The conflict in Nagorno Karabakh (NK) has also been rarely researched by feminist scholars. Existing research is dispersed among the NGO reports, newspaper and website articles and only limited amount of academic papers published on the western journals. There is a lack of public awareness relating to the IDP and refugee women's peace agenda which mainly refers to the feminist peace and revolution (Caucasus Edition, 2014). Therefore, this chapter gathers the existing literature on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with a particular focus on whether and how *gender, ethnicity and peacebuilding are conceptualized and attended to*. The chapter will then introduce the concept of intersectionality which has not been profoundly investigated in the existing literature. This thesis contributes to filling these gaps in the existing literature of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by examining the interwoven relations of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic conditions, peacebuilding and other relevant factors.

Analysing the interrelations between gender and peacebuilding through ethnicity, as a specific category, into the study will assist me to investigate this 'frozen conflict' in more depth. I start by analysing the construction of ethnicity and the power relations through which it is constituted before reviewing the literature on gender and sexualities in light of the inequalities and power relations in the South Caucasus. I proceed with the role of gender and ethnicity in peacebuilding by analysing the current dynamics and then, the final section outlines an intersectional perspective on peacebuilding that will guide the empirical research.

1.2 Ethnic differences and inequalities of power in Armenia and Azerbaijan

Nagorno Karabakh was established as an *oblast*⁴, in 1923, within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) (Cornell, 1999). Azerbaijan claims until the end of the XIX century, Armenians or local Albanian Christians made up only 10 % of the entire population in Karabakh (Ahmadov, 2012). Azerbaijani historians and politicians claim that before the beginning of the 20th century, there were only five villages in Karabakh in which some Armenians lived with Caucasian Christian Albanians (ibid). However, there were many attempts of ethnic cleansing of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh by Soviet officials and in 1988 when the conflict started, Azerbaijani people were deported from NK. At that time, the distribution of the population was 145,593 Armenians (76.4%) and 42,871 Azerbaijanis (22.4%) (ibid).

In the wake of Gorbachev's policies of democratization, Karabakh Armenians requested the re-establishment of Nagorno-Karabakh under the governance of Armenia (Shahnazarian and Ziemer, 2012). Historically, Nagorno-Karabakh has been a part of Azerbaijani territories, but Armenians and Azerbaijanis have lived together for centuries (Waal, 2005). In 1988, deputies of Armenia in local Soviet Assembly of Nagorno-Karabakh voted for uniting the Nagorno-Karabakh with Soviet Armenia. After this referendum, Azerbaijanis committed *Sumgait Armenian Pogrom* against the Armenian population of Sumgayit (the second largest industrial city of Azerbaijan) in 1988 in which 32 people were killed. The pogrom took place during the early stages of the Karabakh movement (Waal, 2010, p.111). Following this vote, tensions between Armenians and Azerbaijanis living in the Nagorno-Karabakh escalated into inter-ethnic violence between two groups (Civil Society Monitoring Report, 2014). The Nagorno Karabakh war lasted from 1988 to 1994 and in 1994, the ceasefire agreement was signed by both Armenian and Azerbaijani sides (ibid). During the war, Russia provided many guns and artilleries for both of these countries and in 1994, Russia attempted to initiate the first peace negotiations with them (ibid). This mediation failed and after the ceasefire, there were still shooting incidents happening in the borders.

This acerbated the social, political and economic challenges that the South Caucasus region has faced following their independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. It is important to highlight that the U.S.S.R mainly represents the power authority of Slavic

⁴ Oblast was a type of administrative division in the former Soviet Union.

nations and especially, ethnic Russians. Therefore, Armenians and Azerbaijanis were considered ethnically inferior to these Slavic nations (Foxall, 2017). After the collapse of the Russian Tsar Empire (when Caucasian territories were under the control of the Tsar regime) during World War I, the short-lived Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic was declared, constituting the present-day republics of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia and after some time, these countries declared their independence and founded their own countries (Kazemzadeh, 1951). However, again in 1920 Soviet troops invaded these territories and these three countries became a part of Soviet Union (ibid). Therefore, these countries were colonized by the Tsarist Russian Empire and after this, from 1920 to 1991 by the Soviet Union.

In order to understand the inter-ethnic tensions in this conflict, it is helpful to consider how ethnicity and ethnic conflict are discussed in the social sciences, not as primordial cultural identities but as performative processes of situated boundary drawings and re-drawings. This view is proposed by Stanley Tambiah (1989) and complicates the idea that ethnic identity simply refers to a bounded collective cultural identity in which a group of people proclaim that they belong to a specific group on the ground of inheritance, ancestry or the sharing of kinship. Tambiah suggests that ethnicity embodies two interrelated elements. The first element is the created myths about the blood, descent and race of that ethnic group and therefore, these ethnicities identify themselves as separate social kinds in comparison with others. The second element is ethnic boundary which is volatile and as a result of this, ethnic groups have either assimilated or sustained their existence. This shows how the ethnicities are socially constructed through the norms, cultural ideologies and myths in order to bound the cultural identity of the ethnic group (ibid).

The construction of ethnicity is thus similar to the construction of gender and sexualities: As Judith Butler (1990) has argued the enactment and embodiment of gender is performative in that gender is performed through acts, gestures, and other practices. The same can be argued for ethnic identities where cultural norms, values, lifestyles become the elements of performative practices. A dominant anthropological perspective in the 1960s defined ethnic groups through the identification of 'objective' cultural traits. Barth and his collaborators, however, argued that although ethnic categories incorporate 'culture' this is not a simple one-to-one relationship. For Barth, cultural characters are the means by

which an ethnic group outlines itself, but only a selection of the entire cache of ethnic or cultural fundamentals offered are organised for defining association of the ethnic group (Hummell, 2014, p. 49). It is important to contextualize this in the context of the NK conflict by analysing the Armenian and Azerbaijani ethnicities. Before that, I would like to focus on the Tambiah's classification which proposes the following classifications that describe the distribution of different ethnic groups in countries:

1. Virtually homogenous in ethnic composition (90-100%, including (contemporary Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh)
2. A single overwhelmingly dominant ethnic majority (75-89%)
3. The largest ethnic group makes up 50 to 75 % of the population and there are several minority groups
4. Two large dominant groups of roughly the same size
5. Pluralistic countries composed of many ethnic groups no one or two of them are dominant and where not all the ethnic groups may be actively implicated in ethnic politics (including former U.S.S.R)

This classification questions the ideology of the nation state that refers to an area where the cultural boundaries largely coincide with the political boundaries. The ideal of a nation-state is 'state' integrates citizens of a single ethnic stock and cultural values (Kazancigil and Dogan, 1994, p.188). Tambiah further highlights that ethnic compositions are not stable. The changes in the ethnic composition of Armenia and Azerbaijan also suggest that these frames are never monolithic. This exemplifies the first category, in the past was a part of second and third models of Tambiah.

Founded in 1918, Armenia (*Հայաստան* - *Hayastan* in Armenian) is currently considered as a monoethnic South Caucasian country with the major ethnic group called 'hay-Hayastan'- 98.1% (Schulze, 2017, pp:14-7). In Tambiah's typology, Armenia belongs in the first group of the countries that are virtually homogenous in ethnic composition. According to last census in 2011, current minority groups include Yazidis, Russians and Kurds (together 1.7%). From the Tambiah's perspectives, Armenians construct their ethnicity in relation to their 'hay' ethnic identity (the Armenian term for 'Armenian' is *Hay*) (Haber, M., et al. 2016). Self-identification as hay-k'ristonya (Armenian-Christian) is the main manifestation of the Armenian (hay) identity (Antonyan, 2011). As Levon

Abrahamian (2006) explains, “hay-k’ristonya is understood by Armenians as a single whole, the two characteristics being firmly linked by a hyphen.” By hay-k’ristonya, Armenians mean belonging to the Armenian Apostolic Church. However, after some historical events (such as wars, genocides, displacement), the Church re-defined this understanding and developed this ethnic identity with the support of the founded secular Republic of Armenia in 1918 (ibid). This suggests how the ethnic identity is socially constructed in the Armenian society through the norms of religion and it is strengthened through the different ideologies such as blood connections, myths and ethnic bounding.

Azerbaijan (*Azərbaycan* in Azerbaijani) similarly is considered a virtually homogenous South Caucasian country with an overwhelmingly dominant ethnic majority called ‘Azerbaijani’- 91.6% (*Political Division: Population Size and Structure*, 2011). Azerbaijanis in contrast do not claim a common or unified ethnic identity but consider themselves decedents of Turks, Persians, Russians and Caucasian tribes in the region. Even though Azerbaijan is multi-religious country, majority of population are Muslim (Motika, 2001). In fact, the name ‘The Republic of Azerbaijan’ and the ethnicity of Azerbaijanis can be considered political inventions of 1918 like Armenians (Waal, 2005). Therefore, unlike Hays-Armenians, Azerbaijanis do not share the common ethnic or religious roots but rather they unite around the idea of ‘The Republic of Azerbaijan’. This also suggests that Azerbaijani identity is also a product of the 1918 which became a political construction after the fall of the Russian Empire. At present, Armenians share only 1.35% of the whole population in Azerbaijan, although in both cases their composition can be presumed to be higher since Armenians do not want to register their ethnicities as Armenian due to the armed conflict over the territories of Nagorno-Karabakh (State Statistics Committee of Azerbaijan, 2009).

The accessible statistics from 1939 show that before the WWII, as part of the Soviet Union both republics were more ethnically diverse. Armenia included more than 17% of other ethnicities, with the largest ethnic minority group being Azerbaijani people (10.2%), Azerbaijan included more than 40 % other ethnicities with the majority being Russian (16.5%) and Armenian (12%).

Figure 1: Ethnic composition of Azerbaijan and Armenia in 1939 (All-Union Census of 1939)

	Armenia	Azerbaijan
Armenians	1 061 997	388 025
Azerbaijanis	130 896	1 870 471
Russians	51 464	528 318
Ukrainians	5 496	23 643
Georgians	652	10 196
Total	1 282 338	3 205 150

Armenia was still an overwhelmingly monoethnic country with about 17% other ethnicities (Tambiah’s category 2), Azerbaijan was more diverse (Tambiah’s category 3) in 1939 with more than 40% of other ethnicities. One of the potential reasons can be considered the economic conditions of Azerbaijan due to the well-developed oil industry of Azerbaijan (Ahmadov, 2012). in these indicators. Even during the recent years, The World Bank forecasted that the poverty rate in Armenia was 29.8% in 2016. Additionally, unemployment in Armenia is high and unstable – 18%. Unemployment is mostly concentrated in urban areas, among the young and women (UNDP Armenia, no date). In Azerbaijan, 4.9 % of the population lives below the national poverty line (Asian Development Bank 2015).

From another perspective, the role of traditional values could play a crucial role, as well. Armenian society is mainly united because of firstly, their religious ‘hay-k’ristonya’ identity and secondly, their constructed political and ethnic identities. That can be one of the reasons to consider why Armenian society is less multicultural in comparison with Azerbaijan because they could be more conservative towards ‘others’. However, Azerbaijani society had only the ethnic and political identity and the economic conditions and geopolitical location of Baku made Azerbaijan more strategically important and ethnically multicultural country in comparison with Armenia (Waal, 2005).

Tambiah (1989) makes clear, ethnic conflict arises from contested relations of power that often have been established through processes of colonialization and in the future that can manifest as a clash of ethnic group interests or group rights. In the context of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the autonomous *oblast* of NK was created under the rule of Azerbaijan SSR by the U.S.S.R in order to create an ethnic conflict in the future (Waal, 2003). In today's politics, it shows how the current Armenian and Azerbaijani political arena is shaped by the promises of Russia and how the colonial power of Russia directly influences the peace negotiations (Waal, 2010). This also suggests that how Russian policy was structured by considering the fall of the U.S.S.R and the potential for future invasions of the region in the new era. In order to understand this issue deeply, I would like to analyse the figure 2:

Figure 2: Ethnic composition of Nagorno-Karabakh 1926-1989 (About the first population census of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic 2005)

	Մարդահամարների անցկացման տարիները Dates of the lead censuses Даты проведенных переписей					
	17.12.1926	17.01.1939	15.01.1959	15.01.1970	17.01.1979	12.01.1989
	Ընդամենը Total Всего	125.3	150.8	130.4	150.3	162.2
<i>այդ թվում՝</i> <i>of wich</i> <i>в том числе</i>						
Հայեր Armenians Армяне	111.7	132.8	110.1	121.1	123.1	145.5
Ադրբեջանցիներ Azerbaijanians Азербайджанцы	12.6	14.1	18.0	27.2	37.3	40.7
Ռուսներ Russians Русские	0.6	3.2	1.8	1.3	1.2	1.9
Այլ Other Другие	0.4	0.7	0.5	0.7	0.6	1.0

Power inequality among ethnic groups refers to the power hierarchy in which one ethnic group holds the power and rules another ethnic group (Tambiah, 1989, pp. 340-2). In the figure 2, it is clear that NK as the autonomy of the former Azerbaijan U.S.S.R had a considerable Armenian population (more than 80%) in the 1920s and more than 70% during 1970s. However, the Armenian citizens of Nagorno-Karabakh were excluded in the social and political life of Azerbaijan SSR. The colonial politics of U.S.S.R was to locate the ethnic Armenian community within Azerbaijan by giving them autonomy not under the governance of Armenian S.S.R. (Waal, 2003). In other words, the power hierarchy and the access to the better living standards will concern Armenian community of the former

Azerbaijan U.S.S.R, in the future. Economic re-distribution and welfare support among the working class were not provided by the social policy schemes of the former Azerbaijan U.S.S.R for the Armenian community of Nagorno Karabakh (Waal, 2003). The total GDP of the former Azerbaijan U.S.S.R was higher in comparison with the former Armenia U.S.S.R (Ahmadov, 2012, pp. 340-49). The conceptions of ethnicity by Tambiah and others, suggest analysing how these power relations are enacted in the practices for different people Azerbaijani, Armenians and Karabakh Armenians. Importantly, Tambiah (1989) analyses ethnic conflicts in terms of power relations and inequalities. In Foucauldian terms, power relations have multiple origins and can only be identified in practice. Here it is important to note [Foucault's idea that 'where there is power, there is resistance' can be applied to the analysis of the NK conflict as well.] that Azerbaijan SSR (1918-1991) did not provide equal opportunities for other ethnicities during Soviet times. Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh claimed that they did not have enough schools, libraries, theatres and other places in the NK and Azerbaijani SSR did not allow them to establish such places (in Armenian language) because it was seen as a threat to Azerbaijani SSR (ibid). Basically, structural forces such as unequal access to resources, economic benefits, or political power between Azerbaijanis and Karabakh Armenians can be considered to fuel the conflict.

After the establishment of NK in 1923, ethnic conflicts were 'resolved' until 1988 when the U.S.S.R rule ended. This was accomplished by keeping the Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh under the oppressive communist regime. This once more supports Tambiah's argument that colonists often create ethnic divisions in terms of involving some groups such as politically or economically less privileged ethnic groups in administration. Upon de-colonisation, these divisions exacerbated the potential for ethnic conflict (Tambiah, 1989, pp. 340-2). In this sense, Tambiah (1989) argues all ethnicities are constructed made and remade in specific situations rather than given. Such divisions were exacerbated by Soviet officials who had a vested interest in creating a conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the territories of NK in order to maintain its influence in these territories after the collapse of U.S.S.R. The Armenian population of NK opposed Azerbaijan rule in 1988 due to the fact that they had limited rights and responsibilities compared to the citizens of Armenia. Mainly, the Armenian population of NK claimed their cultural differences such as language, education, political freedom that were considered obstacles

to the autonomy of Azerbaijan. Therefore, a voting was organized in 1988 in order to leave Soviet Azerbaijan and join Soviet Armenia and after these events, the NK war started.

1.3 Gender and sexuality in the conflict and its aftermath

I would now like to turn to the conceptions of gender and sexualities from the perspectives of critical gender and queer studies and the role they have been accorded to conflict in Nagorno Karabakh. According to Judith Butler (1990), gender and sexual identities are cultural corporeal productions. They are formed through the embodiment of normative discourse that is corporeally enacted. In other words, gender and sexuality are not somatic givens, but embodied cultural effects. Gender scholars go further and discuss how the sexualities are produced through cultural norms and the power authorities such as state, religion and other institutions decide how the *cultural patterns* re-shape gender and sexuality (Halperin, 1989).

Cultures and cultural patterns can differ from a region to another one. However, sexualities and gender identities tend to be considered as binary opposites (homo-heterosexual, male-female) due to pervasive cultural encodings of heterosexual reproduction and gender binaries as natural and universal (Halperin, 1993, p.418). From the 1960s feminist movements in different countries contributed to changing legal and political regulations such as reproductive rights, divorce rights, LGBT rights and other important changes. Even if equal liberal rights such as (white) women's voting rights were instituted at the beginning of the 20th century, heteronormative systems still hold power. Heteronormativity refers to the encompassing regime in which an individual, sexually attracted only to the person of opposite sex, is assumed to be a natural and universal norm or way of being human (Butler, 1993). Mostly heteronormative system tends to confer benefits and privileges to the hegemonic and privileged masculinities. At the same time, cultural differences and living conditions must be taken into account to show what masculinities are formed and how both women and nonnormative sexualities continue to be subjugated (DuBois, 1998, pp. 174-6). In Australian sociologist Raeween Connell's (2005) terms, hegemonic masculinity is defined as a practice that legitimizes the dominant position of powerful men' in society and the subordination of other masculinities and women. Men who established the benefits of patriarchy, could be regarded as viewing complicit masculinity: it was concerning this group, and compliance among heterosexual women, the

concept of hegemony was most influential. The concept of hegemony does not mean violence, although it could be reinforced by force; and dominance reached with the support of culture, traditions, institutions, and encouragement (Connell, 2005).

On the one hand, the Caucasus has been considered a ‘male-dominated region’ in history (see, for example: Tlostanova et al. 2012; Shahnazarian and Ziemer 2018). Some highlight that this region was ruled by hegemonic masculinities (including daily activities, social and economic engagements) which objectified women’s bodies and recognizes women as tools for producing offspring (ibid). Gender and sexuality as critical categories are among the problematic and deeply silenced issues in the Armenian, Azerbaijani and Karabakh societies. As Shahnazarian (2018) argues, Karabakh society is a society where women’s social status and welfare depend on their relationship to men. In Caucasian societies when women are considered subordinate to their husbands, brothers, fathers and sons (ibid). Women are not allowed to take any actions without the approval of male family members. Women were valued as wives and mothers, but less so as daughters, who were essentially raised to marry and serve other families (ibid). Men’s economic and political domination also constitutes their symbolic power as carrier of the family heritage or bloodline (Connell, 2005). In the South Caucasus, kinship relationships served as important resources people could draw upon to circumvent bureaucratic regulations and material shortages (Dudwick 2015, p.6). In other words, this dependency strengthens the male power of the male-dominated region. Such conventions keep women and non-normative sexualities under the control of Caucasian hegemonic masculinities. In S. Caucasian cultures, mothers, wives and daughters signify the nation and national belonging (ibid) and they are perceived as the property of the nation.

On the other hand (to those who argue for a unitary gender order) there is a legacy of progressive gender equality politics. As Tlostanova (2012) argues, when Tsarist Russia invaded the Caucasian territories in the XVIII-XIX century, it was forcing the integration into the Russian Empire. This integration was the societal changes that *Persian* and *Ottoman* empires did not achieve when they ruled these territories. The Caucasus region was opposed to women’s and representation in society. In an effort to control these territories, the Tsarist Russia aimed to empower women and reduced the male dominance in these societies (ibid). Yet, the Tsarist regime implemented women empowerment only in

limited terms such as property and economic rights. However, these changes mainly targeted the wealthy and elite class of the region and the working-class women were not targeted in this empowerment. In the future, this triggered to increase the hate between women in big cities who came from wealthy families and women who were from less-developed areas of Caucasus (Kvinna till Kvinna, 2019). After the downfall of the Russian empire in 1918, this region became independent and in 1920 was forced to involuntarily join the former U.S.S.R. Some scholars argued that socialism has contributed a lot to the women and queer empowerment of these regions (see, for example: Hazard 1965; Usha 2005; Tlostanova 2012). In the 1920s intercultural dialogue, freedom of movements, educational and employment opportunities enabled women in the S. Caucasus region to gain more independence through studying, working, socializing on an equal level to men (Usha, 2005, pp.143-5). Soviet social services were made available such as education, works spaces, social and political participation. As a result of these initiatives, the literacy rate of the women of South Caucasus increased from approximately 8.7 % in 1926 to 99% in 1989 (see, for example: Usha 2005; Matossian 1962). According to Hazard (1965), the early Soviet Union, the Communist Party eliminated many repressive Tsarist regulations in 1917 related to sexuality: In 1917 they legalised homosexuality, and in the 1920s the law did not criminalize non-commercial same-sex between consenting adults. It also provided for no-fault divorce and legalized abortion. However, outside Russia and Ukraine, homosexuality remained a criminal offence in some Soviet republics, predominantly those who were dominantly Muslim, underlining that Soviet policy was often inconsistent for maintaining gender and homosexual rights and equality (Hazard, 1987).

In relation to the NK conflict and peacebuilding though, gender and sexuality are rarely taken into account in the research of the conflict. One reason is that gender is not considered as a social, political concern in this region due to the taken for grantedness of the gender binary and that fact that women have achieved property, voting, working rights in these countries. Queer and LGBT organizations such as Pink Armenia, Nefes LGBT which are well-known in the region are concerned with the living conditions of LGBT/queer individuals in the region. Even less is currently known about the situation of LGBT and queer community, a published article suggests that despite some advances in gender equality, LGBT and gender-queer people continue to be seen as ‘abnormal’ or ‘sick’ who do not fit this culture and traditions (Jalilova, 2019). Representation of queer people is mostly negatively provocative because they are seen as physiologically and

mentally sick in the S. Caucasian societies which I shall investigate in a deeper analysis of [chapter 4](#). “During the Henrich Böll Foundation conference of 2012 on the LGBTIQ situation in Azerbaijan, participants stated that while there is a certain degree of tolerance for men with feminine appearances in beauty salons and show business; homosexual individuals are forced to live in a suffocating environment of discrimination and rejection, where the stereotypes prevail” (Jalilova, 2019). This suggests that if a man behaves feminine, this is not acceptable in the daily routines of ordinary GBT and queer men and the society expects a man should behave masculine, brutal and tough. There is, however, little condemnation of lesbians in these societies -an issue that remains silenced, disregarded and under-researched since lesbians are not perceived as a threat (van den Veur, 2007). Queer men embody alternative types of masculinities that threatened Caucasian dominant masculinity (ibid). The main reason is not profoundly investigated in the literature, but it can be analysed as the role of male-dominance in the Caucasian societies. For centuries, hegemonic masculinities had a dominant role in the politics, economics and importantly, family and thus, queer men deploy a different image of masculinity and men of the region. It suggests that hegemonic Caucasian masculinities do not aim to accept this alternative queer/GBT masculinities and change the power authority of their existing embodied masculinity. The absence of research with queer people in relation to NK conflict can be linked to the absence of queer people’s ‘coming out’ in their communities and wider society. Coming out as gay or lesbian or transgender bears essential risks including honour killings of family members (ibid). In the absence of self-identification, queer people remain invisibilized within these societies.

Gender and war related violence and trauma

Trauma is considered at the core of many problems after the displacement and war in the S. Caucasus region. The existing literature suggests that trauma is a crucial lens for understanding experiences of violent displacement. Trauma is a form of wounding that happens as a result of a violent and sad event, generating distress that exceeds one's ability to cope with the emotions involved with that experience (Spiegel, 2006). Men are traumatised differently due to the fact that they were in the front lines of the war. However, this will not be a part of this thesis. In relation to IDP and refugee women, economic, social and sexual traumas are the most significant. Info about the war a bit here

According to Najafizadeh (2013), there are three phases of forced displacement in which trauma has been noted. These are **(i)** the primary shock and trauma of war and of being forced to flee for one's life; **(ii)** searching for a 'safe place' from the war, facing the reality of an undefined future, and changing to their new identity as IDPs/refugees; and **(iii)** the pains of displacement, emerging resilience, and giving up hope of going back home. In her research on Azerbaijani IDP and refugee women from NK, Najafizadeh elaborates on the social and economic trauma that women faced in the conflict.

Economic trauma includes the precarious living standards such as using shelters instead of their flats (which were occupied due to the war), carrying water in barrels on their back or even losing their children and husband while leaving their lands (Yalcın-Heckmann and Shahnazarian, 2010). Women who left these lands left their houses without even taking basic necessities. Many women did not have a proper flat or house until 2005. They used to live in wagons or sheds (Shahnazarian, 2014). The poor living conditions and poverty of these women become a material condition in their lives after the displacement. In other words, the consequences of the NK conflict highly influence the economic conditions of women and thus, many working-class IDP and refugee women suffer the economic trauma as an ongoing situation after thirty years.

Social trauma refers to the impossibilities of integrating into new societies and regions and villages (ibid). IDP and refugee women of NK are considered more conservative in terms of culture, values and tradition than local women from big cities such as Baku, Sumgayit, Yerevan and others. In this process, adopting the new values and lifestyles of women of the new settlements posed large barriers for many IDP/refugee women. Even if they wanted to integrate into society, they often are not accepted by the local women communities due to the cultural and ethnic prejudice (Najafizadeh, 2019).

Aside from social and economic traumas, it is important to draw attention to possible sexual trauma such as rape and miscarriage in the NK conflict that are often silenced and invisibilized. According to Bernard and Durham (2014, p. 428), 'sexual violence can be broadly defined as acts of a sexual nature imposed by force, a threat of force or coercion, or by taking advantage of a coercive environment or a person's incapacity to give genuine consent'. It includes rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy and

enforced sterilization and sexual violence perpetrated for strategic purposes, opportunistically, or because it is tacitly tolerated. The extent of sexual violence in NK remains disputed. According to Selimovic (2012), rape of women most of the time occurs in connection with acts of war, even if local women's organisations have claimed that the incidence was relatively low in the NK conflict. As it is often the case with sexual violence it tends to remain under-reported. At the same time, it remains important not to reduce all women as victims of trauma.

1.4 Peacebuilding and the role of gender and ethnicity

Before I return to current peace processes and the general background of the peace strategy, I would like to elaborate on the term 'frozen conflict' and its relevance to the NK conflict. Tisdall (2010) defines frozen conflict as a condition where the ongoing conflict has ended, but no peace agreement or political frameworks have solved the conflict. Therefore, politically, the conflict can start again at any moment. This is the case in NK that has been considered as frozen conflicts, I shall analyse the progress of the current peace initiatives in relation to the instability of this frozen conflict.

The situation of NGOs and civil society is not as good as in Armenia. According to the Democracy Index 2019 report, Azerbaijan is ranked (146th) among the authoritarian regimes. Meanwhile, Armenia is ranked (86th) among hybrid regimes. I aim to show how this influence the current peacebuilding and gender issues in the context of NK conflict. Romashov (2019) suggest that one reason for the exclusion of IDP and refugee women's from peacebuilding in particular might be that complying with dominant patriarchal and militaristic norms mean that the feminine and anything that can 'effeminize' peacebuilding must be rejected from public and political realms). As a result, war, violence, and weapons become 'both a significant factor in masculine identity and a crucial factor in the functioning of patriarchy' (Reardon 1985, p.18). The women who are involved in peacebuilding activities are mainly politicians, academics and public figures, and hence can be considered privileged women. And yet, other women are sometimes considered to be *more* interested in peace initiatives more than men (Najafizadeh, 2013). Kalatozishvili (2019) identifies only few NGOs in Armenia, Azerbaijan and NK that combine women and peace initiatives. As a strategy to overcome this barrier, women's organizations in the region have applied international treaties around the Women, Peace and Security agenda

and united for the implementation of the UNSCR 1325 on women's participation in peace processes (ibid). Swedish sociologist Mindauga (2016) also has examined the role of women as mediators and their potential to challenge power and authority of the patriarchal structure in the NK. Mindauga describes the importance and the results of the women's mediation skills in peace dialogues. Importantly, the author connects the negative outcomes of previous mediation and peacebuilding by hegemonic Caucasian masculinity with the absence of women as a failure of peace processes.

At the same time, IDP and refugee women are among those who bear the brunt of the NK conflict. Azerbaijani sociologist Mehrangiz Najafizadeh (2013) observes based on the statistical and demographic surveys that Azerbaijani IDP women constitute 71% of Azerbaijanis who were forcibly displaced when, and after almost twenty years of displacement still mostly live at the poverty line. She argues that it is important to hear the life stories, concerns and ideas from these IDP Azerbaijani women's points of view. Even though the author considers Azerbaijani IDP women as the only oppressed group in her research, the author attempts to show the long-term impacts of the war and displacement on the everyday lives of IDP Azerbaijani women. Together with the presence of only well-known and privileged women in the peacebuilding process, these under-representations and silences re-produce inequalities in the S. Caucasian society.

Some international advocates of the Women, Peace and Security agenda argue that women's social roles, particularly their role as mothers, gives them a different advantage in overcoming both personal and political obstacles to peace (Porter, 2008, p.76). This idea is a very essentialist way of thinking about women in peace. To associate this issue only with women's motherhood instincts re-produces the traditional gender norms in the heteronormative system. Rather what is needed is supporting women's and queer community's empowerment and participation as the source of insight and change. At the same time Armenian sociologist Abrahamyan (2017) points out that women in such a context might carry the double burden of motherhood and victimization. Women are expected to give birth to male soldiers, who will be able to 'protect' them, while those same men serve the patriarchal system, which encourages domination over 'others'.

The existing literature suggests that IDP and refugee women are absent in the current peace discourses of the Nagorno-Karabakh and thus, there is no enough well-established

literature about these women. However, there are several international organizations attempt to help these women for establishing some peace initiatives, but the main obstacle is to locate them in the peace processes. Some authors are aware of the need for the inclusion of IDP and refugee women, but they do not analyse the problem by looking at the ethnicity and gender. Therefore, these women still remain as the mother, sister, grandmother figures in the NK conflict which re-produces the gender essentialism.

1.5 Towards an intersectional approach to life history analysis and peacebuilding

Some authors argue peace is not only about the state of unarmed conflict, but is about the security, women's rights, end of the violence against women, women's control over their bodies and other relevant feminist issues (see, for example, Shahnazarian 2010; Selimovic et al., 2012). At the same time, it is apparent that a focus on gender or ethnicity alone is insufficient to take into account the differential effects of Armenian and Azerbaijani IDP women and refugees. Here an intersectional approach seems more promising and according to Crenshaw (1991), intersectionality is a lens through which we can analyse how axes of power and experience come together interlocks, or clash. Arguing from a legal perspective, Crenshaw points out 'It is not simply that there is a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times, that [legal] framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things' (ibid). Crenshaw also mentions that intersectionality is a 'transient concept connecting modern politics with postmodern theory' that is significant until the interconnected categories gain multidimensionality (1989). Therefore, each element of inequality interrelates with and deploys as a context for the other way of inequalities, and these inequalities mutually construct each other. Following this, according to McCall intracategorical approaches introduced the study of intersectionalities: they demonstrate interwoven relations of categories that constitute specific locations (2005: 1786). Therefore, researchers temporarily analyse existing categories such as gender, race, ethnicity and consider how they are distinctively shaped and have different nuances in distinctively located groups (ibid). Such approach allows the research to analyse the interwoven relations without reducing one category to another one and thus, intersectional lenses contribute to uncovering the hidden elements of very sensitive issues.

In relation to peacebuilding, intersectionality recently has been used by Stefanie Kappler and Nicolas Lemay-Hébert in other conflict scenarios of Guatemalan women (2019). These authors argue that intersectionality of peace approach can help shed a new light on the power imbalances and inequalities within peacebuilding missions. The intersectionality of peace approach can highlight the power dynamics, where matters of intersectionality have continued to play a crucial role in the ways in which justice and peacebuilding discourses play out (Lederach, 2020). These authors demonstrate the role of gender, race and class in the peacebuilding and how the dominant framings of privileged ‘gender, race and class’ continues to play a major role in peacebuilding. They attempt to uncover the role of intersectional peacebuilding by analysing the interwoven relations of gender, ethnicity, race, age and power relations. In this process: firstly, they understand intersectional identities without dichotomising them; secondly, authors analyse these identities with a clear intention of grasping the power differentials; and thirdly, clutch life stories of women not as individualised experiences, but instead as ways of accessing larger structural inequalities in the peacebuilding processes (Kappler and Lemay-Hébert, 2019).

Concerning Nagorno Karabakh, however, an intersectional approach in peacebuilding has not yet been taken up (see, for instance, Shahnazarian 2010, 2014; Najafizadeh 2013, 2019; Selimovic et al., 2012). These authors have published the main articles and books regarding the IDP and refugee women and their life stories but there is no theoretical framework for the intersectional peacebuilding in the context of the NK conflict. This begins to suggest that, to be successful, peace initiatives in NK will require an intersectional approach that simultaneously takes into account the mutual constitution of differences of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, socioeconomic status and marginalized identities (such as working-class IDP / refugee women or queer). Such an intersectional approach should address the participation, concerns of women and LGBT/queer community of various ages, classes and ethnicities in the region. However, the current peace agenda of civil society in Armenia and Azerbaijan mainly focuses on the activism and work with the young generation or generally, re-engaging IDP and refugee Armenian and Azerbaijani people without considering their gender differences, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic conditions and needs. For instance, one of the EuroAsia Partnership Foundation funded project ‘Peacebuilding through Capacity Enhancement and Civic Engagement (PeaCE)’ (2017-2020) is one of the examples of how the peace process is

organized by ignoring the multidimensionality of different identities, especially IDP and refugee women and LGBT/queer community (Peacebuilding through Capacity Enhancement and Civic Engagement (PeaCE), 2017). The research conducted Selimovic and colleagues (2012) for the by Kvinna till Kvinna organization indicates that important reconciliation initiatives in [Armenia and Azerbaijan] led by women so far have not been taken seriously in national politics, where a low level of participation by women limits democracy and decreases the legitimacy of the power of formal political institutions. An intersectional approach can help developing the inter-ethnic intersectional collaboration among the women of the region. Such *peacebuilding* projects might contribute to breaking down concepts/ stereotypes of the enemy widely propagated by national mythmaking; promote tolerance, diversity, and seek to improve practical skills in conflict resolution among participants (Caucasus Edition, 2014). Most importantly, multidimensionality of intersectionality in peacebuilding can bring more IDP and refugee women from Armenia and Azerbaijan to the peace initiatives which can contribute to the current dynamics of the peace processes.⁵

An intersectional approach would also attend to insights and concerns of members of LGBT/queer community in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Firstly, intersectional perspective can allow understanding the position of LGBT/queer community in the peace processes of the NK conflict by taking their ethnicity, gender, age and socioeconomic conditions into account. Secondly, an intersectional approach may foster the cooperation between queer community and other peacebuilders who also aim to be involved in the peacebuilding of NK conflict. This suggests that the intersectional perspective may also establish more multidimensionality within these processes.

By taking an intersectional approach as a starting point, the research that follows this gap. The key argument for intersectional approach is that understanding peacebuilding either solely in inter-ethnic terms and in opposition of war and peace or conversely only as a woman's issue can exacerbate inequalities and prevents a significant part of the post-war society from exercising their agency (Stavrevska, 2017). Such an intersectional approach is so far missing in the NK conflict.

⁵ I shall analyse the current peace processes and the role of IDP and refugee women for the peace initiatives in the [chapter 5](#) where I suggest the changes to the current peacebuilding in the NK conflict.

1.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I introduced the concepts of ethnicity, gender and sexuality, peacebuilding and intersectionality that I argue need to be addressed to understand the current conflict and potentials for peace processes in NK. This chapter gathered the dispersed literature on ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, peacebuilding, trauma and intersectionality in relation to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh that so far has rarely been discussed from feminist perspectives.

The literature review has shown that the ethnic relations between Armenians and Azerbaijanis historically shifted from friendship to enemy level because of the colonial policies of the former U.S.S.R which caused the frozen conflict (Nagorno-Karabakh) in order to control these territories in the future. In this process, the gender regime also remained very oppressive towards IDP and refugee women and non-normative sexualities. Gender and sexualities are often considered in a very heteronormative and discriminative way, where gender often refers to a distinction between a man and a woman in Caucasian societies. In Butler's (1990) terms, gender refers to cultural effects of the heteronormative society and thus, it is considered as social construction. With the support of institutions such as family, patriarchy this system is strengthened for establishing the societies where hegemonic masculinities are the decision-makers (Connell, 2005). An association of motherhood as a virtue of womanhood also re-produces gender roles in the S. Caucasian society. In relation to peacebuilding I have shown that so far, IDP and refugee women and queer community have been largely excluded in the current peace initiatives (Selimovic et al., 2012). Women and LGBT/queer organizations are not numerous, and they fight against war and for women's rights at the same time. As I have shown, this is connected with the hegemonic Caucasian masculinity, dominant gender roles, frozen conflict and the lack of women's self-determination. Women's freedom is limited in the peace agenda, as in many spheres of the S. Caucasus. There are no queer organisations active in peacebuilding which likely strengthen the patriarchal and heteronormative system within peace initiatives.

In conclusion, there are a number of issues which so far have not been addressed. First, the S. Caucasus region is a very specific location in terms of cultural differences, gender inequalities, economic conditions and most importantly, political development and the NK conflict that is under-researched by local and international feminist activists and

researchers. Second, the literature sources I analysed does not have an intersectional understanding of the subjects and process of peacebuilding like Najafizadeh's (2013) work which portrayed Azerbaijani IDP woman as homogenous group without including the intersecting identities of these women. Third, the ethnicity is not analysed in relation to gender regime and mostly, it is seen as a separate entity from gender. However, the analysis of the NK conflict suggests that these two elements should be analysed together by demonstrating the axes of inequalities. Fourth, visions of queer individuals are entirely absent in the discussion about the resolution of the NK conflict. In light of these absences, the current thesis aims to develop a more comprehensive feminist intersectional perspective for the current peace initiatives.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Research design and methods

The key aim of the research is to explore the effects of the conflict in NK on the lives and concerns of IDP and refugee women and LGBT/queers from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh and to think about how these actors can participate in peacebuilding. Thus, I am interested in people who define themselves as IDP and refugee women or the member of queer community and are affected by and concerned with the NK conflict even if they were not born in the territory.

In my research question I am particularly interested in how - Armenian and Azerbaijani IDP and refugee women and LGBT/queers might be differently affected and how these effects contribute to their exclusion from the current peace processes? How might more inclusionary peace processes in the context of NK conflict be enabled?

A qualitative research design is best suited for addressing these research questions. Qualitative research emphasizes the importance of contextual knowledge, derived from participant-centred methods. Rather than imposing preconceived categorizations upon participants, which effectively turn them into objects of research, qualitative research seeks to create space for dialogues that afford the researchers a greater understanding of how participants understand themselves within their social worlds.

As the method of data collection, I chose semi-structured open-ended interviews and participant observation in and around the cities of Tbilisi, (Georgia) and Baku and Sumgayit, (Azerbaijan). These cities are relevant because of the role that these cities played in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Many IDPs and refugees live in these field locations and thus, as a researcher, I had a chance to meet more people from IDP and refugee community in these field locations. I had already established relation to such communities during previous visits of IDP towns in Azerbaijan and people that I met during my previous field research.

Figure 3: The fieldsites of this research [map]



Participant observation aims to provide data on the tacit aspects of the varied lives and interpersonal interactions. Observation complemented individual interviews and was carried out in participants' homes. As I show below participant observation allowed giving further insights particularly into power hierarchies within communities. My insider and outsider positions changed from time to time when I was conducting this research with IDP and refugee women and LGBT/queer participants. The point here is that the separation of insider/outsider is often not specifically clear cut and is undoubtedly not fixed amongst people within one group. For instance, when I visited the participants in the village, Georgia they treated me very friendly and nicely and tried to make me feel like I am one of them and at this point, I realized the refraction of my outsider identity. However, in Sumgayit, people treated me as an outsider. When I was passing through the street, there was a small bakery where four women were working under the supervision of a middle-aged man with a huge moustache. For a while I observed them and that men suddenly started to yell at me by saying 'if you do not want to buy something, what are you doing here?' It seemed like people did not like 'outsiders' in this part of the town.

Following these, 15 interviews were conducted in a way that they were attentive to the mutual constructions or creative collaborations (Campbell and Lassiter, 2014). Interview allows to bring in experiences and concerns that cannot be directly observed. A topic guide for the semi-structured in-depth interviews included open-ended questions that encourage the research participants to direct the flow of the conversation and develop their own structures of relevance.

The open-ended interviews were conducted with the participants in Baku and Sumgayit in Azerbaijan, Tbilisi and a village near Tbilisi in Georgia, and via the internet. I contacted the participants with the support of my colleagues who also worked with IDP and refugee communities in the past. For the LGBT/queer participants, I asked my queer friends to share the connections with LGBT/ queer people in Armenian and Azerbaijan. My sample consisted of altogether 22 people from different 15 interviews were tape recorded and complemented by field notes (see- 2.3:Table 1). I used two different samplings for the interviews and conducted semi-structured open-ended interviews with seven Armenians, seven Azerbaijanis, and one Lezgin; and 5 interviews with men and women who identified as lesbian, gay, transgender and queer. The topic guides focused on the issues of gender and gendered aspects of the NK conflict, and intersectional approach to peacebuilding, especially with the IDP and refugee women, and on issues related to sexuality in the Caucasus, the role of queerness in the context of militarization of NK conflict and the queer perspectives on the resolution of the NK conflict, respectively.

Tape-recorded interviews were transcribed for data for analysis. Analysis proceeded via open coding was the first step in the data analysis to identify emerging themes as well as reflections and omissions. Informed consent was sought by all participants and to ensure anonymity, I have created pseudonym for all research participants, which is especially important in the context of the political conflict - the NK conflict.

Except for these, I attempted to contact some women's organizations which work at the intersections of gender and peace, but they were not interested in conducting interviews with me. Since most of these NGOs did not have well-established websites, thus, in [chapter 5](#), I analysed the websites of some of the main peacebuilding initiatives and NGOs from Armenia and Azerbaijan which were not women's NGOs.

2.2 Field sites and researcher positionality

Positionality in gender studies is a key point of reflection since who we are and how we are perceived affects the way the persons whom we study react to us. While the ways in which my positionality took shape and impacted the research can only be examined in concrete research encounters, and need to be examined throughout the research. I would like to highlight some aspects of my positionality that shaped the contours of the research at the outset.

In short, I am a Baku-born twenty-three-year-old queer gender studies student and researcher who has lived in Azerbaijan (and holds the citizenship of the Republic of Azerbaijan) for more than twenty years. Since my childhood the NK conflict has been a sensitive topic in Azerbaijani society and people hated Armenians. This shaped my childhood memories and traumatized me during all of these years. At the same time, my nationality prevented me from travelling to the Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia to discover and understand the insights of people who live there.

Given these restrictions and previous contacts, my fieldwork was conducted over ten days at four (five-including online research site) key sites in Azerbaijan, Georgia (and Armenia: online research site) (see, figure 3 above). I conducted my research in four different languages. My first research location site was Sumgayit, in Azerbaijan and here, I interviewed 3 IDP women from Azerbaijan. Sumgayit is a seaside industrial city on the shores of Caspian Sea. It has never been remarkably populous, reaching its peak of 133.000 inhabitants just before the NK conflict (World Population Statistics, 1971). Even though Sumgayit was a new city built up in the 1950s, the city was highly populated with IDP women who settled there in the wake of the NK war and displacement in 1990s. The main reason for this settlement could be the good location and the employment opportunities in the city. The neighbourhoods where participants lived were poor; waste littered deserted streets and a smell of urine and also, I did not feel welcomed in Sumgayit.

The second research site was in Baku the Azerbaijani capital where I conducted the interviews with queers, peace activists and an Azerbaijani refugee from Armenia. Since independence in 1991, Baku became a highly industrialized oil-rich affluent city of Caucasus. I have mainly interviewed the research participants in small cafes and local restaurants in the city centre where participants go occasionally. I have also visited the

house of one refugee woman, who had a large garden where she rented three of the small houses in her area. I have known this woman, a neighbour of my grandmother, since my childhood. Around the neighbourhood, there were three gas stations, two big supermarkets, two-car shops and factories. When I entered her house, she was feeding a lot of hens, chickens, turkeys and some cows. The house smelt like a real animal farm and I was surprised to feel like in the village in the midst of one of the industrialized parts of Baku.

The third research site⁶ was a village near Tbilisi- Dartloch, Georgia. The village was approximately thirty-five km far from Tbilisi and here, some Azerbaijani, Armenian and Georgian people lived together. I chose this site to interview two Armenian refugees (from Baku) women who currently live in that village since I was unable to visit Armenia. The Georgian village was similar to the Sumgayit neighbourhood where I interviewed the IDP women. The streets were full of smelly garbage and cigarette ashes but unlike Sumgayit, in this village people were in the streets and everyone was friendly and talkative. One Georgian woman asked me to visit her house and be a guest and wanted to talk to me about the Russian hegemony in these countries. I kindly declined since I needed to return to my accommodation in Tbilisi. Research participants lived next to each other and their houses/apartments places were poorer than the houses of my Azerbaijani participants. The ceilings had small holes in the roof and buckets were placed under these holes. They had a small refrigerator and broken radio. One of the women did not have electricity for more than eleven days. Their flat consisted of a single room for sleeping, eating and welcoming guests. Even though these women clearly had economic problems, they both offered me hot beverages with some sweets such as chocolate and cookies.

The fourth research was Tbilisi, in Georgia where I conducted an interview with one of the refugee Armenian refugee participant. Tbilisi was also in the process of becoming an industrialized European city, but the participant lived in panel houses from Soviet area. The apartment block had nine floors and was called ‘Leningardski proyekt’ alluding to the Soviet buildings in St. Petersburg. The neighbourhood was rather empty, and I came to the building by asking some people in the streets, but most of them refused to talk to me either in Russian or in English. The entry of the building did smell similarly to the neighbourhood in Sumgayit. There was strong smell of urine on each floor. The wooden

⁶ Due to personal request of participant, I cannot mention name of village and the pseudonym is ‘Dartloch’.

door was old and when I entered the walls were without plasters. In the guest room there was only one table and three chairs and nothing else. I only had time to spend half-day in Tbilisi and therefore could not interview other Armenian refugee women in Tbilisi.

The final site was the virtual site of the internet. I was unable to conduct my research in the territories of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh due to the ethno-political Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. As a consequence, I conducted my interviews with five participants who live in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh via the internet. Two of the participants lived in the Armenian capital of Yerevan, one of them was living in the Netherlands and one participant was from the Nagorno-Karabakh. Except for the Armenian participants, I interviewed one Azerbaijani participant who lives in Italy via the internet, as well. As part of short-term research, I missed the chance to develop a special relationship with the research participants. Virtuality caused additional barriers including mistrust, fear and self-defence. In one instance, a participant refused to meet via a social platform and preferred using a special application for having a voice call and then, the participant did not show up for the interview.

Learning about the difficult life stories of marginalized IDP and refugee women, LGBT/queer from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh both in content and process was not an easy research. First, limitation of access: in my research, my gender, ethnicity, age, social status played a crucial role in terms of who I was able to interview. With respect to gender as I had expected, I received many rejections from IDP and refugee women due to the fact that I was considered a male researcher. Gender distinction may not be seen so obviously in the capital or bigger cities but became more apparent in smaller towns. For instance, one of the participants accepted my invitation but after seeing that I shall be in the room with her, she refused interview and asked me to wait for her husband.

Second, my ethnicity also played a significant role in the interactions with the participants from Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. I was considered an ‘Azerbaijani researcher’ rather than a researcher for some of these participants. There was an issue of trust, for instance, one old female refugee Armenian participant asked me to stop recording and told me that she is afraid of having troubles because of this recording. Then, she continued to mention very traumatic moments of her deportation from Baku. Hence, my ethnicity became a very

challenging issue in the research process. I received also many rejections from the participants from Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, especially women.

For the LGBT/queer participants from Armenia, the reason behind the rejection could be interpreted as the current unfavourable situation against queer individuals in Armenia and thus, those participants were afraid of visibilizing themselves in these interviews. This also shows that they did not put their faith in me (the peer, researcher, queer fellow) because they did not believe the anonymity of the interviews. Additionally, these participants could be afraid of participating in this research because of my constructed 'Azerbaijani' ethnicity which is a part of 'enemy' propaganda of the Armenian government. The rejection of potential Azerbaijani participants was also connected with the homophobic Azerbaijani society and the issue of trust. They were also afraid of visibilizing themselves in the homophobic Azerbaijani society because of losing their jobs, friends and families. This also suggests that they did not trust me because of the same anonymity reasons.

Third, I was concerned with insecurities of meaning of my research participants which made the data analysis more situated. According to Gunaratnam (2003) the insecurities of meaning are constituted by the subjective and social differences between researcher and participants. This research was a cross-cultural practice which included people from different cultural backgrounds such as Armenian, Azerbaijani and Karabakian. For many Azerbaijani participants, the Nagorno-Karabakh region was a part of Azerbaijan, but in my research, I analysed the region as a separate entity from Azerbaijan. When I was talking to the participant in Sumgayit, she highlighted this sentence many times '*when we go back to Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan*'. At this point, the participant's insight entangled me to understand what she wanted to mean by saying such phrase. Because, in my point of view, Nagorno-Karabakh was a part of Nagorno-Karabakh not Armenia or Azerbaijan. Therefore, such insecurities of meanings shaped the empirical analysis of my research in different directions and I came up with more sophisticated analysis of data. This also suggested that the research findings are always a co-production of researcher and the research participants (ibid).

2.3 Table I: Compiled Participant Information

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Socioeconomic status	Fieldsite	Citizenship
Tamara	Woman	60-70	Armenian	working-class	Dartloch	Georgia
Anoush	Woman	60-70	Armenian	working-class	Dartloch	Georgia
Alla	Woman	50-60	Armenian	working-class	Tbilisi	Georgia
Aydan	Woman	30-40	Azerbaijani	middle-class	Baku	Azerbaijan
Elnaz	Woman	50-60	Azerbaijani	working-class	Sumgayit	Azerbaijan
Shalala	Woman	50-60	Azerbaijani	working-class	Baku	Azerbaijan
Ulnaz	Woman	60-70	Azerbaijani	working-class	Sumgayit	Azerbaijan
Zubeyda	Woman	60-70	Azerbaijani	middle/upper-class	Sumgayit	Azerbaijan
Firuz	Woman	20-30	Azerbaijani	middle-class	Online	Azerbaijan
Kohar	Woman	20-30	Armenian	middle-class	Online	Nagorno-Karabakh
Lilit	Transgender	30-40	Armenian	middle-class	Online	Armenia
Eldar	Queer	20-30	Azerbaijani	working-class	Baku	Azerbaijan
Hayk	Queer	20-30	Armenian	working-class	Online	Armenia
Vardan	Gay	20-30	Armenian	middle-class	Online	Armenia
Leyla	Lesbian	30-40	Lezgin	middle-class	Baku	Azerbaijan

Chapter 3: The Effects of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the Lives of IDP and Refugee Women

3.1 Introduction

The long-term effects of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict still remain under-researched areas when it comes to the lives of IDP and refugee women. In this chapter, I seek to examine in what ways are the lives of Armenian, Azerbaijani and Karabakh displaced women differentially impacted by the ongoing conflict? How are their socioeconomic and health conditions intersectionally constituted by gender and ethnicity? Najafizadeh (2013) argued most of Azerbaijani IDP women live in the poverty line and they are the most vulnerable group and by doing so, the researcher created a homogenous image of IDP women without taking ethnic differences into account. Concerning cultural discrimination, Shahnazarian (2010) focused on the discrimination against refugee Armenian women from cultural and economic perspectives but the researcher also did not analyse the role of ethnicity. Kvinna till Kvinna (2019) investigated the role of militarization in the lives of IDP and refugee women without distinguishing impact of family status on the concerns of married, widow and single women.

In this chapter, I explore the accounts of ethnic privilege of Azerbaijani displaced women concerning their economic conditions, the discrimination of Armenian and Azerbaijani refugee women face regarding the social support, the notion of ethnicity and the perceptions of different categories of women concerning the militarization. By doing so, I show how studies of gender in Armenia and Azerbaijan can incorporate intersectional approaches to gain insights into a wider range of societal problems of the NK conflict that at first sight seem removed from questions of gender, ethnicity, age and class. The chapter contributes to examining the challenges that IDP and refugee women face that will be important to take into account for peacebuilding efforts in the NK conflict (see, [chapter 5](#)). In the analysis, precarious living conditions, discrimination, social support, ill-health, militarisation and the silences about the sexual violence are lenses through which to explore the situational making and unmaking and interactions of gender, ethnicity, class from an intersectional perspective. I focus on what kinds of challenges, effects and valuations are constituted in the narratives of women, and what they afford.

3.2 Precarious living conditions

For the analysis of the women's material living conditions I draw on the stories of ten women participants: six Azerbaijani IDP women living Sumgayit (Elnaz, Ulnaz and Zubeyda) and in Baku (Aydan, Shalala and Firuza-online); three Armenian refugee women living in the village of Dartloch (Anoush and Tamara) and in Tbilisi (Alla); and Kohar who lives in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Azerbaijani city of Sumgayit (around 300.000 inhabitants), is a Soviet-era hub for the petrochemical industry. Shops and restaurants sell alcohol, and residents dress casually. Sumgayit became home to more than 46.000 Azerbaijani refugees and IDPs, mainly from Qubadli and Zangilan regions after the NK conflict (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2007). The participants claimed that actual numbers were higher because many people are still registered in the territories of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding territories. Azerbaijani research participants emphasised many IDP and refugee women live in poverty. Data from the Asian Development Bank (2015) indicates that 4.9 % Azerbaijani people (in Azerbaijan) live below the poverty line, and this rate was 29.8 % for Armenians in Armenia. The working-class IDP and refugee women are considered one of the most vulnerable groups in these indicators. In my research, most the Armenian and Azerbaijani research participants lived in relative poverty, where households receive 50% less than average household income, so they have some financial income, but this barely covers basic necessities (Foster, 1998). However, the situation of Azerbaijani women was socioeconomically better than the Armenian women who lived in Dartloch.

In the Sumgayit neighbourhood where Zubeyda, a 65-year-old Azerbaijani displaced widow from Kalbajar⁷ had her house, the street was so dirty. However, when I entered Zubeyda's house, I found her house well furnished; besides, the house had a well-tended garden where she cultivated rose, peach and apple. Zubeyda was a middle-class woman in Sumgayit and had better living conditions than most of the IDP participants. She mentioned that *'when I left Kalbajar, I managed to take my pieces of jewellery. I sold them to buy a house and small bakery'*. This can suggest Zubeyda had a financial capacity for maintaining her living conditions which problematises the perception that all IDP and refugee women are destitute. The contrast of Zubeyda's well maintained house and the

⁷ Kalbajar is an affluent rural region in Karabakh which is *de facto* controlled by the Republic of Artsakh.

neighbourhood shows that Zubeyda has financial capacity to take care of this neighbourhood and make it a more liveable place like her garden, but she was not interested in this.

In the village of Dartloch, I interviewed Tamara, a 68-year-old single working-class Armenian refugee woman who was deported from Baku in 1989. Tamara moved from the cosmopolitan Azerbaijani capital⁸ to the second largest Armenian conservative city Gyumri in 1989 and in 1997, she moved to Dartloch in Georgia. The neighbourhood where Tamara lived was as dirty as Zubeyda's. The streets were full of waste, and apple. Tamara was living in a very old and humid shack which was made of sand and concrete.

'I am poor because I do not have good living standards, and it is due to war and displacement. I could not even manage to sell my house before the deportation. If we did not have war, I could be middle-class.' Tamara, 68, single, Armenian, working class refugee, Dartloch

This account challenges the view of Azerbaijani officials who had claimed that Armenians in Azerbaijan were able to sell their houses before they were deported to Armenia and had therefore much better living conditions in Armenia (Musaelyan, 2019). In contrast Azerbaijani side claims that Azerbaijanis expelled from NK were not allowed to take anything and left 'barefoot' (Najafizadeh, 2013). Both Zubeyda's and Tamara's narratives cast doubts on these accounts. Tamara could not sell her house in 1989 and had been unable to change her living conditions since 1989. This was partly due to a lack of employment and social support. Therefore, Tamara moved from Armenia to Georgia to find better job opportunities and maybe, in the future possibility of getting pensions from the Azerbaijani or Georgian government. But Tamara's marital status, ethnicity, and refugee identity too played a role in her poverty. Whereas Zubeyda, for example as an Azerbaijani IDP and widow was entitled to social support from the Azerbaijani government. No such support was provided by either the Armenian or Azerbaijani governments for Tamara. In contrast to a unified image of poverty effected by the NK conflict, IDP and refugee women experience the consequences of the NK war very

⁸ As I previously mentioned, not all the Armenian refugees were from Baku. There were many refugees who were coming from rural areas of Azerbaijan to Yerevan. However, Armenian participants were refugees from Baku.

differently depending on their class, marital status, the situational conditions of flight and expulsion and the welfare benefits available in their places of resettlement.

3.2.1 Cultural discrimination against IDP and refugee women

The analysis further suggests that cultural discrimination contributes to the precarious living conditions of IDP and refugee women. Gender and peace studies scholars from Armenia and Azerbaijan have argued the discrimination against IDP and refugee women is grounded in cultural differences (Shahnazarian, 2014, Najafizadeh (2013). Najafizadeh (2013), for example, suggests that Azerbaijani IDP women from NK were culturally different from the urban women in terms of their lifestyles, dress habits, and accents. These cultural distinctions led the isolation of IDP and refugee women in their settlements.

Here I want to examine if and how the IDP and refugee women interviewed experienced cultural discrimination and how these impacted their living conditions of these women. I begin by turning to the narrative of Aydan, a displaced Azerbaijani woman who currently lives in Switzerland.

'In Azerbaijan, people never use the word IDP; they always call others "qaçqın" (refugee). They use this term [qaçqın] when they want to insult someone... some IDPs refuse their IDP identities. It is something to do with self-dense and connected with the ego. These people know that there is no positive understanding of this identity... In order to be fully accepted, they firstly refuse this identity and secondly start to humiliate the notion of IDP. I understand them, and unfortunately, IDPs cannot be fully integrated into urbanized Azerbaijani society... For instance, I do not understand the practice of IDP camps or IDP towns! It is not inclusive, and by doing this, you isolate the IDP community. These places are located in very remote places. How can these people integrate into Azerbaijani urbanized culture? That is the reason behind this shame' Aydan, 32, middle-class, Azerbaijani IDP, Switzerland.

It is possible to offer a cultural interpretation of Aydan's resistance to the segregation of IDPs in IDP camps through explicit reference to her biography. Aydan is 32 years old married middle-class Azerbaijani IDP woman who had lived in Baku, experienced displacement from NK when she was six-years-old. Her childhood was shaped by experiences of displacement and isolation. At several points during the interview, Aydan's facial expression changed when I asked What is problematic about IDPs in big cities?

Childhood memories were triggered reminding her that she had been part of IDP community which was not ‘culturally integrated’ into the urban Azerbaijani culture.

Aydan’s account suggests that Najafizadeh (2013) argument concerning the ‘cultural integration’ is limited because the author did not analyse the concentrated settlements or camps as an obstacle to the integration process. Aydan suggests that cultural discrimination against IDP women is connected with segregated housing, such that IDPs are accommodated in the isolated parts of the bigger cities. Historically, the Azerbaijani government provided special flats for the IDPs in suburbs or smaller towns that were around 70-90 minutes away by public transport from the centre of bigger cities (Selimovic et al., 2012). Most IDPs are not financially capable of buying such an expensive flat in the centre. This can be seen as one of the failures of the Azerbaijani government in support of IDPs. Cornering IDPs off into the remote and isolated parts of Azerbaijan cities cannot build bridges between IDPs and locals. Thus, the integration is hindered by spatial segregation that both assumes and reinforces cultural difference.

Aydan’s account also suggests that some IDP women do not want to self-identify as IDP which she links to prejudice, a possible consequence of the precarious living conditions of IDP women. Indeed, it appeared that many IDP women had an ambivalent relation about the IDP identity. The interviews accentuate two reasons for the refusal to identify as IDP: first, IDP women were considered less ‘civilized and uneducated’ – even barbaric (Najafizadeh, 2019) – and thus, IDP became an insult in Azerbaijani society. Second, Aydan maintained that the financial support from the Azerbaijani government that Azerbaijani IDPs received, created the myth that ‘IDPs do not work’ – one of the oldest stereotypes in othering. Locals in big cities associated IDPs with laziness and welfare dependency. Najafizadeh (2019) argued many IDP women cannot find a paid work because of this discrimination (association with laziness) – a vicious circle, which is unscored. Why many IDPs refused to self-identify as IDP is contributing to their invisibility.

This was most evident in the refusal of seven Azerbaijani women with a background of displacement to participate in the research, since they did not consider themselves as IDPs. They claimed their identity as locals since they were able to integrate into urban life. It is worth noting that these women already owned houses in bigger cities (Baku, Sumgayit and

others) during the 1970s and did not want to associate themselves with the poverty of IDP women.

These accounts further problematise the assumption that all IDPs are poor and marginalised. Moreover, they reveal that such stereotypes are in part a consequence of sampling strategies that rely as Najafizadeh (2013) and Selimovic (2012) do on the self-identification of IDP women. In contrast it is the non-participants that demonstrate that Azerbaijani IDP women can and do integrate into the urban cultures. At the same time, through the non-participation of these women suggests that integration is premised on assimilation and their IDP status has to be renounced for becoming a part of the urban Azerbaijani cultures. In other words, urban Azerbaijani culture both vilifies and encourages IDP women to give up on their cultural identities.

To further complicate these dynamics, I turn to Firuza, a displaced Azerbaijani woman who now lives in Baku/Italy.

'All our traumas are connected with our living conditions, our integration into Azerbaijani society. My family and I moved to Russia when I was a child ... For a long time, I never mentioned my origins in Azerbaijan. If I would say that I am Karabakh-Azerbaijani people would humiliate me. Because when I was doing my BA degree [in Baku], I did not pay any tuition fee because I was IDP and we were exempt from paying fees. However, my classmates paid the tuition fees... These classmates always complained about the IDPs from Nagorno Karabakh who live in Baku and get these privileges.... Most of the time, these people blamed us for leaving the territories of NK and moving to Baku. They called us 'traitors'... I always question why being an IDP is so problematic in this country?'
Firuza, 27, single, middle-class, Azerbaijani IDP, Baku/Italy

The phrase 'people would humiliate me' suggests that humiliation was a threat that motivated Firuza to hide her IDP background. Firuza's account also suggests that ethnic difference is situationally performed. While living in Russia, she has never questioned her 'IDP identity' which implies that Firuza realized the denigration of IDPs only after moving to Baku where it led to 'bullying' . Indeed, financial support did both contribute to her living conditions and it caused problems of integration. This complicates the image of IDP as poor and uncivilised in place of the claim of their undeserved privilege.

Another aspect of distinction and denigration that surfaced in my interviews was the claim that IDPs did not defend their land. They were 'traitors' because they did not resist the

Armenians who displaced them – a claim that was mixed with the undeserving privileges I discussed above. A significant axis of differentiating ‘locals’ and ‘IDPs’ then is not so much ethnic or cultural difference than perceived inequalities of welfare. That fostered (and fosters) the hate and social exclusion of locals against IDP and refugee women while at the time problematising the monolithic framing (established by the governments) of precarity and poverty of these women.

The hate against IDP women was present in Sumgayit, as well. Consider Elnaz’s account:

‘People, in bigger cities hate IDPs and refugees. Once, I was on the bus, and someone’s child was crying. While I was boarding the bus, a lady pointed at me and told her kid that if she did not stop, she would give the child to me, an IDP woman. I felt so embarrassed and raised my voice. I said that IDPs are not cannibals... They even say that we did not fight for our land and we ran from our lands. Of course, they had no idea what we did there before we ran... I have tried to explain the situation But they are not willing to listen.’ Elnaz, 50, married, Azerbaijani working-class IDP, Sumgayit

Elnaz is a fifty-years-old married working class displaced Azerbaijani woman from Qubadli⁹ and lives in Sumgayit. Like Zubeyda she had a small garden where she was growing onion, cucumber, and other vegetables. Elnaz told me that she is a woman who grew up in nature and was having this small agricultural plot not to miss Qubadli. Her house was newly renovated, but she did not have a registration license and thus, she lived in an illegal house. Elnaz was very kind and invited me for lunch, and I accepted her invitation. I start Elnaz’s account with her hospitality to underline how welcoming she was towards a male researcher whom she did not know. When Elnaz mentioned the hostile attitudes of local Sumgayit people against IDP women, it touched me profoundly. How could such a hospitable welcoming woman be treated as a threat and a monster. Even though Elnaz was employed, she was excluded because of her perceived ethnic and rural IDP identity. In my participant observation, when I was returning back from the interviews to the central bus station for returning to Baku, in the city bus of Sumgayit, people were looking at each other very coldly and I started to panic a little bit. When I was getting off, the driver started to shout at me by saying ‘hey, IDP (qaçqın)? Get off by using the front door!’. In Baku, we used to get on by using the front door and get off at the middle or back door. The behaviour of people of this city made me think about the lives of IDP women participants.

⁹ Qubadli has been de facto controlled by the forces of the Republic of Artsakh .

Taken together these narratives suggests that there is a strong exclusion of IDP women, and this exclusion does have variable connections with economic destitution and privilege. Elnaz's isolation is not predicated on her economic status but mainly on her ethnocultural heritage and IDP woman identity. Here Najafizadeh (2013) and Kvinna till Kvinna (2019) also missed the opportunity to demonstrate how the cultural discrimination is also embedded in the cultural heritage (Karabakh) of IDP women like Elnaz. Elnaz claimed this identity is seen as something inferior and not compatible with the identities of the urban local women of Sumgayit.

In regard to cultural integration of Armenian refugee women, I want to return to the accounts of Tamara and Anoush. As indicated above both women live in Dartloch. One of the problematic issues for Tamara (Armenian refugee from Baku) was to 'integrate with people', especially in the less developed area of Gyumri. Tamara recounts that when most of the Armenian women were forced to leave Azerbaijan in 1989 because of the NK conflict and came to Armenia. Living in the capital Yerevan was too expensive for many refugee women since they did not have enough financial capacity for living in Yerevan.

'Our Azerbaijanis[in Baku] took care of us, until the last day... We came to Gyumri... It was the last flight in December 1989. We did not want to leave, we had a beautiful apartment, wonderful work, and friends... Honestly, I miss them. No one discriminated according to what nationality you belong to. I miss my city. I'm not a nationalist, and I'm telling the truth...Living in Gyumri, Armenia was more challenging... I did not manage to integrate with people there... I was coming from Baku, the most urbanized city in the region and then, these things happened, and I was in Gyumri... People made me feel like I am not one of them because I was single, childless and still beautiful... Some women even called me the 'slut of Gyumri' but I have never done anything... It was all about the cultural differences between them and me.' Tamara, 68

Tamara's talk about Baku and 'our Azerbaijanis' once again shows how ethnic identifications are performed differently. Tamara did not speak about Armenian Azerbaijanis or Karabakh Azerbaijanis, only Bakuvian Azerbaijanis or 'her' Azerbaijanis. This can be a sign of her integration into the urbanized Azerbaijani, Bakuvian culture. Tamara was not ethnically Azerbaijani or Muslim, but she felt fully integrated into urbanized Bakuvian culture. This suggests how ethnicity is inflected by urban- rural distinctions in her narrative. In Gyumri, Tamara could not integrate into the culture of 'Armenians of Gyumri' that was not as urbanized as Yerevan Armenians or Bakuvian

Azerbaijanis. One of the possible interpretations is that Tamara was not accepted in the Christian conservative town because of dominant gender norms whereby a woman of Tamara's age should have been married and have kids. This narrative of Tamara shares the similarity with Elnaz's narrative: both women were discriminated against because of their different ethnocultural heritage and values, differently cast as high or low culture. The interesting contradiction is that Elnaz was not able to integrate into the urbanized culture because she refused to give up on her Karabakh identity cast as barbaric or low culture and Tamara refused to give up her urban identification, and thus, did not integrate into culture of Gyumri. The irony is that Elnaz was refused in Azerbaijani urban culture for being 'too rural' and Tamara was refused in Armenian culture for being 'too urban'. This suggests that there is no monolithic framing of Azerbaijani or Armenian ethnicities, and distinctions are variable and enacted situationally in relation to other categories such as rural-urban distinction and gender.

Anoush, another Armenian refugee had moved to Yerevan from Baku, and faced discrimination as a refugee. Even though she left Azerbaijan thirty years ago, she was still able to speak Azerbaijani. She was a 42-year-old housewife when she was forced to leave Azerbaijan in 1989. She lost her husband in the war, and she took care of her two sons.

'When I had already moved to Yerevan the dark times started... I worked at restaurants, and I had an accent in Armenian. When people heard this accent, they called me 'filthy refugee from Azerbaijan.'... Even I received a passport called a 'refugee passport'-neither Armenian nor Azerbaijani, just a refugee... One day, on the bus I heard someone was talking about refugees from Azerbaijan, and that man labelled us 'incompetent and coward Azerbaijanis'. Anoush, 72, widow, working-class Armenian refugee, village

Anoush's story suggests that Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan were not welcomed even in Yerevan. Just as IDP was a label used to denigrate Azerbaijani displaced women, the term 'refugee' was used as a slur in the Armenian society against Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan. Anoush's story also suggests that in Armenia the hate towards refugee women was both cultural and economic. She had faced discrimination while looking for a job because of her Azerbaijani accent. This shows how accent was enacted as a marker of distinction between Yerevan Armenians and Armenian refugees. Anoush mentioned that locals thought of refugees from Azerbaijan as troublemakers who cause traffic jams, transportation and housing problems, a competitive labour market and more.

Armenian and Azerbaijani IDP and refugee women's experiences of 'cultural' and economic discrimination demonstrate the social consequences of the NK conflict. I have shown the multiplicity and interchangeability of framings that are never uncontested. There is always a problematic distinction of either being 'Azerbaijani or Armenian', 'too urban or rural', 'too lazy to work or stealing local job'. Therefore, these women's experiences are interconnected with the conditions and challenges which they have faced.

3.2.2 The role of ethnic privilege and social support

To mitigate poverty of IDP and refugee women, Azerbaijani and Armenian governments provide special social support for these women and their families (Shahnazarian, 2014). According to research by Kvinna till Kvinna (2019), in Azerbaijan, IDP and refugee status are both formally recognised by the state, and there are legal provisions for benefits such as access to temporary housing, subsidised utilities, monthly allowances, tax privileges and free higher education. The Armenian government also attempted to provide such support for Armenian refugees but financially, Armenia was not able to provide such support for all the refugees. For instance, in 1990, the GDP of Armenia was estimated around 2.26 billion USD (World Bank Group, 2019), meanwhile this amount was 8.86 billion USD for Azerbaijan (ibid). Even in 2019, the Azerbaijani GDP was 47.171 billion USD and the Armenia GDP was only 13.444 billion USD (ibid). My research indicates, however, that Azerbaijani IDP women were able to access social support (provided by the government) much easier Azerbaijani refugees (from Armenia) and Armenian women. Research participants maintained that refugee women from Armenia and Azerbaijan faced more challenges and discrimination when applying for social support. That is, while IDP women are generally associated with being poor, sick and living in poverty (Najafizadeh, 2013), non-IDP research participants argued that IDP women had better living standards than refugee women. Zubeyda, for example, a self-employed single mother was able to get support from the Azerbaijani government:

'I have planned everything from the beginning. I've tried to educate my children... look at their graduation pictures from the university! ... I have four children; two are graduate students from the university, but the others are not... I have done all of this with the support of government subsidies, bank loans and my pension. If I had a chance, I would love to be young and move to Baku... I could buy many apartments and educate all of my children... I am still thankful and happy... I

managed to re-establish many things.' Zubeyda, 65, widowed Azerbaijani IDP, middle-class, Sumgayit

In contrast to Zubeyda's imagination of Baku, Armenian refugee Shalala, who had fled from Spitak¹⁰, was forced to move to Baku in the 1980s

'Me, my husband and son, we all are working for more than twenty-five years to survive... We do not receive any benefits from the government, but those IDPs receive free education, no communal fees and they even occupy the houses of other people ... They told us, 'you are from Spitak', and even though we are legally entitled to get support, we still do not receive it from the Azerbaijani government... I am a middle-aged woman, and nobody wants to give me a full-time job due to my age. So, I cook some sweets and sell them in the bazaar...' Shalala, 56, married, working-class Azerbaijani refugee, Baku.

The possible interpretation of these narratives is the existing inequality in the welfare distribution so that Azerbaijani IDP women receive some benefits from the Azerbaijani government, and refugees do not. This could show the double standards and intersectional discrimination against refugee women who first, do not come from Azerbaijani territories (Spitak is an Armenian city) and second cannot find regular work because of gender and age-based discrimination. Consequently, Shalala is forced to work in the grey economy, that is without work contract and social security, pension and health benefits). There were more than ten people (including her son and his wife, their three grandchildren and her sisters and mother) in Shala's family, relying on her labour selling animals and vegetables. However, Shalala does not face discrimination because of being women or refugee or middle-aged; she faces all of these discriminations because she is a middle-aged refugee woman who comes from the working-class Armenian society. Shahnazarian (2013), Kvinna till Kvinna (2019) and Selimovic (2012) did not assertively analyse the interaction of different axes of inequalities in the cases of refugee women. What my analysis contributes to is that the lack of access to social support worsened the economic situation of Shalala and deepened her relative poverty in comparison with many IDP Azerbaijani women. Meanwhile, Shalala's age, housewife and marital status also complicated this picture by adding the interaction of different inequalities.

¹⁰ Spitak is a town in the northern Armenia.

As Shalala mentioned, most of the IDP families receive special benefits without challenges from the Azerbaijani government. After losing her husband, Zubeyda had also faced economic difficulties, but she reshaped the stereotypical image of widow IDP women in the Azerbaijani society with the support of the subsidies from government. Zubeyda's widow status allowed her to take all the decisions without consulting her husband, but Shalala's case was not the same. Shalala was a married woman and it played a role in her precarious living condition, as well. One of the interpretations can be that her family status did not allow her to become more flexible and decision-maker like Zubeyda because her husband was the decision-maker in the family. Being denied state support, Shalala did not have any of these financial privileges and this showed how ethnicity in a broader sense played a significant role in the cases of Shalala and Zubeyda. As a displaced woman, Zubeyda received financial support and continues to receive. It reproduces and strengthens the inequalities between middle/upper class IDP women and others (working-class IDP, refugee). These stories suggest that IDP and refugee Azerbaijani women experienced the financial support of the government differently due to the established national differentiation. This ethnic privilege distributed social support unequally and this inequality deepened the poverty among refugee women. However, in the upcoming sections, I aim to demonstrate that some working-class IDP women also could not manage to survive with the social support provided by the Azerbaijani government because those women suffered ill-health problems. Therefore, it is impossible to create a homogenous picture of IDP women in this issue.

Including Armenian refugee women into the investigation of displacement creates a richer account than including only Azerbaijani IDP women. My research participants from Armenia claimed that most of the Armenian women also did not receive such subsidies from the Armenian government, possibly because the Armenian government had fewer tax-based resources available than the Azerbaijani government to provide these living standards for Armenian refugee women. Recall that Tamara moved to Gyumri from Baku and during those years, she did not receive any financial support from the government.

I do not receive any pensions neither from the Armenian nor the Georgian government... I worked and paid my taxes for twenty-five years in Baku... Even when I moved to Gyumri, the government did not provide us with social support because it was a financially very complicated situation. I sell everything in this

small shop (in the original 'butka'), and that is how I make money, nowadays.'
Tamara, 68

A possible interpretation of Tamara's account is the unequal distribution of the financial support. Tamara does not receive any pensions or benefits from the Armenian – or the Azerbaijani government since she did not pay her taxes in Armenia, and she could not find a job after forcibly relocating to Armenia but is also no longer an Azerbaijani resident to be able to claim her pension. Unlike Shalala and Zubeyda, Tamara contributed to the Azerbaijani economy and paid her taxes regularly for twenty-five years. In the case of Shalala, she was a housewife in Spitak before the displacement and she contributed to the grey economy while she was living in Armenia, as well. That was one of the main distinguishing factors between Shalala and Tamara. For Zubeyda, she was a housewife and after displacement, she lost her husband and financial stability and with her IDP status, she managed to get the different types of social support from the Azerbaijani government. The issue that emerged among participants was the IDP women like Zubeyda who have financial stability and still receive the social support from the Azerbaijani government because of having an ethnic privilege. Meanwhile, refugee women from Armenia and Azerbaijan like Shalala and Tamara face challenges for receiving such support.

Taken together, the narratives suggest that the access to the social support of IDP and refugee women cannot be generalized but is shaped by nationality that in the context of welfare support can constitute ethnic privilege. The idea of being IDP portrayed, in the existing literature, as more vulnerable and the dominant framing of IDP women in the society and literature appears as a singular feat: it makes social support accessible to them on the basis of losses in the NK conflict but also Azerbaijani ethnicity and nationality. My research with the participants suggests that Armenian and Azerbaijani refugee women face discrimination and more challenges because of their ethnicity (Armenian Azerbaijani or Azerbaijani Armenian). Due to the NK conflict and displacement, some women cannot receive any financial support. Armenian refugee women like Tamara have worked many years and regularly paid their taxes and thus, they qualify for these financial subsidies as much as Shalala and Zubeyda. This creates the unequal distribution of welfare among IDP and refugee women and consequently, this inequality worsens the living conditions of underprivileged refugee women.

3.2.3 Ill-health of IDP and refugee women

Often ill-health of IDP and refugee women was directly and indirectly affected by precarious living conditions, as many continued to live in the houses with no or little heating, and other infrastructures such as water supply, electricity. They did not have access to the healthcare system, as well. Such topics have not been profoundly examined in the existing research materials and still remain as under-researched topic in relation to the NK conflict. An Azerbaijani IDP woman Ulnaz from Sumgayit told me:

'In 1993, we left our comfortable and fancy living standards in Qubadli and moved to a dormitory room in Sumgayit. I needed to go to the ground floor from the third floor to do my laundry. We did not even have hot water... The dormitory standards were horrible, and because of these, my health was getting worse... After coming to Sumgayit, I suffered from illness, and in the end, I stayed at the hospital for more than a year.' Ulnaz, 62, married, Azerbaijani working-class IDP woman, Sumgayit

Ulnaz seemed to be very unhappy and tired during our interview. She and her family were living in a small cramped house where eleven people shared three rooms. Even though she attempted to hide it, it was apparent that she had some pain during the interview. Ulnaz did not want to talk about her illness, possibly for feeling shame of sharing such information with a male researcher. Some participants refused to talk about intimate issues because they considered me as a stranger on different levels (see, [chapter 2](#)).

In the past, Ulnaz considered herself the only one responsible for cleaning, cooking, carrying hot water, taking care of her husband and three sons in a dormitory room. She told me that as a woman and mother of her family, she needed to carry water in 5l bottles three to four times every day. There was no access to hot water and electricity in the dormitory. In 1990s, IDP women like Ulnaz took care of their children, as the family could not afford to pay for the childcare. All of these responsibilities can be considered as part of the gendering family responsibilities of many IDP women like Ulnaz. Najafzadeh (2013) envisaged IDP women's one of the most serious difficulties as the continuing diseases and health problems without analysing women's gender roles. Thus, the gendered practices where women are responsible for the traditional Azerbaijani family was one of the factors which contributed to worsening Ulnaz's health condition. It is important to mention that the public healthcare system is not well accessible in Azerbaijan, and it is often necessary to bribe staff in hospitals to ensure better treatment (Kvinna till Kvinna, 2019). This means

the lack of a well-established public healthcare system was another factor which influenced the health conditions of many IDP women like Ulnaz. Ulnaz told me she did not have enough financial support for purchasing the prescription of medicine because she did not have a public healthcare scheme. Ulnaz sold her golden jewellery that paid for treatment but only for a year, when had to end it because of financial problems.

Unsurprisingly there is a strong link between poverty and illness of IDP women (Najafizadeh, 2013) and refugee women while there is no uniform situation of IDP and refugee women. Many displaced women do not have access to public healthcare and medicine, taking care of all the housework in cold, humid flats or dormitory rooms contributes to worsening the ill-health conditions of many IDP women. This can be interpreted as working-class IDP housewives suffer more from the economic and medical consequences of the NK conflict in Azerbaijan. Now, I turn to participant Alla (Armenian refugee) living in Tbilisi.

'All of these were just because of this massive transformation in my life... in March (2017) after seeing the coming blood from my mouth, and I figured out there is something wrong... Then we went to the doctor, and he diagnosed me with breast cancer'. Alla, 58, divorced, working-class Georgian-Armenian refugee woman, Tbilisi.

Alla was a 58-year-old working-class Armenian woman from Baku and moved to Tbilisi in 1988. She lived in an old Soviet style apartment block with her adult daughter. Their house was very cool when I visited them in August, but during winter it was cold and wet. Alla was tired and lay on the bed and had diagnosed with breast cancer several years ago. Still she had agreed to an interview. Alla had become a warrior of sorts, through practise, wish or through forces beyond consciousness, it is difficult to say. During the interview Alla surprised me with a strange smile after she talked about her challenge and hard times. This was a sign of empowerment and agency which showed that she was going through all of these changes (unwillingly) but it is the part of the life and resilience. She mentioned all the trauma which she was living through made her physically and psychologically sick. Even for a short time, she and her family slept in the streets, especially during frosty winter days in the 1990s. The days Alla lived in extreme poverty and precarity affected her health condition in the long-term. This means when Alla needed treatment, and she could not afford it because Alla mentioned as in Azerbaijan, there was no well-established public

healthcare system in Georgia. Since she did not have access to healthcare. Alla's socioeconomic condition has fallen from the middle-class to working-class, and thus she faced poverty and ill-health problems. While Alla had not wanted to talk about her illnesses, I received a phone call from her sister in December 2019: Alla had died from breast cancer. The sister told me that Alla had been diagnosed with diabetes, tuberculosis, thyroid deficiencies, as well as breast cancer, a cumulative impact that her sister connected with her poor living conditions that accelerated the spread of cancer.

These two stories can be interpreted in the context of poverty and precarious living standards of Ulnaz and Alla. Cumulative illnesses often accompany displacement, substandard housing and demanding gendered and gendering family responsibilities. These accounts suggest the poverty and precarious living conditions had a crucial impact on the health condition of IDP and refugee women in the context of NK conflict. This shows that how multidimensionality of these problems reproduces and strengthens the challenges of many IDP and refugee women. In this instance, intersectionality allows us to unravel and analyse this issue by bringing gender, age, ethnicity (and citizenship), socioeconomic conditions. As I mentioned, there is not enough literature concerning the ill-health situation of IDP Azerbaijani and Armenian refugee women, thus my research contributed to showing the mutual constitution between the poverty and ill-health of displaced and refugee women.

3.2.4 Militarization and motherhood

According to some of participants, militarization is one of the long-term consequences of the NK conflict which socioeconomically influenced their lives. Militarism is associated with a destructive foreign policy, supported by an unjustified and intimidating military accumulation, giving the right to use a preference for the practise of force in settling conflicts between states. The same stress appears in Klare's definition, as well:

we can define 'militarism' as the tendency of a nation's military apparatus (which includes the armed forces and associated paramilitary, intelligence and bureaucratic agencies) to assume ever-increasing control over the lives and behaviour of its citizens; and for military goals (preparation for war, acquisition of weaponry, development of military industries) and military values (centralization of authority, hierarchization, discipline and conformity, combativeness and xenophobia)

increasingly to dominate national culture, education, the media, religion, politics and the economy, at the expense of civilian institutions (Klare, 1978).

In 2019, the military costs shared 4% of the GDP in Azerbaijan and 4.9% of GDP in Armenia (SIPRI, 2020). This suggests these investments could help to provide a better socioeconomic condition for many IDP and refugees in Armenia and Azerbaijan instead of increasing the military budget. Therefore, militarization had a different impact on the lives of widows, mothers and single women participants. Zubeyda (Azerbaijani IDP) told me that *'militarization caused problems such as the death and displacement and I did not want my son to serve in the military service but if the Armenian side is getting stronger Azerbaijan can also be a well-militarized country'*. Meanwhile, Anoush (Armenian refugee) argued *'it is not guaranteed I would not face the death of my son if the military system regains the power'*. These two accounts suggest that even though Zubeyda is against her son serving in the military, she still supports militarization due to militarization of Armenian side. As I mentioned previously, Zubeyda lost her husband before the NK war (she is not a war widow) and thus, Zubeyda did not want her son to serve in the compulsory military service. Many mothers are afraid of losing their children in the military service and therefore, one of the common practices in Azerbaijan is to bribe the military commissary (RadioFreeEurope, 2012). In this context, motherhood became a very sensitive issue for Zubeyda and Anoush because they do not want to lose their children due to the war. This can be seen as Kvinna till Kvinna (2019, p.13) argued *'no mother should lose her son in war, but at the same time thought that militarization will make the country powerful'*. Unlike Zubeyda, Anoush is against militarization because she lost her husband in the war (she is a war-widow) and thus, she does not want to face death because of war. What these women have in common is the idea of motherhood which is conceptualized on two different levels. For Anoush, it is universal and regardless of any situation, she is against militarization. For Zubeyda, it is on the individual level and she wants to protect her son but support militarization in Azerbaijan. The reasons for such support can be analysed as the propaganda of the Armenian and Azerbaijani governments which have also been analysed in the research of Kvinna till Kvinna (2019) organization and they suggest this propaganda starts from schools, universities, televisions, radios and the speeches of the officials. Therefore, such discourses directly influence the visions of many IDP and refugee women, too. The main aim is to create an 'enemy image' against Azerbaijanis and Armenians in these discourses. Thus, the differences between these two

widow mothers can be seen as one widow faced the death and precarity of war and another did not. Kvinna till Kvinna (2019) did not differentiate the categories of widow, single and married women which my research contributed to showing these women as heterogeneous groups concerning their positions in militarization. This also suggests there is a segregation among widow IDP and refugee women like Zubeyda and IDP and refugee war widows like Anoush concerning militarization and the long-term effects of NK conflict.

But serving in the military had long-term effects as Elnaz, (Azerbaijani IDP) highlighted *‘my son had health problems and thus, they did not call him for the military. If my son had served in the military, now he could find a better job with a higher salary’*. This account also indirectly supported militarization because the mother wanted her son to attend the military service to have a better living standard. This suggests how the welfare system is militarized through the compulsory military service in Armenia and Azerbaijan. As Najafzadeh (2013) argued, women can be incorporated into militarisation through their relationship to men, but only if their roles are as mothers. This suggests that military service is also one of the main influence mechanisms of Azerbaijani and Armenian governments through the NK conflict. Therefore, it complexifies the welfare support by promising some privileges to the citizens who serve in the military. Even though the military system is mandatory in both countries, there are many people who are unable to join the military service such as Elnaz’s son. This implies the governments promote welfare through the militarization and many people accept this because of the socioeconomic privileges. However, I shall provide a well-detailed analysis of this in the upcoming chapter (see, [chapter 4](#)).

Refugee women participant, Tamara (Armenian refugee) who did not have children argued that *‘the process of militarization worsens the lives of IDPs and refugees who live in poverty and many young male soldiers are killed in the borders because of this propaganda’*. This narrative contradicts with what Elnaz and Zubeyda argued because like Anoush, Tamara is also against militarization. Tamara is not a married or mother, but she clearly refused the militarization because of its consequences not only for mothers or widows but also for all IDPs and refugees coming from the working-class. This suggests Tamara considers the economic aspects of militarization, negatively, meanwhile Elnaz approached it unwillingly positively while she argued her son’s situation. One of the possible interpretations can be that Elnaz approaches militarization from the perspectives

of her son's economic well-being. Unlike Elnaz, Tamara considered it more holistically and thus, she refused the process of militarization.

IDP and refugee women come from diverse backgrounds and their intersectional identities as widows, mothers, and class influence their approach towards the process of militarization. There is no united image of IDP and refugee women when it comes to militarization. Some women accept militarization because of the propaganda (the enemy) and individual economic conditions. Meanwhile, some women refuse the process of militarization because of their fear of losing beloved sons and collective economic challenges. It does not change the fact that these women are not always pro-militarization or anti, the more important point is that through the legacies of Armenian and Azerbaijani governments, their perception of militarization change. These changes are either through the welfare policies, or the government propaganda against the 'enemies' or their personal experiences of the war. However, militarization still has the long-term effects on the lives of IDP and refugee women and it increases the poverty among women in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

3.3 Silences about sexual violence

As I argued in the [chapter 2](#), there are some sensitive issues that the participants did not want to talk about, and possible experiences of sexual violence and rape are the examples for this. To discuss sexual matters/violence is likely to be traumatic and shameful, not to be discussed with a 'male researcher'. As a male researcher, I was considered as 'other' to develop this conversation and most of the participants changed the topic in different direction when I indirectly asked about the 'potential rape' cases. There might also be effort to forget or not relive a traumatic experience in the telling. Aydan describes the gendered and ethical dimension of war related rape in Azerbaijan.

'Well, I used to work as an interpreter for a foreign researcher who conducted interviews with IDPs in the regions of Azerbaijan. Over time, I realized that women respondents' biggest fear was being raped by the Armenian soldiers. Meanwhile, male respondents' fear was the 'honour' of their wives, daughters, sisters and mothers. There was even a story that I have witnessed. A man advised his son that if Armenian soldiers come to our house, you should kill your mother, sister and grandmother before the enemy does! If they catch you, you can handle it because you are a man.' Aydan, IDP, Switzerland/Baku

This account seems to confirm the importance of ‘honour’ in the patriarchal Armenian and Azerbaijani societies where women are seen as objects more than subjects in NK war. Women’s rape was often considered a shameful experience for society is one reason that women participants were hesitant for talking about these experiences. The perspectives of hegemonic masculinities silenced these women’s voices about rape and thus, women’s experiences and fears developed over the years. In fact Selimovic (2012) reported that women anticipated this response in their families: their biggest fear of losing their ‘honours’ was not being a part of their family. This also suggests that some of the research participants attempted to protect their family honour by not mentioning these topics in my research as well.

The war-related fears were expressed by Kohar who was the only research participant from Nagorno Karabakh, who had helped me to contact other potential participants. I interviewed Kohar online, and she seemed to be nervous because to be talking, for the first time, with an Azerbaijani queer researcher. It is possible that Kohar considered me as ethnically and sexually different compared to other researchers she has met previously. This can also suggest that as researcher, my ethnicity and queer identity were on the one hand, respected and on the other hand, it was questioned.

‘During the war in the 1990s we lived our lives in fear for more than five months... I was a kid, and my mom was a newly married woman, and whenever her mother-in-law and father-in-law went somewhere, they were locking up the door. She was always asking them not to lock the door due to the fear of rape by Azerbaijanis. They could come and do other horrible things to us. At least, if they did not lock the door, we could run. Once this kind of situation occurred and we were crying in the flat just because of this fear... some women said Azerbaijani men had raped Azerbaijani women in Vanadzor¹¹.’ Kohar, 26, single, middle-class Armenian woman from Nagorno-Karabakh

The narrative of Kohar' suggests that ‘family honour’ and dependence on family members might in many cases aim to protect women from sexual violence. On the one hand, by locking the door, men aimed to protect the women members of the family. On the other hand, this lockdown increased the fear and insecurities of Kohar’s mother because she could not escape from the house. It is not clear from the interview how much these experiences shaped Kohar’s own life as a long-term effect of NK conflict. Since she is the

¹¹ Vanadzor is a municipal community and the third-largest city in Armenia with a population of 90,000.

representative of the new generation of Nagorno-Karabakh, thus she did not know how the stories or rumours of sexual violence shaped her life.

Another facet that complicated the gendered notion of family honour was the implicit suggestion that Azerbaijani soldiers raped Azerbaijani women in Vanadzor and blamed it on Armenian men. Anoush conversely spoke about stories that Armenian men raped Armenian women and blamed Azerbaijani men. The scandal here is that these men are not only using ‘other’ women to punish other (Azerbaijani or Armenian) men but using ‘their own’ women to tarnish other men. The occurring problem is that I did not have the participants to talk about these issues which occurred in 1990s and thus, the rumours about the sexual violence still remain unknown. However, what is significant is that what Kohar’s mother thought or rumoured that it might really happen. This highlights the brutality of using rape as weapon of war. This not only suggests the issue of rape was also constructed to increase the hate between two ethnicities but also the way of using women as ‘inferior’ or ‘sexual objects’. Raping these women was a part of sexual pleasure (without consent) to feel superior over another ethnicity and show that Azerbaijani or Armenian woman is already ‘dirty’ or ‘raped’. So, again it is something connected with the ‘honour of women’. In other words, the rape of women might be a part of the sexual pleasure of perpetrators due to the NK war, but it was constructed as ‘ethnicity-based rape’.

To sum up, the fear of potential rape and silence about it were the main obstacles for my IDP and refugee women participants. Many participants remained silent when I asked about rape because of the shame of talking about sexual violence. Aydan’s and Kohar’s narratives suggested that the fear of rape situations included the fear to lose the honour and family. While highlighting gender, the stories refract the role of ethnicity which suggests how the intersectional perspectives contributed to unravelling this. This suggests ethnicity was refracted by gender in sexual violence because the war shaped gender relations differently.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have investigated the long-term impacts of the NK conflict in the lives of IDP and refugee women by analysing these impacts from an intersectional perspective. Through the ethnographic research, among participants, I uncovered the ethnic privilege of

some Azerbaijani IDP women in comparison with Azerbaijani and Armenian refugee women. The social support (provided by the government) is more accessible for IDP Azerbaijani women because of their Azerbaijani ethnicity. Meanwhile, Azerbaijani refugee women face more challenges and in Armenia, some refugee women are not entitled to receive those benefits. This also destroyed the ‘the most vulnerable’ group image of IDP women (Najafizadeh, 2019) because the stories of refugee participants suggested their lives are more vulnerable compared to IDP women. I uncovered also the mutual relations between the relative poverty and ill-health of IDP and refugee women because in Armenia and Azerbaijan the healthcare system is highly corrupted and there are no public healthcare schemes. Due to lack of finance, most of IDP and refugee women cannot access the healthcare system and consequently, they suffer the diseases for years.

The chapter thereby contributed to enriching the existing literature concerning the complex living conditions of IDP and refugee women from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh. In the cultural discrimination against IDP and refugee women, I showed how the notion of ethnicity is not only constructed through the binary Armenian versus Azerbaijani but also the rural versus urban. Therefore, many IDP and refugee women participants were discriminated in the bigger cities of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Through the interviews, I suggested cultural discrimination strengthens marginalization of IDP and refugee women which creates unemployment and financial instability for them.

On the section about social privileges and the role of ethnicity, I revealed the ethnic privilege of IDP Azerbaijani women who managed to get the support of Azerbaijani government easily in comparison with refugee women from Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, in the following section about ill-health, I demonstrated there are also many under-privileged IDP women who come from the working-class families and they are not able to maintain their socioeconomic conditions only with the support of the Azerbaijani government. By doing so, I examined how the lack of access to the healthcare facilities challenge IDP and refugee women’s everyday lives.

I contributed to examining the role of militarization in lives of IDP and refugee women by exploring differences among married, widow and single women participants (unlike Kvinna till Kvinna 2019). The interesting finding among the participants was that war

widow and single women were against militarization and meanwhile, widow (non-war) and married women indirectly supported militarization because of financial conditions and government propaganda. Following that, my research was sexual violence and its long-term impacts on the lives of IDP and refugee women participants. However, most of the participants refused to talk about it: first because I was considered of I, male researcher, and they considered talking about sexual violence to me as shameful action; secondly, they were afraid of remembering such fears and re-traumatizing themselves.

To put all of these together, the long-term impacts of the NK conflict still highly influence the daily lives of IDP and refugee women. However, the socioeconomic conditions of these women may differ because of their age, ethnicity, marital and class status. Analysing the conflict through the intersectional lenses contributed to finding the hidden elements of the everyday lives of women and the impacts of NK conflict on their socioeconomic conditions. Therefore, analysing the lives of IDP and refugee women as heterogeneous groups (from intersectional perspective) is one of the required steps for understanding the long-term impacts of the NK.

Chapter 4: Queer and LGBT Experiences in the Context of Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

4.1 Introduction

There are no well-established academic research materials regarding the LGBT/queer community in the region and especially, less in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. By focusing on LGBT/queer-identified people from Armenia and Azerbaijan, this chapter begins to examine the impact on the conflict more systematically. I aim to answer does the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict influence the lives of the LGBT/queer community in Armenia and Azerbaijan? How might the militarization of society shape gender, class and ethnicity differently?

Research of ILGA Europe, Carroll and Quinn (2009) and van der Veur (2007) have examined the general situation of the queer community in Armenia and Azerbaijan and they also argued the role of hostile environments against them. However, their research materials have not addressed the conflict in NK, and this did not contribute to understanding the current situation of LGBT/queer community in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Many Armenian, Azerbaijani and foreign social scientists know something about the role of NK conflict in the negative discourse of queer community (see, for example, Shahnazarian 2016; Carroll and Quinn 2009; van der Veur 2007) but hardly anyone has written about them. Shahnazarian (2016) has also argued that hostilities against LGBT individuals in Armenia are in part fuelled by the NK conflict. However, Shahnazarian does not systematically analyse the role of militarization and its interconnections with unemployment and heteronormativity in the lives of LGBT individuals. The research to demonstrate the mutual constitution between the NK conflict and militarization which fosters hate against the queer community.

The chapter examines LGBT/queer practices and interactions through two themes that emerged from the data. The first section focuses on the general situation and cultural discrimination of the community in Armenia and Azerbaijan. I explore the increasing hate towards queer individuals and the existence and resistance of the queer community. The second section focuses on militarization and its interconnections with opportunities on the labour market and pronatalist policies. I investigate what kind of consequences of

militarization of the NK conflict arise and how this exacerbates processes of exclusion and discrimination against the queer/LGBT community in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

4.2 Anti-LGBT/queer environments and hate crimes

I draw on the stories of five participants (Lilit, Hayk, Eldar, Leyla and Vardan) in this and upcoming section. In total, I tried to interview five members of the Armenian queer community members but only Hayk, Vardan and Lilit accepted my invitation. Lilit and Vardan lived in the Armenian capital of Yerevan and Hayk was living in the Netherlands. The interview process was via the internet and I was not able to visit Yerevan due to the political relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. All three respondents from Armenia had longstanding experience in defending the rights of Armenian queer individuals. Hayk, Lilit and Vardan were the middle-class queer representatives of the Armenian society but all of them faced discrimination because of their different gender identities in the conservative Armenian society.

Hayk who had recently immigrated to the Netherlands told me about the brutal against him in Armenia. Hayk highlighted *‘the attackers wanted to catch and kill me. Two of my friends were seriously injured and seven friends suffered other injuries.’* The hostile environment against Hayk and his friends suggest that the queer community is rejected in Armenian society and the attack fostered Hayk’s decision to emigrate to a safer country like the Netherlands. Even though homosexuality is legalized in Armenia since 2003 (Carroll and Quinn, 2009), Armenian society has a low tolerance towards LGBT/queer individuals in the country. Thus, some of the queer activists like Hayk cannot continue their activism and gender awareness in Armenia because their lives are in danger. This short story of Hayk gives some details about the homophobic approach of the Armenian society towards Hayk and many other LGBT/queer individuals.

Hayk is not the only LGBT/queer community representative who faced such violence. Lilit, is a transgender Armenian queer rights activist who lives in Yerevan in Armenia. She gained prominence through a presentation of the situation of Armenian transgender women in the Armenian parliament. After her presentation the speaker of the parliament had forced her to leave the building. Lilit recounted that *‘people started to write on social media ‘Find and kill Lilit’... I was afraid of leaving my house for more than two months... I*

did not even go to the supermarket'. Lilit's narrative suggests that visibilization of transgender women on the political level, ends up with the homophobic attacks in the Armenian society. This attack is not only a violent act but also a homophobic resistance for not accepting transgender women in the political arena in Armenia. In order to save herself, Lilit should have isolated herself from the Armenian society for a short period of time in order to save her life from the brutal attacks. Together, Lilit's and Hayk's stories begin to show the hostile and homophobic environment for the people who openly identify as LGB/queer or transgender. These experiences also suggest that there is a community of people in Armenia who share the same fears and suffer the hostile and homophobic environment. Such hostility allows LGBT/queer individuals to develop a collective identity which is LGBT/queer community.

Concerning respondents from Azerbaijan, I was only able to interview Eldar and Leyla. Eldar and Leyla were well-known activists in the Azerbaijani LGBT/queer community and open to be interviewed by me in Baku, Azerbaijan. Eldar is a BA student with a working-class background and Leyla is a middle-class lesbian from the Lezghin community. Lezghins are a Northeast Caucasian ethnic group native predominantly to southern Dagestan, Russia and north-eastern Azerbaijan and 193,300 Lezghins live in Azerbaijan and according to 2009 statistics largest minority in Azerbaijan (Markedonov, 2010).

Eldar held that the situation of queer-identified people in Azerbaijan was not so different from Armenia. *I have not faced violence, but many queer individuals were brutally beaten because of their feminine behaviour*'. For instance, in September 2017, there were about hundred queers, mainly transgenders and transsexuals were arrested and tortured in a two-week series of raids in Baku and after an international protest, the Azerbaijani authorities released all the detainees in early October (Safarova, 2017). Even though homosexuality is legal since 2000, the society and government are still homophobic (van der Veur 2007). This also suggests that the situation in Azerbaijan is not that different from Armenia and I aim to show this in detail while analysing the existing legislations and the discourses of my respondents.

Except for the homophobic society, Eldar also pointed '*unemployment of LGBT/queer community is one of the main obstacles for acceptance*'. Many LGBT/queer individuals

cannot find job opportunities in Azerbaijan because many employers and companies refuse to offer such opportunities. Therefore, most of the time, coming out as LGBT/queer carries a high risk of losing the job and becoming unemployed. This begins to suggest that discrimination against queer individuals impacts on their socioeconomic conditions which will be examined in the upcoming section.

The queer individuals, in Azerbaijan, also attempts to develop a collective identity such as the queer community and this process is seemed to be challenging as in Armenia. Many challenges of Azerbaijani LGBT/queer community are similar to Armenian LGBT/queer community in terms of homophobic society, crimes, attacks, coming out, unemployment and others. These similar challenges are because of the same historical development and colonial history (Tlostanova, 2012) of Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, the Azerbaijani LGBT/queer community faces more challenges in terms of the autocratic regime in Azerbaijan. As I previously mentioned, Azerbaijan becomes a more autocratic post-Soviet state unlike Armenia. This also suggests that LGBT/queer liberation goes through more challenging times in Azerbaijan. The two-week series of raids in 2017 was a good example of how the autocratic Azerbaijan organized such raid in order to arrest many LGBT/queers.

I aimed to show these challenges and homophobic behaviour of these societies to understand the regional context before I move to the relations between the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the LGBT/queer community of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Therefore, it was important to have a broader picture of the region and the intolerance against LGBT/queer community. Now, I turn to analytically examine the NK conflict and the role of militarization on the lives of this community.

4.3 Societal militarization and its effects on LGBT/queer lives

As I have shown in [chapter 1](#), the sparse available literature suggests that in S. Caucasus being a queer is considered unethical, and the previous section begins to suggest how being considered homosexual, genderqueer or transgender can pose grave physical dangers such as physical and psychological violence, torture, and even death (also Shahnazarian, 2016). Research participants coded as gay or queer men (in binary understanding) in particular highlighted the role of militarization of the Armenian and Azerbaijani societies in the wake of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh which create a highly homophobic and hostile

environment for the acceptance and development of queer community in the region. In 2016, Armenia was ranked third and Azerbaijan eleventh, in the global militarization index, that refers to the levels of military spending on the armed forces in relation to the GDP and in comparison, to other sectors of society (Mutschler, 2017). Concerning masculinities, this issue is more related to them because the military service is mandatory for men in both countries. In other words, the military system is one of the institutions which is actively engaged in the gendering process of these societies which demands men's mandatory participation in the military service. Therefore, closer integration of military and nationalism (promotion of the victory over the Nagorno-Karabakh) is seen as the most prominent elements of these societies (Abrahamyan, 2017). As I mentioned in the previous chapter, through different channels, these Armenian and Azerbaijani governments promote the national discourses by using the conflict as a tool. Due to the ongoing NK conflict, Azerbaijani and Armenian identities are often promoted through the discourses of nationalism and militarization of the societies which strengthens nationalism. Both governments promoted the increasing role of the military in society such through different tools. For instance, in Armenia the government's 'Nation-Army Concept' is a programme by the Ministry of Defence to increase the military's role in society by organizing special trainings and providing special subjects about military in schools (Kucera, 2017). In Azerbaijan, Akhundov (2017) highlights the militaristic propaganda, including in elementary schools where students are dressed in military uniforms and have to march repeating slogans such as '*Our homeland is indivisible; our martyrs are immortal*'. The research participants suggested that the mutual enforcement of militarization and nationalism influence the LGBT/queer community in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

'When it comes to military and government propaganda, queers attempt to stay away from these things... Many queer individuals refuse to join the army because they are not accepted to [openly] serve in the military and these values go against their values. They do not want to fight against Azerbaijanis.' Hayk, 27, working-class, Armenian queer, Netherlands

Hayk suggested that Armenian LGBT/queer people do not join the military because they are not accepted, and they do want to participate in the war against Azerbaijan which implies some queers reject nationalism (of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict). The International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights' (IHF) 2007 report clarifies that since 2001, based

on Order No. 378 by the Armenian Minister of Defence, homosexuality has been considered an illness and, thus, homosexuals are considered unfit for military service. However, Eldar's narrative suggests a different opinion on this:

'the queer community is not a part of the military in Azerbaijan. Not because they do not support the war, but mainly because the system does not want to include them in this process. If we are not included due to our gender identities, this means we are not considered an important actor of the NK conflict' Eldar, 22, working-class, Azerbaijani queer, Baku

Eldar's argument suggests that the LGBT/queer community does not serve in the military because of the suppression of non-traditional sexual identities. There is also evidence that gay men conceal their sexuality and join the military. Carroll and Quinn (2009) have shown that the male¹² homosexuals serve in the Armenian military service while hiding their sexuality. The term homosexual is widely used in the official state documents both in Armenia and Azerbaijan and therefore, the usage of queer or LGBTQI+ is not common. In some cases, if homosexuality is revealed LGBT/queer soldiers were sent to psychiatric hospitals and diagnosed with schizophrenia (ibid). The orders with the same content have been accepted in Azerbaijan, as well (Dadashzadeh and Paitjan, 2020). There are stories about rape of suspected homosexuals in the military both in Armenia and Azerbaijan (ibid). This suggests that there is no single perspective of queer identified individuals supporting militarization. Therefore, Eldar implies that if there was a more tolerant approach towards queer people in the military, more LGBT/ queer individuals join the military. They might assume that through participating in the military, queer men will become full citizens. At the same time, it casts doubts on Hayk's portrayal of the LGBT/queer community as anti-militarist. It is important to highlight that Eldar's point has a strong connection with the notion of 'sexuality and citizenship' which brings me to the economic consequences of NK conflict on the lives of queer/LGBT individuals

Economic effects of the exclusion from military service

'My best friend is an Armenian queer, and he did not join the army, and then, he got the paper says he is 'homosexual and exempted from the conscription'... It has been three years since he graduated and cannot find a job in his field. He is very talented, but the law does not allow him to work in the public sector... He is discriminated

¹² Women are not obliged to serve in the military service (Carroll and Quinn, 2009).

because he is queer and not supporting the military.’ Leyla, 32, middle-class, queer, Lezghin, Baku

The pathologization of homosexual and queer men in the military demonstrates that queer individuals are not treated as equal citizens in Armenia and Azerbaijan – where serving your country is considered a key element of citizenship for able bodied men. As Richardson (2000) argues, sexuality and citizenship should be part of full rights of all the citizens in the context of legal, economic and social participation. The author conceptualizes the sexuality and citizenship by defining it as a status involving a number of distinctive rights claims, some are recognized as legal by the state institution and are legitimate. In this analysis, one of the sub-streams can be identified ‘as seeking rights within social institutions: public validation of various forms of sexual relations’ (ibid). In this context, the interviews show that the exclusion from military has broader ramifications. Employment in the public sector, for example, legally *requires* certification of the successful completion of the *mandatory* military service in Armenia and Azerbaijan (see, for example, Law of 1993 on Armed Forces of Azerbaijan; Law of the Republic of Armenia on Alternative Service). To some extent the private sector also requires for such document. Both Eldar and Lilit told me that in the private sector ‘*some companies demand the successful completion of mandatory military service and some of them do not*’. To date, there was no research on the importance of completion of military service for men’s employment in the private sector. These findings suggest that due to the mandatory military service, queer individuals might be unemployed to a higher degree than heterosexual men in these countries. These narratives also imply that queer individuals are excluded from military service, and they are not seen as part of the ‘great nation’ of Armenia or Azerbaijan. This shows how militarization is diffused to the employment of queer individuals in Armenia and Azerbaijan, and thus, many queers cannot apply for the desired job positions or they end up being unemployed for a long time.

The interviews further uncovered that class background mattered in this issue. Both in Armenia and Azerbaijan, participants argued that LGBT/queers from upper-class are not affected from such processes. Vardan argued that ‘*queers from the working or middle class are discriminated based on their sexualities and socioeconomic status, meanwhile queers from the upper class do not have to face such problems*’. According to him and Eldar, those LGBT/queers avoided military service by bribing military commissions (see, also

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2014; Transparency International 2015; Ghukasyan 2020) and had less interest in working in the public sector. This implies that LGBT/queer individuals who come from upper-class do not have to deal with challenges such as joining the military or working in the public sector because of their good socioeconomic conditions.

For the majority though, the exclusion from, military service impacted employment opportunity and prosperity particularly in the context of countries with relatively high unemployment like Armenia. Hayk suggested that this negatively impacted on the visibility of queers: *'When you have a country which is founded based on the traditional values, and you do not have a strong economy, it is obvious queer people will not be visible in society.'* Hayk implies that queer representation requires relative economic independence – which was jeopardised in the wake of the NK conflict. Militarization does not refer to only serving in the army but also having a prosperous life in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Since most of the queers are excluded from the system or there is no alternative for the system, queer community faces structural discrimination. Therefore, Hayk implies that queer representation requires a strong economy and labour market where LGBT/queer people can live independently to sustain the quality of lives. For both countries, economic representation of the queer community remains a complicated topic since economic independence also means social and political independence for the queer individuals.

In relation to economic and political representation, coming out also becomes a challenge for queer/LGBT community in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Lilit mentioned that *'coming out becomes a very dangerous practice in Armenia because of the intolerance towards LGBT community'*. The discourses of other participants also suggested that the threat of unemployment and job loss as well as cultural discrimination and hate crimes reduced the willingness of queer people to come out in their environments. As long as, they do not come out in their environments they will remain invisible. However, coming out also carries a high risk for many LGBT/queer individuals because of the homophobic societies where they live. Example of Hayk showed, he left their country in order to escape from the homophobic Armenian society. Hayk had applied for was granted asylum in the

Netherlands and many other LGBT/queers also study in other western countries, which indicates a further loss of critical queer perspectives and visibility in these countries.

To sum up, my analysis shows that the militarization of Armenia and Azerbaijan due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict negatively influences LGBT/queers' economic conditions such as employment, financial income and social and political representation. While legislation exempts queer men from the mandatory military service, for those unable to bribe the authorities, this exemption comes at the cost of pathologization and sectioning in mental institutions as well as long-term effects on employment opportunities in the public sector (and some cases, private sector). The militarization of society thereby contributes to a strengthening of heteronormativity. As I will show in the following section, it is associated with pronatalist heteronormative policies.

Heteronormativity and pronatalism in the context of militarization

'We live in a post-Soviet and traditional Armenia where heteronormativity rules us... 'Don't ask, don't tell', 'Get married to a woman and have kids', this is what Armenian society expects from us. If we don't have babies in Armenia, we won't be able to preserve the Armenian identity anymore.' Vardan, 23, middle-class, queer Armenian, Yerevan

Vardan considers the emphasis on heteronormative reproduction in the service of the nation as another societal challenge for the queer community in Armenia. The idea of 'Greater Armenia'¹³ is promoted through militarization, where current Armenia needs to have a strong army which can be achieved with the support of more Armenian male soldiers. This also uncovers the reason behind the high military expenditures of Armenian and Azerbaijani governments which aim to sustain or expand its territories with the support of highly militarized regime and citizens.

It thereby participates in naturalising both a primordial ethnic identity (that I have problematised in the previous chapter) as well as heteronormative gender order. Some scholars argue that the Armenian Genocide helped unifying Armenians and to underscore the importance of the necessity of protecting their Armenian ethnicity (de Waal, 2010) and

¹³ Greater Armenia (or great Armenia) is an Armenian ethno-nationalist concept referring to areas within — the Armenian Highland in 2nd century BCE which are currently and have historically been mostly populated by Armenians and the idea of a re-unification of this land with Armenia (Hovannisian, 2007).

thus, declining fertility rate can cause the disappearance of the Armenian ethnicity. In 2017, the Armenian government proposed a policy plan to increase Armenian's population from currently three to *four million* by 2040 (Arakelyan, 2017). This scheme was supported through a variety of measures such as subsidies of family housing and increased child allowances (Allen and Holding 2019; Avery and Lazdane 2010; Kocharyan 2020). Such pronatalist policies aim also to support the gendered conception of citizenship: heterosexual men serve to the nation in the military, women through producing many children to support this system. Women are encouraged to produce babies for the nation, including more 'soldiers' to realise the ambitions of 'Greater Armenia'. Naturalisation here posits an 'Armenian DNA' (see, for example, Haber, M., et al. 2016; Abrahamyan 2017) that relies on and perpetuates traditional the gender roles, where heterosexual men serve in military and women produce children. This is a good example of mutual constitution between gender and ethnicity from the intersectional perspective. Such arguments are promoted in a context where the fertility rate has decreased from 4.8 in 1960 to low 1.8 in 2018 (The World Bank, 2018), and the threat of the loss of the 'nation' is seen as a fear of loss of the Armenian ethnicity – and Armenian gender order. At the same time, the low fertility rate suggests that many Armenian women refuse these pronatalist policies proposed by the Armenian government.

Both construction of Armenian DNA and pronatalism configures the queer community as non-reproductive partnerships that threaten Armenian heritage as Vardan implied. This is one reason why the governmental and some societal actors are highly repressive towards the queer community. The promotion of 'more kids=more soldiers' (Shahnazarian, 2016) reinforces the militarization of society and increases the hostility towards the queer community. Therefore, together with heteronormativity, militarization directly forces the heteronormative societies to promote ethnic identity and gender roles myths. However, the very specific context of this propaganda is the NK conflict because, from each side, there is a constructed 'enemy' image (see, for example, Shahnazarian 2017; Najafizadeh 2013; Terzyan 2018). This 'enemy' image helps Azerbaijani and Armenian governments to widely promote their gender propaganda and thus, in the process, non-heteronormative people are discriminated and seen as 'perverts' (Vardan).

This repression also has psychological effects. Lilit suggested that the idea of same-sex marriage is *'in our society, called mental illness'* – just as homosexuals were categorised in the military. This influences the perceptions of the queers in society such that same-sex marriage is also opposed on the grounds of pronatalism. As I demonstrated, the marriage is an accepted institution only between a heterosexual man and woman and this suggests how gender and ethnicity become the important elements of the heteronormative Armenian and Azerbaijani societies. In other words, intersectionality allows us to uncover these dimensions through the mutual constitution between gender and ethnicity. The issue of reproduction is not seen as a process; it is the sign of ethnic identity and gender normativity and the NK conflict extremely affects it. Since the LGBT/queer community do not promote any of these signs, they are not welcomed in these societies. The oppression against the non-heteronormative people remains as an obstacle to tackle for them.

Very similar processes of the intersection of gender and ethnicity in pronatalist and pro-militarist policies are also at work in Azerbaijan.

'The most problematic side of Azerbaijani society is heteronormativity. What can we expect from a heteronormative society where the gender norms and roles pre-determined? Queer people are not accepted because they cannot reproduce and strengthen our army...' Eldar, 22, Azerbaijani queer, Baku

In Azerbaijan, the concern of producing more soldiers for protecting the lands of Azerbaijan from Armenia is the mirror version of aspiration for Greater Armenia. Since Azerbaijan has lost the territories in the NK conflict, it is too obsessed with growing its population, including future soldiers (see, for example, Avdeev 2015; Garenne and Hohmann 2014). In Azerbaijan the fertility rate has decreased from 5.9 to currently 1.9 (The World Bank, 2018) while the overall population has grown by 7 million from 3 million in 1950 to over 10 million in 2019/2020 (State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan, 2019). The statistics show that Azerbaijan's population growth is approximately seven million since 1950 (ibid). Therefore, Eldar argues that the idea of 'more kids=more soldiers' increases the hate against the queer community because they do not participate in the processes of militarization and population growth. In this context, the queer community is considered as non-contributory subjects of population growth to Azerbaijani society and thus, their visibilization is prevented with the terror on state and society levels.

We also see the pathologization where homosexual or transgender is considered ‘mental illness’ (see, for example, Nefes LGBT Azerbaijan Alliance 2015; van der Veur 2007). In Azerbaijan, Fazil Mustafa, a member of Azerbaijani Parliament ¹⁴, publicly called homosexuality a disease and considered queer sex against nature and human morality, and called for its illegalisation (Nefes LGBT Azerbaijan Alliance, 2015). This underlines how the hate against the queer community is promoted through public figures in Azerbaijan. With respect to these policies and perspectives of the LGBT/queers, the two countries are thus surprisingly similar.

Even if, Azerbaijani society is more multicultural in comparison with the mono-ethnic Armenian society, it also oppresses other ethnicities in the country. For while the government claims that everyone who is born in the territories of Azerbaijan is Azerbaijani (see, for example, Azerbaijan State News Agency 2016; Azerbaijani Multiculturalism 2016). Practically, the pronatalist and pro-militarist policies target predominantly only Azerbaijani identity which is the construction of 1918 as I argued in [chapter 1](#). Consider the case of Leyla, a lesbian and ethnic Lezghin:

‘I always feel that I am a member of marginalized community in Azerbaijan... My lesbian identity is always problematic... People think if I am a lesbian, it is because I have never had a man who can satisfy me. Some men think I can be their sexual partner if they buy me expensive cars and houses... and some women think that all I need is a husband and baby to understand the sense of motherhood... and others say ‘I do not have to live here’ because I am not Azerbaijani, I am Lezghin.’ Leyla, Baku

For Leyla, her lesbian identity is not accepted in the Azerbaijani heteronormative system that considers women’s primary function as citizens in reproduction (Shahnazarian, 2017). To be a lesbian does not fit the image of women in Azerbaijani heteronormative system. Her ethnic identification is considered problematic since Lezghins, the largest minoritized ethnic group in Azerbaijan attempted in 1994 to create the independent state of ‘Lezgistan’ (Markedonov, 2010). This independence movement was perceived as separatist against the united Azerbaijan and thus, Lezghins were considered separatists like the Armenian community of Nagorno Karabakh (ibid). Leyla had introduced herself as ‘*a member of marginalized communities in Azerbaijan: a lesbian and Lezghin*’. Being a member of two

¹⁴ Fazil Mustafa is the MP from the ruling New Azerbaijan Party which won 72 of 125 seats in 2020-2024 elections; the second largest party (the Civic Solidarity Party) won only three seats (Azernews, 2020).

disregarded communities in the Azerbaijani society discriminates her differently, and she faces oppression on multiple and intersectional levels. As a non-reproductive and non-Azerbaijani woman who refuses to participate in the heteronormative pronatalist population growth project, Leyla is considered both an ethnic and gendered threat to Azerbaijani identity that is intersectionally constituted through heterosexual reproduction. From the perspective of ethnicity Leyla's story implies that Azerbaijani ethnicity/identity is conceived on the state level as the only 'unifying' seemingly multicultural ethnicity into which all other ethnic groups should integrate or assimilate (see, for example, Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization 2017; Markedonov 2010). Therefore, Leyla is forced to give up on her Lezghin ethnic identity and integrate into the Azerbaijani political identity. From the perspective of gender, heteronormative society denigrates Leyla's lesbian identity because of her non-reproductive participation in this process of pronatalist and militarist process. Taken together, the intersectional perspective uncovers that gender and ethnicity are mutually constitutive in this process and thus, Leyla faces a multi-layered oppression unlike other queer/LGBT participants.

To sum up, the analysis shows how the NK conflict fosters militarization in Armenia and Azerbaijan that reinforces the heteronormative idea of pronatalist population growth. With respect to policies and perspectives of the participants, the two countries are thus surprisingly similar because of the same colonial history and also the militarization due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Members of the LGBT/queer community becomes denigrated, pathologized and because they do not participate in either of these projects. These heteronormative ideologies are intersectionally co-constituted with militarisation and both reinforces hatred and render the LGBT/queer community invisible.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh shapes the lives of LGBT/queer community. I asked in the introduction, does the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict influence the lives of the LGBT/queer community in Armenia and Azerbaijan? How might the militarization of society shape gender, class and ethnicity differently? The analysis pointed to the impact of hate attacks, cultural discrimination, the mutual constitution between militarization and heteronormativity and economic and political challenges of LGBT/queer community in Armenia and Azerbaijan. The brutal attacks and hate foster the

exclusion of queers in Armenia and Azerbaijan. This suggests that militarization – and its concomitant of pronatalism – contribute both to the denigration and invisibilization of LGBT/queers in the Armenian and Azerbaijani societies. There is a strong connection between militarization and pronatalism that an intersectional sensibility makes visible and accountable. Analysing the LGBT/queer lives from intersectional perspectives contributed to uncovering the role of NK conflict in the high level of militarization in Armenian and Azerbaijani, and it forces queers to hide their sexual identities. In this instance, intersectional perspective uncovered the reasons for possible higher rate of the unemployment of LGBT/queer individuals or low level of representation in political or social issues. This is one of the indirect findings and contributions of my research based on the analysis of the government regulations and interviews with some of the participants.

The mutual constitution between pronatalist policies and militarization has a direct impact on the continuation of discrimination against LGBT/queer community. The pronatalism is seen as a process of strengthening the ethnic identity and produce more male soldiers for winning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Therefore, this research uncovered how as a consequence of the NK conflict, Armenian and Azerbaijani societies and governments terrorize against the LGBT/queer community by labelling them as ‘non-reproductive’ and ‘mentally ill’ and this risks the existence of such community in the region.

These findings also suggest that loss of critical LGBT/queer perspectives in the Armenian and Azerbaijani societies caused the invisibilization of queer/LGBT community in the social and political processes. Through intersectional lenses, I uncovered how the LGBT/queer community is oppressed on different levels and how these oppressions are dependent on each other. Therefore, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict highly influenced (and still influencing) this community which brings me to the issue for inclusion of LGBT/queer perspectives in the peacebuilding initiatives of NK conflict.

Chapter 5: Rethinking Peacebuilding in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict from an Intersectional Perspective

5.1 Introduction

Existing initiatives aiming at peacebuilding in the conflict on Nagorno Karabakh have been criticized for not including IDP and refugee women (see, for example, Najafizadeh 2013; Selimovic et al., 2012; Kvinna till Kvinna 2019). This chapter examines the role of current peace processes in the resolution of the NK conflict by analysing the webpages of relevant organisation and exploring the perspectives of IDP and refugee women and queer community. On this basis I reflect how these initiatives would have to change more concretely if they were to include the participation and insights of IDP and refugee women and LGBT/queer subjects. This section adds concrete examples of inclusion and empowerment that are often missing in the existing literature (see, Najafizadeh 2013; Selimovic et al. 2012)

The section seeks to illuminate both why and how are IDP and refugee women and LGBT/queer community excluded from the current peacebuilding initiatives? And how does the peace process have to be re-imagined and re-designed to take the intersectional experiences and positionalities of IDP and refugee women and queer community into account? What this study adds to existing work is a more explicit focus on construction of sexuality and intersectional understanding of peace processes that have remained under-examined in the context of the peace processes of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. There is little relevant literature to date that considers the mutual constitution of ethnicity, gender and sexuality for the peace processes of the NK conflict. Myrntinen and Daigle (2018) have emphasised the need to acknowledge that gender is not a binary categorisation of women and men only, and that non-heterosexual practices and identities should be considered when using a gender lens to understand the peacebuilding. The concerns of queer individuals need to be seen through a relational lens, that is, understanding the interplay between gender and other social distinctions (identity markers) shaping behaviour, vulnerabilities and peacebuilding opportunities. In addition, examining the gendered and intersectional dynamics of excluding these marginalized experiences can provide valuable insights into how existing male-dominated peace processes affect and underpin current peace initiatives. The chapter aims to contribute to strengthening an intersectional approach in current peace

processes and develop the notion of inclusivity including a wider array of marginalized concerns and insights. The chapter starts by examining the male dominated-resolution process and exploring the reasons for the exclusion of IDP and refugee women and LGBT/queer community. I go on to analyse the importance of an intersectional perspective and in conclusion I offer suggestions for re-designing current peace initiatives by taking the experiences of IDP and refugee women and queer community.

5.2 Ongoing male dominance in existing peacebuilding initiatives

In the context of NK conflict, feminist researchers consider the dominance of privileged men in the peacebuilding process as one reason for its limited results (Jocbalis, 2016, pp.43-48).¹⁵ This dominance refers to the widespread exclusion of women in peace processes with the exception of select privileged women (see, for example, Najafizadeh 2013; Shahnazarian 2014). The privileged women in the context of NK conflict mainly include upper class Armenian non-refugee and Azerbaijani non-IDP as well as few IDP women (ibid). Marginalized women who are working-class IDP and refugees and LGBT/queers are not included and an intersectional perspective that focuses on the co-constitution of gender, ethnicity, sexuality and class in the **current peace initiatives** is ignored. According to Cobar (2018), there is no such thing as a gender-neutral peace process¹⁶. Thus, a gender perspective leads to a gender-sensitive peace, and a more inclusive peace which starts with an understanding that policies, processes and peace agreements are gendered. This also means that in peace processes gender is one of the significant categories which unravels the male-centred policies and processes of peacebuilding. As an analytical tool, gender allows us to investigate the power relations in the specific situations, and to comprehend the historical development of conflict from a wider perspective.

Here I focus on the main peace initiatives which include the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, which was established in 1994. The Minsk group organised twenty-three high level summits that included the Armenian and

¹⁵ Azerbaijan is ranked 123rd with 0.650 (from a low of 0 to a high of 1) and Armenia is ranked 82nd with 0.720 among 167 countries for the inclusion of women in the peace processes (Women Peace and Security Index, 2019).

¹⁶ Although the original definition by Cobar describes the approach using binary language on gender, this chapter broadens the perspective by widening the binary understanding and including the participation and needs of people with non-binary gender identities.

Azerbaijani presidents between 1993 and 2003, as well as 140 meetings with Armenian and Azerbaijani ministers and other officials on the territorial integrity of Armenia and Azerbaijan; the legal status of and security guarantees for Nagorno-Karabakh (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, no date). On the official level the peacebuilders are mostly men, except a few well-known women. However, these women were predominantly included at the level of technical experts, and observers (Civil Society Monitoring Country Report, 2013). The masculinised structures of the OSCE Minsk Group have thus far failed to change the Karabakh status quo and resolve the conflict (Walsh, 2014). It is also unlikely that the Minsk Group aims to bring a new peace plan in Armenia and Azerbaijan in the near future (ibid). There is no evidence that members of the queer community were included in these peace initiatives in Armenia and Azerbaijan. This again shows the binary construction of gender (man and woman) and the exclusion of LGBT/queer perspectives in the current process.

Regarding civil society peace initiatives, some nongovernmental organisations (NGOs)¹⁷ participate in resolving the NK conflict. *The Azerbaijani Community of Nagorno-Karabakh of the Azerbaijan Republic* was established in 1992 to take part in the OSCE peace negotiations (The Azerbaijani Community of Nagorno-Karabakh, no date). According to their out-dated website, among the chairman and the 22 members of the executive board in 2009 there was only one woman, Dr. Havva Mammadova,¹⁸ as a representative of privileged IDP women. According to the Community's social media

¹⁷ There are some women organizations in Armenia and Azerbaijan which work at the intersections of gender and peace, but those organizations do not have the official plans for the current peacebuilding initiatives. Additionally, these NGOs have not been taken seriously in national politics, where a low level of participation by women limits democracy and decreases the legitimacy of the power of formal political institutions. In Azerbaijan, for instance, 'The Women's Association for Rational Development'; 'Azerbaijan Department of Transcaucasian Women's Dialogue'; 'Azerbaijan Women's Meclis "Sevil"'; 'Center for Development of Women Refugees and IDP-s'; 'Center for Protecting Women's Rights' and others. However, many of the Azerbaijani IDP and refugee women participants did not know about the activities of such NGOs. In Armenia, for instance, 'Bridge of hope'; 'Martuni Women Assembly'; 'Society without violence'; 'Women's resource center'; 'Women for Development' and others. The refugee participants (of Armenian ethnic origin) also did not know about the activities and agenda of such organizations. As a researcher, I attempted to reach out some of these organizations, but they were not interested in conducting interviews with me. Therefore, I have decided to mention some of these NGOs, but I do not aim to analyse these organizations as the case study of this thesis. Firstly, these NGOs did not have a strong authority in this peacebuilding initiatives and secondly, their work was not accessible for the research participants.

¹⁸ Mammadova is a professor of history and an Azerbaijani politician who from 2005 to 2010 served as a Member of the National Assembly of Azerbaijan.

accounts, since 2018 the chairman is another man, Tural Ganjaliyev¹⁹ and there is no information about the current members of the executive board. The activities described such as international and national conferences and congresses suggest that firstly, underprivileged IDP and refugee women are not present in their activities. Additionally, such activities are not accessible for working class IDP and refugee women because they will not be able to become a part of such ‘privileged’ group. Almost, none of the research participants knew about the activities of this peace initiative, which further suggests that there was no communication between underprivileged IDP women and the *Azerbaijani Community of Nagorno-Karabakh*. Except for this organization, there were some more peacebuilding initiatives (which were registered as NGOs), but as I previously mentioned the rise of autocratic regime suppressed such initiatives, as well. Therefore, many of these initiatives do not exist anymore and some of the founders immigrated to other countries as political asylum seekers.

In Armenia, *Peace Dialogue NGO* is an organisation founded in 2009 that describes itself as non-religious, and non-political (Peace Dialogue NGO, no date). The organization brings together human rights and peace activists from the Eastern Partnership countries, Russia and Europe to promote the protection of human rights and non-violent conflict resolution (ibid). Among the six members, three are three women but there is no information about their background (that suggests they do not include refugees from Azerbaijan). Again, the Armenian refugees and queers who participated in the research had never heard about it and they were excluded from its initiatives – even though the chairman of *Peace Dialogue* supports the empowerment of the queer community in Armenia (Civil Society Monitoring Country Report, 2013). The Peace Dialogue NGO thereby seems to be more progressive than the *Azerbaijani Community of Nagorno - Karabakh* since Armenia is more democratic than Azerbaijan (see, [chapter 1](#)).

Against this backdrop reflects on the modes of exclusion of IDP and refugee women and queers in the peace processes and their gendered and intersectional perspectives. Therefore, the main criticism of this chapter is the silenced gendered perspectives in the

¹⁹ Tural Ganjaliyev is an Azerbaijani politician who is a Member of the National Assembly of Azerbaijan (VI convocation), and has served as Chairman of the Azerbaijani Community of the Nagorno-Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan since December 2018.

peace processes. In the upcoming sections, I shall demonstrate how the participants are excluded from peace processes by analysing their narratives.

5.3 Processes of exclusion of working-class IDP and refugee women

In this section, I examine how the exclusion of IDP and refugee, and other working-class women affected by the NK conflict in the current peace initiatives is enacted from the perspective of the research participants. Two processes are particularly noteworthy: first, the lack of accessibility of the peace initiatives and second, the idea of women's emotionality, and IDP and refugee women's irrationality that tends to legitimise this exclusion. [Chapter 3](#) examined the intersecting challenges of poverty, family status, ill-health, and discrimination that most of the working-class IDP and refugee women face in the wake of their displacement. However, the current peace initiatives were not designed to address the practical living conditions so that the women had the possibility to become engaged. Anoush recalls:

'I was a [war] widow with two children, ... I needed to find a job, flat, money... How could I be involved in peace? I [still] need to take care of my children. I cannot go to meetings, conferences because I am not paid for these things... Who would take care of me and my children? Many IDP and refugee women need to take care of their children for at least 3-5 years and after this, they have a second child... This circle is unstoppable, and in the end the women do not know anything about peacebuilding, and they do not believe in peace anymore... They didn't consider us and thus, these privileged people represent women like me.' Anoush, Armenian refugee, Dartloch

Anoush points to the social and economic problems that not only widows with children face: the absence of financial means, including the contributions of a husband to family income or childcare. She suggests that lack of childcare facilities and other financial means prevents many working-class IDP and refugee women from '*go[ing] to meetings, conferences*' in the current peace process. Their hardship and exclusion from participation lead women to lose faith in the very possibility of peace. That is in the promises made over the past 30 years of solving the conflict, providing social support and returning people to their homelands (see also Shahnazarian, 2014). Economic precarity, fight for basic survival is key obstacle to women's participation and a reason for profound disillusionment.

'You know, on the community level, IDP and refugee women have already lost many things including her property, husband, children. She is not interested in any peace or social development. Her main goal is to survive. Economic stability has been the key factor for IDP and refugee women. The issue of peace and peacebuilding is maybe the last of her priorities or maybe, she does not know about these things' Tamara, Armenian refugee, Dartloch

Tamara's account suggests how the 'disinterest' is produced through an all-consuming quest for basic survival. As I have shown in [chapter 3](#), IDP and refugee women face a severe lack of social support and access to healthcare that makes their participation in peacebuilding fundamentally impossible. The women's account suggests that as long as IDP and refugee women do not have access to basic necessities, financial security, stabilized living conditions, and healthcare these women will be unable to join peace initiatives.

At the same time their exclusion strengthens the participation of (privileged) men in peace negotiations. There are no differences in the experiences of Armenian and Azerbaijani women in this respect. It is important to highlight that ,in these accounts, ethnicity is less prominent: gender and class intersect to exclude IDP and refugee women who are represented in the peace process by privileged heterosexual Armenian and Azerbaijani men (see, for example, Najafizadeh 2013; Selimovic et al., 2012; Kvinna till Kvinna 2019). These men do not always come from non-IDP backgrounds and this means privileged IDP and refugee men are included in the negotiations on behalf of many working-class IDP and refugee women (ibid). Zubeyda even suggests that women might be deliberate and accounts for the lack of progress:

'Approaching the current peace initiatives from a broader perspective is important... For example, why don't we see any IDP or refugee women from Azerbaijan and Armenia, from the working-class? Why[?] did they forget them? Can they actually forget them? I believe their exclusion is also a tool and nobody cares about these women ...these men from governments who consider themselves as 'peacebuilders' want to resolve the conflict without any compromises.. Is it that hard to compromise on anything?.' Zubeyda, Azerbaijani IDP, Sumgayit.

Zubeyda implies that working women could be more skilled to compromise which is a necessity for establishing lasting peace in the Nagorno-Karabakh. This also suggests gender is as an important category of peacebuilding initiatives because gendered

perspectives are different for men who participate in these peace processes. Therefore, Zubeyda highlights the role of gender and women's compromising skills in the peace resolution. Together with Aydan, another Azerbaijani displaced woman-Zubeyda, she suggests that working-class IDP and refugee women are purposefully excluded from peacebuilding: their precarious living standards (social support, health care and housing) are not addressed to keep the marginalized groups out of the negotiations, perhaps because the frozen conflict works well for the current elites of both countries as others have argued (see, for example, The Economist 2016; de Waal 2010). Ayunts (2014) argues that since the status quo serves the interests of the authorities, the ruling elites do not have strong incentives to seek conflict resolution. Bringing working-class IDP and refugee women to the negotiations could fundamentally change these dynamics of the negotiations. Thus, the intersecting experiences of the working class IDP and refugee women are excluded from peacebuilding precisely because they have a potential to bring new perspectives and outcomes.

The force of gender stereotypes

'Men are capable of everything... Sometimes, I wonder that if they were, why can they not resolve this conflict for more than thirty years. So either they are not interested in solving the conflict or they are incapable of solving it, It is a problem of mindsets [to assume] that men can solve serious issues and women belong in the kitchen...The image of traditional women reproduces gender inequalities not only on the individual but also political, social, judicial levels.' Firuza, Azerbaijani IDP, Baku/Italy

Firuza's account suggests that women's exclusion in the peace processes of the NK conflict is linked to ideals of gender roles of Armenian and Azerbaijani societies where women are assigned to household and childcare, and men take care of the 'serious issues'. In Caucasian societies, this hierarchical division of labour associates women with emotionality and even with irrationality (Shahnazarian, 2017). Firuza's account suggests the close connection of men with personal and public decision-making plays a significant role in the NK peacebuilding process. Men are considered rational and women are emotional (Selimovic et al., 2012). During interview Firuza argued also that IDP and refugee women are less educated which makes them appear 'irrational' in Azerbaijani and

Armenian societies. Firuza thus considers how the prevalent gender stereotypes underwrite the status quo of current peace initiatives both in these societies.

'IDP / refugee women of Armenia and Azerbaijan are represented by the privileged men of our countries... Why should a man represent my sad experiences and trauma instead of me?! Because many women are silenced, and their children are tortured in this war....' Anoush, Armenian refugee, Dartloch

Participants' accounts suggest that these men, many of whom are from higher middle class include privileged some IDP and refugee men to speak on behalf of all working-class IDP and refugees. Here, gender status of these women trumps ethnicity because IDP and refugee women, like Anoush and Firuza are represented in the peace process by privileged upper-class heterosexual Armenian and Azerbaijani men. As I introduced, women are seen as inferior and it is promoted, they are incapable of solving such issues because of their emotionality. Thus, ethnicity becomes refracted by gender and this shows how gender comes into play when the participants talk about their exclusion by these privileged men. Anoush suggests that men are not capable of representing IDP and refugee women, especially working-class, because they have not gone through the challenges and traumas which IDP and refugee women faced. Not only Anoush and Firuza but many IDP and refugee women are silenced for many years. Ethnicity becomes backgrounded as women highlight the role of gender relations and stereotypes in peace initiatives – even though research participants question the ability of men to represent. IDP and refugee women's experiences and potential for resolving the conflict, how to facilitate the women's participation and a more adequate representation of precarity, discrimination, ill-health and sexual violence will be addressed below.

Non-essentialist approaches to peacebuilding

It is important to acknowledge that not all research participants thought that simply encouraging women's participation will change the dynamics of peacebuilding. Consider the account of Aydan, who had been active in peacekeeping for many years:

Peacebuilding becomes very mechanical nowadays. It is like a doctor's prescription, if you take this pill you'll feel better. However, peacebuilding takes years and sometimes decades and centuries... I don't not think that considering gender as the most an important category in peacebuilding is the right thing to do. We should approach it more holistically. If we do not have this approach it can

cause troubles for peacebuilding in future... Unfortunately, in the negotiations process, you only can find only male politicians from Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Nobody else is involved in this and there is no outcome... I should mention that liberal feminists claim we should empower women in each field... But I do not think we should empower women in peacebuilding who support militarization like these men who are so-called peacebuilders... We should invite people who are really interested in the process of conflict resolution.’ Aydan, 32, Azerbaijani IDP woman, Baku/Switzerland

Aydan is one of the first generations of young peacebuilders from the region. She supports a ‘holistic’ processual and non-essentialist approach towards peacebuilding where women should not simply participate because they are women but in view of what they can contribute. Aydan implies that women who support the increased militarization of society like their male counterparts should not be empowered. Aydan’s account suggests that many peacebuilders participate in the negotiations even though they support a military solution of the NK conflict. This does not invalidate but underlines the plea for including IDP and refugee women, however, who often bear the consequences of militarisation and who need to be included in large enough numbers precisely because their experiences are not singular. The argument about the non-innocence of subjugated positions suggests that it is not that all refugee women naturally oppose military but that their experiences make them less likely to support militarisation (as we have seen with the reluctance of women to send their boys to war in [chapter 3](#)). Precisely because of variance among IDP and refugee women, they have to be included in meaningful numbers. If they had a singular perspective this could be represented by a single woman – or man for this matter. Here the suggestion that only those really interested in peacebuilding should not obfuscate the fact that many IDP and refugee women are not able to develop and articulate their interest on account of their living conditions. Any sustained interest in peace has to be actively enabled as part of peacebuilding itself. Precisely because gender and ethnicity are not essentialist categories, is it important that a variety of differently located women be involved in the peace negotiations to bring varied perspectives to inform peacebuilding.

Even though Aydan appeared to reject the representation of IDP and refugee women as such, she endorsed the role of quota system as a means to include IDP and refugee women’s participation in peacebuilding. This suggests that IDP and refugee women are best considered as a heterogeneous group with many critical perspectives, as my research

highlighted ([chapter 3](#)). Therefore, a quota system might contribute to including different intersecting experiences. For Aydan, quotas are merely a short-term solution and need to be complemented by consciousness-raising. Aydan suggested consciousness-raising between and among working-class IDP and refugee women can empower them to develop their own understanding of peacebuilding. In this sense, consciousness-raising is not re-education but an enabling of women to trust and develop their own analyses together. By sharing their personal stories and helping each other, they can change the solid understanding of the male-dominated peacebuilding. Therefore, Aydan highlighted the role of grassroots movements and working-class IDP and refugee women peace activists, as well as peer educators and teachers as role models.

To sum up, two main obstacles emerge on practical and symbolic levels that need to be addressed together: women's day to day quest for the survival and prevalent gender stereotypes whereby men are better able to solve the current conflict. Redesigning viable peacebuilding initiatives on the NK conflict requires a more contextualised understanding of how the inclusion of IDP and refugee women in peacebuilding that takes into account accessibility and participation both practically (enabling conditions such as childcare, transportation, healthcare) as well as institutional quotas to increase participation and destabilise pervasive gender stereotypes that – as the women point out – are disproven by the very lack of tangible progress. Therefore, as highlighted above, it is important to provide a heterogeneity of differently located IDP and refugee women for being involved in the peace negotiations in order to bring varied perspectives to inform peacebuilding.

5.4 Processes of exclusion of members of the LGBT/queer community

Conflict and displacement constitute layers of vulnerability also for LGBT/queer-identified individuals from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabakh who as I have shown in [chapter 4](#) facing pervasive discrimination and hatred. In this section, I analyse the views of research participants on their exclusion from peace initiatives in relation to the persistent association of queerness with pathology and the fear of queer individuals. As I have shown in the previous chapter 4, in Armenian and Azerbaijani societies, LGBT/queer individuals are often considered an aberration (Dadashzadeh and Paitjan, 2020) since they do not appear to engage in the pronatalist policies. According to Armenian transgender Lilit

queers are perceived as being ‘incapable of making rational choices’, an argument used against their participation in peacebuilding.

‘In Armenia, the queer community is not seen as rational individuals and unfortunately, they are considered mentally ill Armenian society thinks LGBT individuals cannot help solving the NK conflict because they first need to solve their own ‘mental problem’. Their mental problem being LGBT and not following the traditional values of Armenian society...’ Lilit, 46, middle-class, Armenian transgender, Yerevan

As Lilit argued queer individuals’ mental illness is a product of the heteronormativity and the hatred of LGBT/queer as shown in [chapter 4](#). Here the notion of ‘incapable of making rational choices’ is associated with the issue of sexuality and thus, queers are seen as mentally sick. This suggests that LGBT/queerness is considered pathology (see, [chapter 4](#)). Because of the non-reproductive partnerships and the promoted pronatalist policies, Armenian and Azerbaijani societies consider it as ‘illness’. The queer community is excluded because of their assumed ‘mental illness’ and inferiority [specifically irrationality] that contrasts with the superior ‘rationality’ accorded to male peacebuilders and their heteronormative identities. LGBT/Queers might not be included by women peacebuilders either as Eldar observed:

‘There are many privileged women peacebuilders who do not imagine queer individuals in the peacebuilding process. The ‘illness’ of queer individuals is also perceived (by privileged women) as a barrier for them to participate in the current peace initiative.’ Eldar, Azerbaijani queer, Baku.

Eldar’s observations amplify Lilit’s claim of queer abjection in Armenian and Azerbaijani societies. Even this allegedly privileged women peacebuilders might not aim to include the queer individuals in the peace processes because of the manipulation against the queer identities. These suggest that abjection and manipulation obscure the violence, pathologization and exclusion. Vardan highlighted that women peacebuilders already are, considered marginal figures in the negotiations process because they are minority and Hayk had claimed that many supported the militarization underwriting the male-dominated peacebuilding process. The perspectives of these minoritized women of queers in peacebuilding might, therefore, be shaped through male and heteronormative lenses. Together, the pathologization against queer community is produced through the traditional understanding of heteronormativity in Armenia and Azerbaijan. In this process, hegemonic

masculinities are considered decision-makers and thus, they have already labelled queerness as ‘mental sickness’. Consequently, the male-dominated peace process kept the queer community out of the peace processes. Therefore, on the first level LGBT/queer community is considered ‘non-contributory’ subjects for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The second level of analysis focuses on the fear of queers within the peace processes. Leyla told me that some peacebuilders think that LGBT/queer empowerment can cause a serious problem of loss of trust) in the peacebuilding process for many citizens in Armenia and Azerbaijan. The research participants argued that the inclusion of queers in peace processes is supported only by pro-western peace activists and organisations. Consider Hayk’s account:

‘Queer people’s involvement is seen as problematic and queers are excluded [in peace initiatives] because of the irrational fear against them... Many men and privileged women peacebuilders think if queers are involved in this process, people will hate peacebuilding even more.... But I believe that people will get used to the visibility of queers in each part of life, especially in the peace process if these ‘peacebuilders’ stop the manipulation against us.’ Hayk, Armenian queer, Netherlands

Hayk considered that Armenian and Azerbaijani peacebuilders actively manipulated citizens’ thoughts so as to not include the queer community in the peace processes. This suggests that there is a strong anti-queer propaganda within the peace processes, which both feeds of and reinforces the hatred and homophobia on the societal level. Homophobic mindsets (Carroll and Quinn, 2009) are fuelled by the idea of ‘mental illness’ of queers. As one of the privileged women peacebuilders and former Ombudsman of Azerbaijan, Elmira Suleymanova, emphasised, *‘I don’t think that it [homosexuality, ed.] is normal. The roles of the sexes are defined by nature (...) This will be a general view of most from my country, though we never discuss this issue’* (The Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2011, p. 5). As an Ombudsman and peacebuilder, she discriminated against the rights of people whom she should have defended. This suggests the ‘fear’ against queers is socially constructed in the discourses (also in chapter 4) of the state officials through hate speech. Because of this propaganda, people comprehend ‘queerness’ as a problematic category and, therefore, the

inclusion of LGBT/queer community in the peacebuilding activities and initiatives becomes a challenge within Armenian and Azerbaijani societies.

To sum, exclusion of queer community emerges on two mutually reinforcing levels- mental illness and fear of queers that undergird their exclusion from the peace processes . The accounts of LGBT/queer research participants suggest that they contribute critical societal analysis and an alternative vision of peace to the peace processes in ways that challenge heteronormativity of Armenian and Azerbaijani societies. In particular LGBT/queer identified people tend to emphasise an anti-militarist perspective and endorse a diminishing of the role of the military in the NK conflict. The involvement of queers in the peace process will not only contribute to resolving the conflict but also increases the visibility of queer community. The visibility of queers may help to dismantle ideas of mental illness, pathology and 'fear' against queer community. Therefore, the inclusion and representation of queers in the peace process play a vital role for the queer community of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

5.5 Conclusion: Towards a re-designed peacebuilding

An intersectional approach to peacebuilding is vital when considering that working-class IDP and refugee women, LGBT/queer peacebuilders/mediators and minoritized ethnic groups are still persistently excluded not only in the official negotiations in the NK conflict. An intersectional approach is concerned with how to increase the participation of these marginalized people in the peace process of the ongoing NK conflict. It reflects a mono-axial or superficial understanding of ethnicity and gender, which ignore the presence of heterogeneous group of people which include IDP and refugee women and LGBT/queer community (see, [chapter 1.5](#)). Ledreach (2020) suggests that 'an intersectional lens brings into sharp relief the ways in which gendered, territorial, ethnic and generational experiences of violence shape everyday practices of peacebuilding' (p.201). Therefore, such intersectional approach in peacebuilding helps to unravel the power hierarchies between marginalized and privileged groups who rule the peacebuilding initiatives.

The intersectional perspective can be different in the context of each conflict because of the historical development, the roots of conflict and other relevant reasons. In the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the notion of intersectionality in peacebuilding should

refer to including a wider range of people (mainly, IDP and refugee women and LGBT/queer community) as peacebuilders and only after this engagement, expanding and redesigning the initiatives and actions can be seen as the further steps.

Building on Lederach, Stefanie Kappler and Nicolas Lemay-Hébert ([chapter 1.5](#)), an intersectional perspective holds that subject positions of peacebuilders are shaped by their experiences and shape the perspectives and stakes of dialogue and negotiation [e.g. in relation to militarisation] and that therefore more varied subject positions have to be included. Intersectional peacebuilding both takes account of critical research that shows inclusion of different group of marginalized people and variety of subjects in the peace processes contribute to establishing more heterogeneous and inclusionary peacebuilding practices and it helps opening up how such subject positions can bring new insights (including their gender, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic and IDP or refugee status) during and after the conflict. An intersectional approach can also help to develop the inter-ethnic intersectional collaboration among the women and queers of the region including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh and Georgia. This can contribute to the exchanges between and among these marginalized group of people with the support of intersectional approach in peacebuilding (see, for example, Selimovic et al 2012). Peacebuilding, in the context of NK conflict, should, however, not only be a matter of technical implementation of steps of judicial and legal change but should become a broader effort that aims towards less violence and more social cohesion and inclusivity of queer community and IDP and refugee women in the current peace initiatives.

Enabling participation of queers and IDP and refugee women means that institutions and actors responsible for the current peace initiatives need to change to become more inclusionary. This inclusion contributes to consideration of the needs and views of queers and IDP and refugee women which brings new insights to the peace processes. Intersectional awareness helps to curb male dominance in the peace process and gives more space for representation and involvement of IDP and refugee women and queers by creating more sustainable and equal peace initiatives for all the citizens. By way of conclusion, I propose the following **four** suggestions that can contribute to re-designing the peace process in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

First, improving the material living conditions of IDP and refugee women is the key priority for IDP and refugee women and LGBT/queer community to participate in local and particularly centralised meeting, conferences and summits. According to the research participants that includes basic employment, housing childcare, healthcare and social support. The UN report *'2004 report of the Secretary-General on Women, Peace and Security'* (2004) highlights the importance of human and financial support to help women participants are considered the top priorities for empowering women in the peace initiatives – so a budget to enable this.

To support the participation of IDP and refugee women's, queers' and minoritized ethnic group like Lezgins peace processes, financial and logistical assistance should be provided by governments, civil society and international organizations. The increase of the financial support for attending the international and local peace meetings should be prioritized. Many of my IDP and refugee women respondents do not have enough financial income to attend such informal and formal meetings by covering the transport, hotel, meal costs and thus, they become excluded from the current peace initiatives. Further, one of the prominent concerns of the redesign process is taking the ill-health of refugee and IDP women into account. The improvements concern an accessible healthcare system for these women; subsidies for these women's medical check-ups; to ensure the safety and health situation. Additionally, informal networks or assistance such as childcare, transportation and accommodation can help working-class women tackle these challenges. Therefore, the regular childcare facilities should be arranged for these IDP and refugee women who aim to join these peace processes. This shows how their intersectional identities (working-class, women and IDP/refugee) play an exclusionary role in practice and in the end, such exclusion directly influences the dynamics of the NK conflict. The queer community also needs to be visible within peace process and thus should also receive financial support for attending these events. As long as queers do not get such economic support, they will be unable to join the peace processes because they also have unemployment problems in these countries (see, [chapter 4](#)).

The intersectional discrimination (women, queer, working-class, widow, mother, IDP/refugee) against these groups increases the discouragement of IDP and refugee women and LGBT/queer community for participating in these negotiations. Also, a space for articulating these different experiences so that they can meaningfully inform the

dialogues and negotiations. This is not only intersectional awareness in peace processes of NK conflict; rather, it will be an auction of the ending of male-dominated peace initiatives and giving more space for IDP and refugee women and queers by creating more sustainable and equal peace processes.

Second, to widely publicise and prepare open and secure environments for IDP and refugee women and LGBT/queers to articulate and share experiences that can then inform other people about the presence of these peacebuilders within the process. This will allow them to become a part of the peace processes because many research participants did not have information about the current peace initiatives. Thus, exclusionary environments did not let IDP and refugee women and queers develop their credible and leader personalities because they were not allowed to show their rational strengths. It is also important to highlight that emotionality of these women (which is not accepted by the current male-dominated peace initiatives) will also allow them to express their needs and concerns in these peacebuilding initiatives. The intersectional perspective does not analyse this as ‘emotionality versus rationality’ and it mainly targets the fluidity and multidimensionality of these concepts together. For IDP and refugee women respondents, topics such as sexual violence and ill-health were unspoken and providing a secure environment for them may help to talk about these topics without fear. This can be organized by following the several circles but firstly, it should start with smaller groups which mean IDP and refugee women or LGBT/queer community should initiate these conversations among themselves. Over time, they can reach larger groups after having a clear agenda. From the perspectives of the queer community, it can help queers to openly introduce themselves to the working-class IDP and refugee women to develop solidarity in these peace processes. Therefore, IDP and refugee women and queers need to set up their own peace fora to increase their leadership and get access to the peace processes in the context of the NK conflict.

Third, to consciousness-raising among IDP and refugee women and queers can enhance their active participation in the current peace processes. The main aim of consciousness-raising is to show to many working-class IDP and refugee women that as long as they do not raise their voices, nobody will solve the NK conflict. People who are responsible for such consciousness-raising should be IDP and refugee women and LGBT/queer citizens of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh who can start the grassroots movement of

these communities. Through sharing and seeing the structural dimensions of the current peacebuilding, these marginalized groups can develop the new notion of peacebuilding for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In the small groups, IDP and refugee women and LGBT/queer individuals can organize the events and gatherings in order to share their own experiences and stories which can help them to understand the role of consciousness-raising in the peacebuilding. Thus, the consciousness-raising process must be organized as a grassroots movement by local communities, activists and peacebuilders which consists of working-class IDP and refugee women and LGBT/queers. Therefore, establishing consciousness-raising groups at local level among these marginalized groups will contribute to theorising/politicising the problematicity of current peace initiatives of the NK conflict. This will contribute to understanding experiences differently and increasing their leadership in the peace processes and secondly, developing collective understanding of peace beyond the resolution of conflicts such as hatred relations of Armenians and Azerbaijanis, discussions over cultural hegemony and others.

Fourth, introducing a quota system is an important step towards including more IDP and refugee women and queers and minoritized ethnic people in the peace processes. The basic premise of the quota system in the peacebuilding activities is to provide IDP and refugee women's and queers' representation at all levels and aspects of the current peace initiatives (usually within a set period of time). Active participation through the legislation provides more coherent and less challenging empowerment. Introduction of such strict measurement should become a part of the national conventions in Armenia and Azerbaijan and this can help to change the misperceptions of the society about the queer community and IDP and refugee women. The active representation can be achieved through the equal conditions and quota system can contribute to closing the existing gap. This suggests that the quota system can allow IDP and refugee women and queers to be politically involved in the current peace processes and actively participate in them. However, quotas are not long-term action plans and they must always be adapted to the specific cultural and socioeconomic situations.

Conclusion

This thesis posed four interconnected questions: first, in what ways are the lives of Armenian, Azerbaijani and Karabakh displaced women differentially impacted by the ongoing conflict? Second, does the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict influence the lives of the LGBT/queer community in Armenia and Azerbaijan? Third, why and how are IDP and refugee women and LGBT/queer community excluded from the current peacebuilding initiatives? And fourth, how does the peace process have to be re-imagined and re-designed to take the intersectional experiences and positionalities of IDP and refugee women and queer community into account?

In the state of art, I analysed the existing literature in relation to the concepts of gender, ethnicity, peacebuilding and intersectionality. As the key concepts, I used Stanley Tambiah's definition together with Fredrik Barth's understanding of ethnicity which claimed ethnic identities are the social constructions of the societies. In relation to gender, I considered different authors including Nona Shahnazarian, Mehrangiz Najafizadeh, Kvinna till Kvinna team to understand the gendered relations in the South Caucasus by highlighting the colonial history of the region. Regarding intersectionality, I employed Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality which helped to uncover the interwoven relations of gender, ethnicity, class, age and other relevant issues in the context of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Finally, for peacebuilding I developed the methodology by drawing on the works of Angela Lederach, Stefanie Kappler and Nicolas Lemay-Hébert which elaborated on the importance of the intersectional approach in the peace processes. The literature review highlighted both the gender system is very oppressive in the male-dominated South Caucasian societies and suggested performative conceptions of politics of ethnicity, gender and sexuality and proposed intersectionality as the enabling tool for deeply understanding and interconnectedly analysing these issues without reducing one to another.

I proceeded with the methodology chapter and a qualitative research design with qualitative interviews conducted in a range of venues was chosen to examine these questions. While little participation of peace activists, 15 interviews were conducted with refugee and IDP women and LGBT/queers, currently living in Armenia and Azerbaijan. I

showed how my researcher positionality influenced dynamics of the research process and how some of my respondents approached me suspiciously and differently. This directly influenced the research findings in many ways.

In chapter 3, I analysed the IDP and refugee women's lives by focusing on the interviews and participant observation and, my research findings were interconnected with the precarious living conditions of my respondents. The research showed that NK conflict caused precarious changes in the living conditions of IDP and refugee women and the interaction of different axes of inequalities fostered these massive changes. In the analysis, I uncovered how the ethnicity was differently configured in different situations by considering the 'urban women versus rural women' distinctions. Gender also refracted ethnicity in many situations, and this suggested how the gender order in the Armenian and Azerbaijani societies put women in inferior positions. Gender and ethnicity were constituted in and through cultural discrimination, socioeconomic challenges, state support, ethnic privilege, ill-health, which also shaped perspectives on militarization and the inability to talk about the sexual violence with me. Therefore, Armenian and Azerbaijani IDP and refugee women participants' lives were highly influenced from the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

In chapter 4, I elaborated on the mutual relations between queer community in Armenia and Azerbaijan and the militarization of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and I examined the impact of the militarization due to this conflict on the lives of queers. One of the important findings was that the oppressive militarized system of these countries identity queers as pathological or 'mentally sick' and they are exempted from the mandatory military service. However, concerning their employment, the completion of mandatory military service is required and most of the workplaces require such documentation. This uncovered how the militarization influence economic stability of LGBT/queer community and therefore, these individuals face the oppression on multi-layered levels. Except economic conditions, the pronatalist nationalist idea(s) of population growth which NK conflict strengthened fostered discriminations and pathologizing of LGBT/queer community in the Armenian and Azerbaijani societies. Consequently, such discriminations have been increasing the hate against the community and therefore, many LGBT/queer individuals remain invisible in these societies.

The last chapter examined processes of exclusion and provided crucial suggestions. Here I showed the current male-dominated resolution processes and the exclusionary politics against of IDP and refugee women and queers from Armenia and Azerbaijan. The exclusion of IDP and refugee women on practical and symbolic levels and queer community because of pathologization and fear kept them out of the current peace processes. Some of the key conclusions that can be drawn from this study are that working-class IDP and refugee women cannot realise their capacity to contribute to the peace processes due to ill-health problems, childcare and economic responsibilities. This suggests how marginalized women consider themselves as economically unavailable to join the peace process. The current peace process does not allow these women to be involved in these processes as the equal citizens of Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, the inclusion of these marginalized experiences requires re-designed peace processes by taking the needs of these groups into account. Thus, I proposed four suggestions which include the economic support for these marginalized groups of people; widely publicising and preparing open and secure environments; doing consciousness-raising activities among the IDP and refugee women and LGBT/queer community as a grassroots movement; and finally, setting up special quota for empowering these underprivileged groups of people in the peacebuilding initiatives.

My study also had crucial limitations and thus, I would like to focus on them and propose suggestions for the future research. My sampling included only limited number of participants due to the time limitations and effects of research positionality such as being queer Azerbaijani non-IDP researcher. Research would benefit from collaborative multi-gender, multi-ethnic cooperation to allow access to the territories of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Thus, the collaboration of Armenian and Azerbaijani researchers on collecting the qualitative data of IDP and refugee women's life stories can enrich the current study. Since in the existing literature the IDP and refugee women are promoted as a homogenous group, in further research, strengthening the heterogeneous image of IDP and refugee women should be explicitly promoted by researchers. Concerning the queer community, I would encourage more researchers to join the examine the mutual connections between NK conflict and queer community in Armenia and Azerbaijan. In my interviews, I had only a limited number of participants and thus, the inclusion of more queer perspectives can contribute to showing an analysis more focused on ethnicity,

different generations and the impacts of the NK conflict on their lives. Additionally, accessing the official data on exemptions of queers from mandatory military service through the national archives and Ministry of Defence in Armenia and Azerbaijan can enrich future research since this topic remains under-researched.

In relation to the peace processes, I would suggest conducting interviews with more peacebuilders and the specific peace organizations and their agendas of intersectional approach in peacebuilding. To connect with the current negotiators of OSCE Minsk Group from Armenia and Azerbaijan will also bring more insights about their plans of including marginalized experiences. Since I could not reach these privileged negotiators because of lack of connections, I suggest future researchers connect these negotiators by attending special events and organizational meetings. The importance of the intersectional approach in peacebuilding is a provocation: not (only) to take into account a set of subject positions and relations of power already known but being open and designing conditions that examine the differences and differentiations that emerge and yet have to be examined in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Therefore, the intersectional perspective should be enriched in the future research by considering the life stories of underprivileged subjects of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

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