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**Does gender play a role in peace
journalism practices?**

**An analysis of the Armenian and
Azerbaijani coverage of the 44 days
Karabakh war**

Master Thesis

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Abstract

This study explores peace journalism practices in the context of the 44 days Karabakh war and whether the reporter's gender matters in applying this approach. The research draws on analysis of eight conducted reconstruction interviews with Armenian and Azerbaijani female and male reporters. The results show that peace journalism faces several challenges in the region: from press freedom restrictions, to the prohibition of accessing the war zone especially for the Azerbaijani reporters, to the fear of being targeted as traitors, and to the additional difficulties of those reporters who are refugees themselves. Furthermore, when applying gender lenses to the analysis, the impact of patriarchal norms in the reporters' work is evident. While women were more likely to access war victims, but faced challenges when embedded in the masculine environment of the army, men would be seen as 'weak' for adopting a more peaceful approach in their reporting. Although there is no shared view among the respondents on the role of the reporter's gender in applying peace journalism, the ingrained gender roles of the two societies help explain why female reporters are more likely than their male colleagues to embrace peace journalism.

Keywords

peace journalism, gender, gender roles, women reporters, patriarchy, women peace journalists, Nagorno-Karabakh war

Abstrakt

Tato studie zkoumá praktiky mírové žurnalistiky v kontextu 44denní války v Karabachu a to, zda při uplatňování tohoto přístupu závisí na pohlaví novináře. Výzkum čerpá z analýzy osmi provedených rekonstrukčních rozhovorů s arménskými a ázerbájdžánskými reportéry a reportérkami. Výsledky ukazují, že mírová žurnalistika čelí v regionu několika výzvám: od omezování svobody tisku přes zákaz vstupu do válečné zóny, zejména pro ázerbájdžánské reportéry, až po strach z toho, že se stanou terčem zrádců, nebo po zvláštní potíže těch reportérů, kteří jsou sami uprchlíky. Navíc při aplikaci genderového úhlu pohledu na analýzu je zřejmý dopad patriarchálních norem v práci novinářů. Zatímco ženy měly s větší pravděpodobností přístup k obětem války, ale čelily výzvám, když byly zasazeny do mužského prostředí armády, muži by byli považováni za „slabé“, protože ve svých zprávách přijali mírovější přístup. Ačkoli mezi respondenty neexistuje společný názor na roli pohlaví reportérky v aplikaci mírové žurnalistiky, zakořeněné genderové role obou společností pomáhají vysvětlit, proč reportérky častěji než jejich mužští kolegové realizují mírovou žurnalistiku.

Klíčová slova

mírová žurnalistika, gender, genderové role, reportérky, patriarchát, mírové novinářky, válka v Náhorním Karabachu

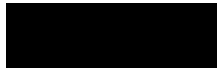
Range of thesis: 63 pages and 109 756 characters

Declaration of Authorship

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague, August 1st, 2022

Teresa Di Mauro



Acknowledgments

I owe a big thank you to all ‘the middlemen and middlewomen’ whose contribution has been fundamental for the realisation of this academic work.

To the brave journalists who agreed to contribute to this research.

To my supervisor Michal Dimitrov, for thought-provoking discussions and stimulating critique during the process. Thank you for your endless support.

To friends and family for the constant encouragement and affection that helped me get through the challenges of this journey.

Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism

Approved research proposal

Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism FSV UK Research proposal for Erasmus Mundus Journalism Diploma Thesis									
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Student's surname and given name: Teresa Di Mauro	Registry stamp: / Razítko podatelny: <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">Univerzita Karlova Fakulta sociálních věd</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Došlo dne:</td> <td>11-11-2021 -1-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Číslo:</td> <td>388 Příloha:</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">Přidělena</td> </tr> </table>	Univerzita Karlova Fakulta sociálních věd		Došlo dne:	11-11-2021 -1-	Číslo:	388 Příloha:	Přidělena	
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Thesis title in English: Does gender play a role in peace journalism practices? An analysis of the Armenian and Azerbaijani coverage of the 44 days Karabakh war									
Expected date of submission SS, May, 2021/2022									
Main research question (max. 250 characters): What was the role of the journalist's gender in covering the 44 days war in Nagorno-Karabakh? Did Azerbaijani and Armenian female reporters do more peace journalism than their male counterparts?									
Current state of research on the topic (max. 1800 characters): <p>Artenesyan (2020) analysed the media framing of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and whether Peace Journalism (PJ) is possible in that political context and concluded that media framing of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is mostly oriented toward confrontation and therefore, peace journalism results marginal. Media peace initiatives are usually carried out by local non-governmental organizations and small private media agencies and rarely, they reach institutional level of attention (Artenesyan, 2020). When looking at peace journalism from a gender perspective, it seems there is a gap of studies on whether women are more prominent towards peace journalism than men (Weinblatt, Baden, 2018). Therefore, my research aims to find out whether war journalism(WJ) frames were also leading the coverage of the 44 days war in Nagorno-Karabakh and if so, to what extent and whether the journalist's gender played a role at all in the presence of peace journalism frames (PJ).</p>									
Expected theoretical framework (max. 1800 characters): <p>Norwegian researcher Johan Galtung was the first to coin the term "Peace Journalism"(PJ) (Galtung and Ruge, 1965). He claimed that the media are so focused on war and violence that they tend to marginalize peace narratives (Galtung, 1993). The peace journalist concentrates on stories that highlight peace initiatives and promote conflict resolution, reconstruction, and reconciliation (Galtung, 1986, 1998). However, up until now peace journalism practices have encountered some resistance among scholars and practitioners leading some researchers to suggest the necessity of training to help reporters and editors embrace it (Arregui et al., 2020).</p>									

The second relevant theory for the scope of my research is the gendered dimensions of conflict, war, and peace (Frühlich, 2016; Goldstein, 2001) another aspect which is widely investigated among conflict reporting scholars. The hypothesis that “women are more oriented toward peace than men” (Maoz, 2012, p. 1185) has received much attention within the researchers of this branch of journalism studies. Empirically, however, the evidence is quite mixed, with some studies finding no significant difference between women and men in their attitude towards peace (Weinblatt, Baden, 2018). It is surprising that, given journalists’ key role in shaping public discourse on violent conflict, there’s not enough literature that examines the possibility of gender differences in the prominence of peace-related news discourse (Weinblatt, Baden, 2018). Therefore, I hypothesize that:

H1: War Journalism frames were more prominent than Peace Journalism frames both in the Armenian and Azerbaijani coverage of the 44 days war;

H2: Armenian and Azerbaijani female reporters are more oriented towards Peace Journalism than their male counterparts.

Expected methodology, and methods for data gathering and analysis (max. 1800 characters):

This study aims at answering the research question on whether gender plays a role in the prominence of peace journalism practices in the context of the 44 days war in Nagorno-Karabakh by combining two methods of data collection: content analysis and semi-structured interviews. In their study on the use of Peace Journalism in the local and foreign coverage of the 2017 election violence and the 2019 Dusit attack in Kenya, Arregui et al. (2020) used content analysis and semi-structured interviews to examine the prominence of peace journalism frames amongst local and foreign reporters. They point out that most of the existing PJ-related literature uses content analysis and to a smaller extent qualitative interviews. Therefore, the mixed-methods approach helped them understand through the content analysis how journalists reported the events and then, they used the identified themes to prepare the questions for the semi-structured interviews with local and foreign journalists. Inspired by their work, I will also apply the mixed method approach to understand through the content analysis the extent to which Azerbaijani and Armenian female and male reporters used war or peace frames and then, I will use the semi-structured interviews to explore my findings further.


Expected research design (data to be analyzed, for example, the titles of analyzed newspapers and selected time period):

The time period for the content analysis will be between September 27th (date of the beginning of the war) and December 31st, 2020. This time frame, that exceeds the 44 days of war, will help including more in depth analysis, opinions that are more likely to have been published when the war was over, after the signing of the trilateral agreement between Yerevan, Moscow and Baku (November 10th, 2020). Therefore, the unit for my content analysis will be news stories, feature articles, opinion columns, editorials published in two of the most followed Armenian and Azerbaijani online media, such as 1in.am and Civilnet.am in Armenia and Azadlig.org (Radio Liberty) and Meydan Tv in Azerbaijan. Then, I will deepen my findings with semi-structured interviews with 1 female, 1 male Armenian journalist; 1 female, 1 male Azerbaijani journalist whose articles were part of the sample chosen for the content analysis.

Expected thesis structure (chapters and subchapters with brief description of their content):

1. Abstract
2. Introduction
3. Theoretical Framework

<p>3.1. Peace journalism 3.2. Role of gender in conflict reporting 3.3. Nagorno-Karabakh context 4. Methodology 4.1 Mix methods 4.1.1 Quantitative content analysis 4.1.2 Semi structured interviews 5. Empirical Findings 6. Discussion/Limits 7. Conclusion</p> <p>Basic literature list (at least 5 most important works related to the topic and the method(s) of analysis; all works should be briefly characterized on 2-5 lines):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Arregui, C., Thomas, R., & Kilby, A. (2020). Peace Journalism in Theory and Practice: Kenyan and Foreign Correspondent Perspectives. <i>Journalism Practice</i>, 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2020.1856707 2. Atanesyan, A. (2020). Media Framing on Armed Conflicts: Limits of Peace Journalism on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict. <i>Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding</i>, 14(4), 534–550. https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2020.1780018 3. Gouse, V., Valentin-Llopis, M., Perry, S., & Nyamwange, B. (2018). An investigation of the conceptualization of peace and war in peace journalism studies of media coverage of national and international conflicts. <i>Media, War & Conflict</i>, 12(4), 435–449. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635218810917 4. Robert K. Yin. (2014). <i>Case Study Research Design and Methods</i> (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. 5. Lee, S. T., & Maslog, C. C. (2005). War or Peace Journalism? Asian Newspaper Coverage of Conflicts. <i>Journal of Communication</i>, 55(2), 311–329. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2005.tb02674.x 6. Tenenboim-Weinblatt, K., & Baden, C. (2018). Gendered Communication Styles in the News: An Algorithmic Comparative Study of Conflict Coverage. <i>Communication Research</i>, 48(2), 233–256. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650218815383 <p>Related theses and dissertations (list of B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. theses defended at Charles University or other academic institutions in the last five years):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. KOPEČNÝ, Ondřej. Warfare and Institutional Communication on Social Media in 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict. Praha, 2021. Diplomová práce. Univerzita Karlova, Fakulta sociálních věd, Katedra bezpečnostních studií. Vedoucí práce Ludvík, Jan. 2. Ohanjanyan, Marie. Reflection of the "Four-Day War" in Nagorno-Karabakh in Russian Media. Praha 2018. Bachelor thesis. Univerzita Karlova, Filozofická fakulta, Advisor: Tumis, Stanislav 3. Hroch, Jaroslav. Does Media Coverage Help to Understand Conflicts? Redefining the Concept of Peace Journalism and a Comparative Analysis of Cyprus and Nagorno Karabakh Conflicts in the Czech Media. Praha 2019. Diploma thesis. Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences. Advisor: Dítřich, Ondřej <p>Date / Signature of the student: [REDACTED]</p>

THIS PART TO BE FILLED BY THE ACADEMIC SUPERVISOR:	
I confirm that I have consulted this research proposal with the author and that the proposal is related to my field of expertise at the Faculty of Social Sciences.	
I agree to be the Thesis supervisor.	
PhDr. Michal Dimitrov, Ph. D.	10. 11. 2021
.....	
Surname and name of the supervisor	Date / Signature of the supervisor
Further recommendations related to the topic, structure and methods for analysis:	
Further recommendations of literature related to the topic:	

The research proposal has to be printed, signed and submitted to the FSV UK registry office (podatelna) in two copies, by **November 15, 2021**, addressed to the Program Coordinator.

Accepted research proposals have to be picked up at the Program Coordinator's Office, Mgr. Sandra Štefaníková. The accepted research proposal needs to be included in the hard copy version of the submitted thesis.

RESEARCH PROPOSALS NEED TO BE APPROVED BY THE HEAD OF ERASMUS MUNDUS JOURNALISM PROGRAM.

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1. Introduction

On February 24th, 2022 Ukrainians were woken by the sounds of bombs. The Russian invasion had just started and still to this day it has not ended. As of July 26th, 2022, according to the data provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the war has caused thousands of deaths and more than six million refugees. However, the war in Ukraine is not an isolated case. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), a non-governmental organisation specialising in disaggregated data collection, analysis, and crisis mapping, there are currently 59 wars in the world. From Myanmar and Afghanistan, to Yemen, Ethiopia, and Syria, these are just some of the major conflicts that Western media tends to ignore. Among the forgotten regions is the South Caucasus. When on September 27th, 2020 Azerbaijan started bombing Nagorno-Karabakh, a de-facto state situated at the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the world was distracted. The covid-19 pandemic had broken out a few months prior, and the Western world was hit by it very badly, while the USA, one of the members of the Minsk Group of the Organisation for the Security in Europe (OSCE) - the collective in charge of finding a peaceful solution to the Karabakh conflict - was busy with its election campaign. Meanwhile Nagorno-Karabakh, which is rarely in the radar of the international community, was on fire. In almost 30 years of a conflict-like situation, Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Karabakh authorities had not reached a peace agreement, and the tension between the parties was so high that on September 27th, 2020, it exploded into a full scale war.

The conflict, which lasted 44 days, caused more than 7000 military and about 150 civilian casualties. The majority of which were soldiers between 18 and 20 years old at the beginning of their military service. This war hardly reached international media, likely due to the lack of interest in the region.

Tiziano Terzani (1995), a famous Italian journalist, wrote in his book “A Fortune-Teller Told Me” about the necessity to report what happens around the world to acknowledge it actually existed:

“How many massacres, how many earthquakes occur in the world, how many ships are sinking, how many volcanoes explode and how many people are persecuted, tortured and killed! Yet, if there is no one who collects a testimony, who writes about it, someone who takes a picture, who leaves a trace of it in a book, it is as if those events had never happened! Suffering without consequences, without history. Because history only exists if someone tells it" (Terzani, 1995)

With these words Terzani highlighted the journalists’ responsibility to report what is occurring around the world. But how to do so? When covering conflicts for instance, are journalists aware that their choice of wording and their frames have an impact on public opinion? And can they help de-escalate a crisis, a conflict?

Several reporters and scholars have focused on what is known as *peace journalism*, a branch of journalism studies funded by the Norwegian scholar J. Galtung, that focuses on the choices editors and reporters can make to improve the chances of peace.

Additionally, some researchers have stressed the gendered dimensions of conflict, war, and peace (as cited in Weinblatt and Baden, 2018). In peacebuilding initiatives, women's contribution to peace has been proven to be significant in ensuring a more sustainable and lasting peace after a war (UN Women, 2019). In fact, their inclusion might lead to enhanced gender equality and therefore, a more sustainable development (as cited in Rosén and Marklund, 2015).

Within war and peace journalism studies, the hypothesis that “women are more

oriented toward peace than men,” (Maoz, 2012, p. 1185) has also received much attention, Galtung himself assuming that the rise of female journalists might lead to more emphasis on peace journalism (as cited in Hanitzsch, 2004). Empirically, however, the evidence is quite mixed, with some studies finding no significant difference between women and men in their attitude towards peace (Weinblatt, Baden, 2018). It is surprising that, given journalists’ key role in shaping public discourse on violent conflict, there’s not enough literature that examines the possibility of gender differences in the prominence of peace-related news discourse (Weinblatt, Baden, 2018). Considering the Nagorno-Karabakh war as a case study, it is worth mentioning that women's contribution to peace has also been remarkable in this context where for example, they helped negotiate prisoners-of-war exchanges on the Armenian-Azerbaijan border (Walsh, 2015).

Consequently, the assumption that guided this study is that also when it comes to journalism, Armenian and Azerbaijani female reporters might be more oriented towards peace than their male counterparts. The research questions that guided this research were the following:

RQ1:

How did Armenian and Azerbaijani female and male journalists cover the 44 days war?

RQ2:

Were there significant differences in the way female and male reporters from both sides reported on it?

RQ3:

What were the journalists' perceptions on peace journalism?

RQ4:

Do they think the gender of the reporter matters when it comes to applying peace

journalism practices and if so, why?

Initially, the aim of this study was to investigate the role of the journalist's gender in covering the 44 days Karabakh war and to collect evidence on whether or not Armenian and Azerbaijani female reporters did more peace journalism than their male counterparts through a mixed method approach: content analysis and semi-structured interviews. However, the majority of the pieces published by the selected Azerbaijani and Armenian media outlets were not signed by the reporters who wrote it thus making it impossible to assess to what extent gender impacts peace or war journalism frames. Instead, the journalists were selected using word of mouth and the snowballing technique. Eight local war reporters, four from Armenia (two females and two males) and four from Azerbaijan (two females and two males) contributed to this study.

In order to find out their coverage habits, the first part of the interviews were conducted using a technique called "*reconstruction interviews*", which consists in re-creating the biography of a few selected news pieces published by the respondents. This helped to spotlight how these journalists create their work giving significant insights to understand the challenges of peace journalism in the region and whether women reporters would be more keen on applying it than their male counterparts.

In the first part of the analysis, the interviews were coded following the theoretical framework inspired by Hoxha and Hanitzsch (2017) on the two main steps of news production: story ideation and story narration, while the second section of the analysis was coded using the principles of thematic analysis, an approach of data analysis that aims at identifying specific themes in relation to the research question in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2008).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 *Peace Journalism*

The terms “peace” and “war” have always been key themes among scholars of international relations, however, it is only in the ‘50s that peace research became a specific academic field (Gleditsch et al. 2014).

Although it is hard to say who was the first one to use the term “peace research”, scholars agree Galtung, a Norwegian researcher, was among the early users in his pacific manifesto. In 1965, he was also the one to introduce the idea of *peace journalism* for the first time. Together with his colleague Mari Holmboe Ruge, he worked on a study about the coverage of international conflicts in Norwegian press and they noticed that the way journalists covered wars was sensationalistic and disregarded the background and context of the conflict (Galtung and Ruge, 1965).

This is when he came up with the idea of peace journalism, a type of journalism where media not only inform about the problem but also describe its causes as well as range of possibilities of resolutions and preventive measures (Galtung, 2003). Adding to Galtung’s work, Jake Lynch argued that peace journalism should not be associated with advocacy, but should be seen as a choice of editors and reporters to showcase to their audience the range of possibilities of nonviolent responses to conflict (as cited in Hussain and Ahmad, 2022) . Lynch and McGoldrick’s approach also highlights the connections between journalists, their sources, the topics they cover, and the impact and consequences of their reporting (Youngblood, 2016).

Furthermore, Benn (2015) included the definition of “active” and “passive” peace journalism, the former actively promoting solutions and the latter avoiding criticising the war.

Moreover, a further expansion of the definition of peace journalism is given by the Center for Global Peace Journalism which underlines the responsibility of editors and reporters to make choices that improve the chances of peace. Among those choices are the story frame, the words used and the space that is given to peace initiatives and peace makers (Youngblood, 2016).

In the past years scholars have investigated peace journalism through a multitude of approaches: from content analysis, to critical discourse analysis, to interviews with war reporters, applying mainly the war and peace journalism model developed by Galtung in 1998 (Hussain and Ahmad, 2021). According to Galtung's model, war and peace coverage can be divided in the following categories: four frames of war coverage—violence oriented, propaganda oriented, elite oriented, difference oriented - and four frames of peace coverage—peace oriented, truth oriented, people oriented and solution oriented (Hussain and Ahmad, 2021).

However, this concept is not exempt from criticism. Among the major critical remarks scholars addressed in this branch of journalism is that there is the lack of strong theoretical support (Hussain and Ahmad, 2021). For others, the polarity of Galtung's model of either peace or war journalism frames does not represent journalistic content fairly, as they believe journalists' work lies in between these two extremes (Hussain and Ahmad, 2021). There are also those who find the term *peace* itself to be problematic as they believe it can be misunderstood for advocacy, rather than objective journalism (Youngblood, 2016).

2.1.1 The power of media in conflict de-escalation

Despite the critics, scholars have collected evidence on the media's power of conflict de-escalation (Ersoy, 2016). There are several key aspects that spotlight the news media's impact during conflicts:

Media has access to the key political settings and stakeholders of a peace process, it

has an impact on the narrative of the conflict and its solutions and it can influence the legitimacy of the actors involved in the peace process in the eyes of the general public (Jan, 2011).

One example of the impact of the media on public opinion is the case of the Cypriot referendum on the acceptance of the Annan Plan - a proposal to solve the Cypriot question by reuniting the two communities into a federal Republic. During the referendum phase, the Turkish Cypriot media positively influenced public opinion on the acceptance of the proposed Plan (Ersoy, 2016). Another example of the impact of peace journalism in conflict situations is given by the role of Northern Ireland's mainstream media in the Irish peace process. Bratic et al. (2008) showed how the news media helped pass the referendum on the conflict resolution, showing the impact of a successful collaboration between politics and the media.

Long lasting peace processes, however, need time, and the news industry does not have time to wait (as cited in Ersoy, 2016). This is one of the main limits of peace journalism.

Furthermore, Youngblood (2016) underlines several other obstacles to the applicability of this approach: war-like societies, media economics, press freedom, and safety for journalists. According to Lynch and Galtung (as cited in Youngblood, 2016), there is a connection between the media and the violence of a society, and they believe the United States' media environment better exemplifies this link: the three most important arms industries are into the three major US media groups and therefore peace and reconciliation will never be appealing to them as they do not boost the business.

When it comes to media economics, it is known that the media profits from advertising, views and clicks, and circulation in the case of print media. In the last decades, that need for attention has increased as Western media faced an engagement crisis that subsequently led to more sensationalism.

Additionally, the applicability of peace journalism principles seem almost impossible in countries where governments have strong control over the media and journalists and media outlets can be punished for writing something that does not align with the government's views.

2.1.2 The Karabakh conflict

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is the longest-running in post-Soviet Eurasia.

The origins of the conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis root back to 1988, when ethnic Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh demanded to relocate what was then the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) from Soviet Azerbaijan to Armenia (Atlante delle Guerre, 2021). When the Soviet Union collapsed, tensions grew into a full-scale war which lasted until the parties signed a ceasefire agreement in 1994. As a result, Nagorno-Karabakh and seven adjacent districts were wholly or partially controlled by Armenian forces. Thousands became victims, and the people forced to flee were both Karabakh and Azerbaijan. The de-facto leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh declared its independence and the status quo lasted 26 years. However, the hostilities between the two states never definitively ceased, culminating in the "four-days war" in 2016 and in the "44 days war" or second Karabakh war between September 27th and November 10th, 2020, which ended with a ceasefire agreement brokered by Russia. This time Azerbaijan gained control over the seven districts adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh and a significant part of Nagorno-Karabakh itself, while Russian peacekeepers monitored the rest (International Crisis Group, 2022).

2.2 Patriarchal norms in Armenia and Azerbaijan

2.2.1 Armenia

In Armenian society, patriarchal norms favour boys over girls (Khachatryan et al. 2014) and women are expected to be in the private sphere, where they can fully devote themselves to their children and not be engaged in the public sphere (Ghazaryan, 2020). When their husbands leave to search for a job abroad, women do fulfil some additional tasks, but these new occupations do not challenge the deeply ingrained gender inequality (Menjívar and Agadjanian, 2007).

Nowadays, Armenian women's status and health often depends on the extent to which they correspond to the traditional idea of a 'perfect' woman: delicate, obedient, decent, willing to concede, and loyal (Ghazaryan, 2020).

According to a study by Iskandaryan et al. (2013), Armenian media perpetuates the idea of an idealised woman who accomplishes her traditional duties (looking after her husband, raising children and keeping the house) but can also be professionally successful unless social restraints keep her back. However, the last data available about the country's Gender Pay Gap estimates it around 28.4% (UN Women, 2020) meaning that the road to economic success is still long for Armenian women.

Additionally, Armenia ranks as the second most militarised country in Europe, according to the Global Militarization Index (2019) and as Elveren and Moghadam (2019) have shown in their study, militarization positively correlates with gender inequality and the war zone in particular is an extreme case of a gendered, hostile, and male-dominated work environment (Palmer and Melki, 2016).

During the 44 days war -known also as the second Karabakh war- fought between September 27th, 2020 and November 10th, 2020, the national war narratives depicted women from both sides as the mothers of the nation, the ones who will give birth to future soldiers who will protect the country (Snip, 2020).

Despite women's efforts to demand the end of fighting and establish peace, they have been mostly excluded from the negotiations (PeaceWomen, 2020).

2.2.2 Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan gained its independence in 1991 together with the other post-soviet countries. However, the transition from the Soviet Union to being a sovereign country caused a lot of political, social and economic instability (Geybullayeva, 2009) which was noticeable at the family level too. Men, who used to be the breadwinners - or in other words the ones who financially sustained the family - found themselves in precarious positions, but this did not mean a change of expectations towards traditional gender roles in the family, which remained unaltered (Aliyeva, 2019).

Thus, men were often portrayed as 'victims' of the transitional period since 'unemployment resulted in the man's decreasing authority in the household' (UNDP, 2007).

Nowadays, patriarchal norms are reinforced by the Azerbaijani government's nationalistic narrative, known as the *socialist paternalism* (Verdery, 1996), that compares the independent state to patriarchal family units, meaning that the presidents Heydar Aliyev and later his son Ilham Aliyev - who succeeded him and who is now the current president - became father figures (Militz, 2020).

In these circumstances, Azerbaijani women find limited space of participation at the political and social level, a situation that has worsened in recent years as some new laws have obstructed people's willingness to express their views (Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, 2019).

2.3 Media landscape in Armenia and Azerbaijan

2.3.1 Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is a consolidated authoritarian regime (Freedom House, 2022) where media are highly restricted and under the control of the country's President Ilham Aliyev, who took power in 2003 after the death of his father Heydar Aliyev.

Prominent independent and opposition journalists and editors are often harassed and arrested (Geybulla, 2021). At the time of writing this thesis, there are currently two journalists imprisoned: Polad Aslanov, editor in-chief and founder of two independent news websites - Xeberman and Press-az- and the blogger and member of the Azerbaijan Nationalist Democratic Party (ANDP) Eyvaz Yahyaoglu (RSF, 2022).

The former, accused of conspiring against the government and selling state secrets to Iran, said he was targeted because of his investigations about state corruption (FNF, 2021).

The latter, arrested on charges of disobedience to a public officer, runs a YouTube channel spotlighting violations of citizens' rights (Jam News, 2022).

In the 2021 annual report on media freedom of 'Reporters Without Borders', Azerbaijan ranked 154th out of 180 countries.

Since the country gained independence from the Soviets, Azerbaijani independent media have struggled to exist, but it is especially since 2003, when Ilham Aliyev took leadership, that the situation worsened (Geybulla, 2021).

In 2014, officials assaulted the Azerbaijani service of Radio Free Europe and arrested Khadija Ismayilova, the former bureau chief (Rfe, 2015).

She was convicted to 7.5 years imprisonment, but was released on probation in 2016 (Geybulla, 2021). A few days later, the same fate happened to the award winning journalist Emin Mill of Meydan TV, one of the few independent media with an

Azerbaijani office, which was also forced to shut down (Hetq, 2014). Today, they continue their work from Berlin, a much safer city for journalists, counting on the contribution of citizens and journalists on the ground (Ballweg, 2017). However, the challenges did not stop. On June 18, 2020, Meydan TV's Facebook page was hacked and nearly all his content got lost (Crouch, 2020).

According to Geybulla (2021), the challenges for media in exile are numerous and providing a balanced and trustworthy report becomes even harder when afar, without direct access to sources and places. However, exile also inspires innovation, and despite the government's crackdown on free press, the media found new forms of resistance.

Some examples are for instance Mikroskop media, an online media that creates explainers and visuals or Sancaq TV, a socio-political magazine active on social media (Geybulla, 2021).

When on September 27th 2020 the war in Nagorno-Karabakh broke out, Azerbaijan declared martial law. Internet limitations and censorship rose (RSF, 2020) and according to the data collected by the Open Observatory of Network Interference(OONI) between October 2020 and February 2021, several social media websites and apps were blocked (Geybullayeva et al., 2021). This made the work of the few independent media left in the country very hard.

Additionally, foreign journalists faced restrictions to their jobs: in fact, the ones who entered Nagorno Karabakh from Armenia without an official permission from Azerbaijan could find themselves on the blacklist that has been published by Azerbaijan since 2013 (RSF, 2020).

2.3.2 Armenia

According to the 2022 annual report published by Freedom House, Armenia is a partially free country. The same year it ranked 51st out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom index of Reporters Without Borders. However, according to Shushan Doydoyan, President of the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia, there have been some changes in the way the Index is calculated and it does not evaluate the tense political situation in the country (Vardanyan, 2022).

As for neighbouring Azerbaijan, the main changes in the media landscape started to take place after the country's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. But while the developments of a multiparty system, freedom of speech and expression started immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the technology and media sectors saw a drastic change with the advent of the Internet and the development of digital technologies (Baghiyan, 2022).

In 2001 Armenia became a member of the Council of Europe and since then, it has signed and ratified several conventions including the European Convention on Human Rights and has committed to protect the freedom of the media as a participant state in the Organisation for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) (Sargsyan, 2014).

During the leadership of Serzh Sargsyan (2008-2018), however, the media struggled to have access to him. In fact, Sargsyan had few contact with journalists during the first year of his presidency and later on, he was open to just a few chosen reporters and media outlets (Harutyunyan, 2020). When in 2018, Nikol Pashinyan, a former journalist, took power after leading the so called "Velvet Revolution", a nonviolent movement to protest against injustice and corruption in the country, journalists gained hope that they would be able to work in a freer media environment (Lewis, 2022). In fact, under the Pashinyan government, media diversity rose. However, his

government failed to keep his promises of passing reforms in the field of official information and market liberalisation (Lewis, 2022).

The media landscape appears as polarised as the political environment: if on one hand, most of the newspapers are loyal to the leaders who emerged after 2018, on the other one, many remain close to old oligarchs (rsf, 2022). After the defeat in the 2020 war, Pashinyan became more susceptible to criticism; in fact, in August 2021 the Parliament forbade journalists access to the legislative chamber without advanced approval and limited the area for interviews with the MPs, fining those who do not respect this rule (Lewis, 2022).

Like Azerbaijan, when the 44 days war broke out Armenia declared martial law.

As a consequence, the work of the media was restricted and on October 8th 2020 the government prohibited the publication of information critical of the government and public servants. Media could be charged with heavy fines and their assets and online content could be frozen (Nahapetyan, 2021). The war coverage basically consisted of amplifying the statements of the Ministry of Defence and the content provided by state media, meaning independent media and Russian state-funded media did not differ much (ERMES, 2021).

2.4 Women War Reporters

Scholars widely consider the Vietnam war the milestone of the increase of women war reporters. In fact, the changes of the Vietnam era, from the developments in new media technologies to the shift towards guerrilla and terrorist-led forms of combat from the traditional military front lines, highlighted the necessity of new skills such as flexibility and improvisation that women journalists could offer. (Chambers et al. 2004).

Another landmark for women war correspondents was the 2002 Afghanistan War. But in this case, their popularity increased mainly on television news, not necessarily in other less-exposing media and it was mainly due to a renewed attention to international news in the post 9/11 era and an overall increase in the number of both men and women war journalists (Palmer and Melki, 2016).

However, their rise did not mean parity with their male counterparts. Instead, women were mostly publicly condemned for taking risks in their careers and the war zone represents the most extreme case of such unequal and gendered work environments (Palmer and Melki, 2016). Nevertheless, there is significant support for the view that the presence of women reporters in modern conflict has shifted the focus of the traditional masculine reporting style on bullets and bombs to civilian sufferings (Harris and Williams, 2018) and that gender affects the relationship with subjects, especially when engaging intimately with female subjects (Campbell and Critcher, 2018).

Palmer and Melki (2016) focused their research on the strategy of *shape-shifting* of women war reporters- a phenomenon that consists in switching gender performances depending on the environment and the audience. They conducted 72 qualitative interviews with English and Arabic-speaking women journalists who have covered wars and conflicts especially in the Middle East. Their findings highlighted three different levels of shape-shifting: some women reporters said they can work in the exact same way as their male counterparts, others said they tend to accentuate their feminine accessibility and intuition when navigating private spaces and when engaging with female sources. Finally, some said they highlight their version of feminine weakness especially when it could save them from a dangerous situation. The research showed how women need to be versatile to navigate the hostile war reporting environment, but if being a female reporter can be advantageous in chauvinist environments as being “just the woman” can give the reporter easier access to sources and stories (Harris et al., 2018) it is worth highlighting that this

advantage, however, relies on the sexist idea that women are inoffensive (Melki and Mallat, 2014).

In terms of safety, the situation does not get any better.

The 2015 Reporters Without Borders's "Safety Guide for Journalists" states that women war reporters risk on different fronts: from sexual violence and sexual assault, to being targeted for being female journalists. The Guide also highlights the importance of the 2015 UN Security Council resolution 2222 that affirms, among many other things, the necessity of considering gender when evaluating measures to protect journalists as it is clear the risks faced by female war reporters are different from the ones experienced by their male colleagues (as cited in Earnhardt, 2020).

In the 21st century war reporting started to rely more on the contribution of freelance reporters and although this means not being backed by media houses and therefore that the journalist assumes personally all the risks on the field, it may be an occasion for women war reporters to find space to tell stories from their perspective in a male-dominated industry (Earnhardt, 2020).

2.5 Women as peace agents

Women's contribution has also appeared to be very significant in peace building initiatives, ensuring a more sustainable and lasting peace after a war (UN Women, 2019). Even though in the last decades women's rights witnessed some major improvements with international tools such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security, women's presence in peace processes remains marginal, especially at the local community level (Zanoni, 2017). In fact, according to the data collected over

16 years -from 1992 to 2018- by UN Women (2019), women represent only 13% of negotiators, 3% of mediators and only 4% of signatories of peace processes.

Nonetheless, women around the world have played a crucial role in facilitating negotiations and breaking the cycle of violence (Noma et al., 2012).

For example, in Nepal, the work of women's organisations was fundamental to bring Maoists and the Nepali government - enemies during the civil war - to the negotiation table (Kolås, 2017). In Kenya, women like Wangari Maathai- the first African woman to win the Nobel prize- Sarah Akoru Lochodo and Wahu Kaara assumed the role of leaders of positive change by using their skills to mediate peace deals in several Kenyan communities (Zanoni, 2017).

In Colombia, six years after the sign of the peace agreement between the Colombian government and the main rebel group, violence persists in many regions and young women heal the wounds of decades of conflict by assuming the role of peace agents (Devia-Valbuena et al., 2021).

Women's contribution to peace has also been remarkable in the context of the war between Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Karabakh forces over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, a *de-facto*¹¹ state located at the border between the two countries.

Among the many outstanding initiatives they carried out, they helped negotiate prisoners-of-war exchanges on the Armenian-Azerbaijan border (Walsh, 2015).

Their efforts, especially at the civil society level, however, did not mean visibility at the political level (Abrahamyan et al., 2018). To overcome this obstacle, women organisations in the region have appealed to international agreement on the theme of Women, Peace and Security and called for the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women's participation in peace

¹ This expression refers to a place that exercises internal sovereignty over its citizens but is not recognized by most of the world as the *de jure* legal authority in that territory.

processes. But despite its importance, the resolution is not exempt from criticisms. Nikoghosyan (2017), an Armenian women rights defender, highlighted some of the major issues of the resolution: women are associated with beings in need of protection and consequently, the military appears to be an important institution to rely on to ensure their security, bolstering gender stereotypes. Additionally, Nikoghosyan also stressed that one of the major goals of the resolution is to expand women's contribution to the security and the military sectors, meaning that they will become part of a patriarchal environment that propagates violence against them.

Until nowadays, women's presence in negotiations, peacebuilding initiatives remains extremely low (Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, 2019) and the increasing war propaganda from both nations has been obstructing their contribution to the peace process (Snip, 2020).

In 30 years of conflict-like situations the collective memories and identities of Azerbaijanis and Armenians have developed against one another, having at the centre of their narratives an "Us versus Them" (Gamaghelyan, 2010).

Furthermore, as shown before, in countries that are not free or partially free, the government has basically full control over the media, meaning that alternative voices to the war narratives would likely not find space to be heard. Plus, if the level of freedom is unequal like in this case, building constructive dialogues might be even harder (Atanesyan, 2020). Atanesyan (2020) analyzed the media framing of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and whether Peace Journalism (PJ) is possible in

this political context and concluded that the media mostly uses a language of confrontation and therefore, peace journalism results are marginal. Media peace initiatives are usually carried out by local non-governmental organizations and small private media agencies and rarely do they reach institutional level of attention.

An initiative that is worth mentioning is the campaign Women for Peace launched by the journalist Anna Hakobyan (spouse of the prime minister of Armenia) in July

2018. The goal of this campaign was to bring together women leaders, activists of both societies involved in the conflict, highlighting the necessity of the inclusion of more women into peace building initiatives (Atanesyan, 2020). Hokobyan's attempt to bring Azerbaijani and Armenian women together for peace was the first initiative of its kind, promoted by an official figure of one of the two countries, giving hopes for a new engagement of civil society in promoting peace. In leading this campaign, Hakobyan, who is herself a journalist, embraced the principles of peace journalism (Atanesyan, 2020). But at the end of August 2020, she made a controversial decision: As part of the "Women for Peace Initiative", she organised a military training for Armenian women in Nagorno-Karabakh, generating resentment especially on the Azerbaijani side (Oc Media, 2020). The controversy of a peace initiative that turned into a military training sums up the complexity of reflecting about peace in the region.

3. Methodology

The initial aim of this study was to answer the following research questions:

What was the role of the journalist's gender in covering the 44 days war in Nagorno-Karabakh? Did Azerbaijani and Armenian female reporters do more peace journalism than their male counterparts?

For the purpose of this research, the idea was to investigate this matter by combining two methods of data collection: content analysis and semi-structured interviews inspired by Arregui et al. (2020) research on the use of *peace journalism(PJ)* in the local and foreign coverage of the 2017 election violence and the 2019 Dusit attack in Kenya. Arregui et al. used content analysis and semi-structured interviews to examine the prominence of peace journalism frames amongst local and foreign reporters as they point out that most of the existing PJ-related literature uses content analysis and to a smaller extent qualitative interviews. Therefore, the mixed-methods approach helped them understand through the content analysis how journalists reported the events and then, they used the identified themes to prepare the questions for the semi-structured interviews with local and foreign journalists.

According to the plan above-mentioned, this research would use content analysis to analyse news stories, feature articles, opinion columns, editorials published between September 27th (date of the outbreak of the war) and December 31st, 2020 in two of the most followed Armenian and Azerbaijani online media, such as 1in.am and Civilnet.am in Armenia and Azadlig.org (Radio Liberty) and Meydan Tv in Azerbaijan. The time frame, that exceeds the 44 days of war, was chosen to have more chances of including more in depth analysis, opinions, peace related articles that are more likely to be published when the war is over, after the signing of the trilateral agreement between Yerevan, Moscow and Baku on November 10th, 2020.

Then, the findings would have been deepened with semi-structured interviews with 2 females, 2 males Armenian journalists; 2 females, 2 males Azerbaijani journalists whose articles were part of the sample chosen for the content analysis.

However, a preliminary analysis of some of the articles planned to be included in the sample, highlighted a considerably big obstacle for the purpose of this research: the majority of the pieces published by the selected Azerbaijani and Armenian media outlets were not signed by the reporters who wrote it and therefore, it would have been impossible to assess to what extent gender impacts peace or war journalism frames.

Thinking on how to face this challenge, it seemed useful to do an overview of the articles published by other online newspapers, hoping to find a good sample to use, but unfortunately the problem persisted. So how to overcome this obstacle?

It became clear that the research approach had to be changed and therefore, its methodology.

Consequently, instead of relying on the mix method approach and on the selection of the journalists to interview through the content analysis of their pieces, the journalists were selected using word of mouth and the *snowballing technique* - the method of obtaining interviewees by asking the research respondents to introduce the study to someone they know (Griffin, 2017). In doing this, the issue of not finding the authors of the articles was overcome, since local journalists, who were working during the months above mentioned, were purposely selected.

The search of the respondents however, was still quite challenging. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that while for the Armenian side it was slightly easier to directly contact the journalists selected, for the Azerbaijani side, the selection process relied on what Reich & Aviv Barnoy (2016) have described as the 'middlemen' or in other words, a person that knows the potential respondents personally and can encourage them to take part in the research.

Adopting this approach helped minimise the reporters' refusal to collaborate with the study, although the selection process continued to be extremely difficult, due to the sensitivity of the topic and the risks journalists face, especially in Azerbaijan, to openly share their views on the war.

Despite that, this study relies on 8 semi-structured interviews:

4 from the Armenian side (2 male reporters and 2 female reporters) and 4 from the Azerbaijani side (2 male reporters and 2 female reporters). Out of more than 20 journalists contacted, they are the ones who agreed to contribute to this research. Among the many reasons why others refused to take part are the fear of speaking up against the government, being too busy covering the Russian aggression in Ukraine and its consequences on the feeble balances in the region, but also being tired of talking about the war as it was their own war and many have lost their close relatives in it.

The table below shows the list of the respondents, including their name, gender, country of origin and newspapers they worked for during the war:

Gender	Name	Country	Newspaper
Male	Heydar Isayev	Azerbaijan	Mikroskop media
Male	Seymur Kasimov	Azerbaijan	Aljazeera and pressclub.az
Female	Gunel Safarova	Azerbaijan	BBC Azerbaijan Service
Female	Sabine Abubakirova	Azerbaijan	OC Media
Male	Aren Melykian	Armenia	CNN and BBC international
Male	Karen Harutyunian	Armenia	Civilnet TV.am
Female	Ami Chichakyan	Armenia	Aravot.am
Female	Ani Grigoryan	Armenia	Fip.am

Once the interviewees were found, they were asked to present their work published between September 27th, 2020 - day of the war outbreak- and December 31st, 2020. I received 23 videos from Gunel Safarova, 72 articles from Ami Chichakyan, 6 articles and 1 video report from Aren Melykian, 9 articles from Ani Grigoryan, 1 article by Karen Harutyunian, 3 articles by Sabine Abubakirova, 1 article from Heydar Isayev and 4 articles from Seymur Kasimov.

For each of the respondents, I selected two articles or video reports to discuss with them during the interview phase, except for Karen Harutyunian and Heydar Isayev that shared just one article for the time indicated.

The criteria used for the selection of the articles was based on the willingness to differentiate not only the overall sample to work with, but also the pieces selected for each of the journalists.

The interviews were conducted using a technique introduced by Reich (2009; 2011) and Brüggemann (2013) called ‘the reconstruction interview’- a method for studying the news production process, which is often under investigation. Contrary to traditional interviews, which are usually general discussions about the respondents work practices, reconstructions are item-anchored which means that interviewees are asked to rebuild the creation of specific news items that were pre-selected, purposely or randomly, by the scholar (Reich & Aviv Barnoy, 2016).

When studying conflict and peace journalism, the majority of researchers rely on the analysis of news content and it is rare that they study how the news were created (Hoxha & Hanitzsch, 2017). Therefore, this study aims to be a contribution to a less common way of researching peace and war journalism practices.

During the part of reconstruction, the respondents were asked to tell what triggered a certain story, how it was built and why it was built in a certain way, what was the relationship with the sources and if they had editorial freedom or not. The questions and the consequent theoretical framework used for the coding about the two main steps of the news production process -story narration and story ideation- were inspired by Hoxha & Hanitzsch’s (2017) research on how conflict news came into being.

The second part of the interview followed a more traditional interview style and the interviewees were asked about their role as journalists, their views on peace journalism and on whether they think the reporters’ gender influence a peace or war

journalism approach and if yes, how.

The answers were coded using *theoretical thematic analysis* - an approach of data analysis that tends to be more analyst driven and that aims at identifying specific themes in relation to the research question in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2008)-.

The research questions that drove this study were the following:

RQ1: How did Armenian and Azerbaijani female and male journalists cover the 44 days war?

RQ2: Were there significant differences in the way female and male reporters from both sides reported on it?

RQ3: What were the journalists' perceptions on peace journalism?

RQ4: Do they think the gender of the reporter matters when it comes to applying peace journalism practices and if so, why?

4. Analysis

In order to answer the first research question and understand how Armenian and Azerbaijani female and male reporters covered the 44 days Karabakh war, this study adopted the reconstruction interview approach, a relatively new research technique that aims at identifying the process behind the creation of a news story.

Deconstructing the way local reporters built some of the stories they published during the duration of the war and in the month that followed, helped understanding their coverage habits and the environment they work in and therefore, it added some concrete foundations to further interpret the second part of the analysis about the journalists' perceptions of peace journalism, the possibilities and challenges of this approach in the region and if the reporter's gender plays a role in applying peace journalism principles.

Thanks again to the reconstruction approach, It turned out that even those who believe in the importance of adopting a peace journalism approach in news stories in the region, in practice were limited by several factors such as their own biases on the war, the fear of being targeted for sharing a different view from what the local audience expects to hear and read and the strict rules of the martial law.

It is also worth mentioning that two of the Azerbaijani journalists were refugees of the first Karabakh war themselves and one Armenian journalist risked being recruited by the Armenian army while working as a reporter. Although they were among the supporters of peace journalism, their experiences highlighted the extreme difficulty of having to silence the side of themselves that has direct and personal memory of the precariousness of life during and after the first Karabakh war and the fear of being one of the soldiers fighting at the frontline in the case of the Armenian journalist.

Peace journalism, although necessary, is not seen as a priority nor of the media owners, or of the respective governments. It is considered an approach embraced by

a niche of reporters that most likely will not reach a broad audience, but that some believe it is likely to be practised more by women journalists than men as the patriarchal structure of the Armenian and Azerbaijani societies does not easily allow men to talk about peace. As all the reporters interviewed were raised in these societies, it is likely that the societal expectations in terms of gender roles will apply also to the journalism environment they work in.

The first part of this analysis will focus on the reconstruction of the reporters' work pieces and on what Hoxha and Hanitzsch (2017) called "story ideation" and "story narration", the two main steps of the news production process, while the second part will concentrate on the reporter's views on peace journalism, their role as journalists and their opinions on whether they believe the reporter's gender matters when it comes to applying peace journalism practices and if so, how.

Among the major findings of the first section of the analysis, it stood out the initial difficulty of Chichakyan, an Armenian female reporter, to be accepted as a professional figure in the hyper masculine environment of the Armenian army.

Additionally, the reconstruction approach was helpful to spotlight the complexity of the use of what some respondents called the 'correct' terminology, meaning on one hand, a wording that satisfies the requests of balance of international media and on the other one, choosing to use the terms that align with the dominant narrative of the conflict in the respective countries when reporting for local media. It seemed that these choices were triggered both by the journalists personal views on the conflict, but also by the fear of being targeted and/or arrested in times of martial law if they shared alternative views to the national war propaganda. However, choosing a language of containment and that can help de-escalating the conflict is one of the pillars of peace journalism (Ndhlovu, 2021) and in making these differentiations, local reporters are supporting the war narrative of the respective countries and therefore, are pushing further away the possibility of finding a common ground for peace.

4.1 Story ideation

Following Hoxha and Hanitzsch (2018) approach to news reconstruction, the first part of the analysis focused on the story ideation, the first step of news production.

As they suggest, there are several ways the story comes into being.

In this study, the interviewees showed that when it comes to conflict reporting their approach was mostly *event-driven*- an event occurs and the journalist needs to report about it- *proactive* - the journalist suggests a story idea or *reactive*- someone else gives the story input.

The fact that reporters from both sides had more of an *event-driven* approach underlines several aspects of their report habits during the war: it was the constant flow of events to guide their coverage, meaning they had little or no time at all to reflect on the angle and the frame to use. Additionally, the news industry expects them to be as fast as possible and speed hinders peace journalism.

From this section of the analysis it emerged that the major differences between the reporters' ways of finding stories ideas were due to the type of newspaper they were writing for, whether it was a local or an international one, whether it was news oriented or more human centred, if the journalists were covering it from the ground with direct access to sources or if they were writing from their offices in Yerevan, Baku or Tbilisi.

Among the 8 participants in this study, 4 covered it from the ground, while 4 reported it from Baku, Yerevan or Tbilisi. The fact that not all of them were able to report from the war zone was mostly due to the Azerbaijani government's prohibition of accessing the war area both for Azerbaijani and international reporters and for the lack of willingness of an international media outlet to guarantee the security of one of his contributors in case he would decide to report from there.

Ami Chichakyan and Ani Grigoryan, two Armenian female journalists were in Karabakh almost throughout the entire duration of the war, while Seymur Kasimov - among the first journalists to enter the Karabakh areas reconquered by Azerbaijani forces- and Gunel Safarova covered the bombing of Barda, Ganja and Manghichevir in Azerbaijan.

On the other hand, Heydar Isayev was in Baku, Sabine Abubakirova was in Tbilisi and Aren Melikyan and Karen Harutyunian were in Yerevan.

In this phase, the reporter's gender was relevant in the case of Ami Chichakyan, who first had to be accepted in the masculine environment of the military before being able to do her job and Gunel Safarova, who on the other hand, found easier to access sources in Azerbaijan as a female reporter.

Regarding how they found their stories, for the majority, it was the constant flow of events that inspired the pieces they created.

For example, Seymur Kasimov describes the hastiness of war reporting with the following words:

“During war you cannot have plans, everything happens suddenly. You cannot choose your focus. You are on the ground and you have to decide right now what type of angle is going to be interesting” (Seymur Kasimov, personal communication, May, 10, 2022).

Gunel Safarova also understands the immediacy of war reporting.

In fact, she found herself close to Mingachevir and Ganja, two Azerbaijani cities shelled by Armenian forces, when the bombing happened, so she was left with no options but to report on it:

“First I went to the houses that were bombed, then I did a video, but then my editor asked

me to just talk to people in the street. So I just took my phone and mic and talked to anyone who wanted to say something. A sort of vox pop. It was nothing special, I did not have this idea for days, but with BBC Azerbaijan we always want to do vox pop because it is easy to do and you hear people's voices, so that's why I did it" (Gunel Safarova, personal communication, April, 14, 2022).

On the other hand, Ami Chichakyan and Ani Grigoryan were reporting from Nagorno-Karabakh which was only accessible for Armenian and international journalists and not for Azerbaijani reporters.

At the time, Grigoryan was working for an Armenian independent fact checking platform and she decided to go to Karabakh to verify the statements of the Azerbaijani government. When asked about what triggered the story selected for the reconstruction, Grigoryan said:

"There was censorship and we were banned from posting anything which will not coincide with the government statements. So there was a lack of information and we decided to go to Karabakh to understand what was going on there. We knew that Azerbaijan was using weapons that are banned by international law. So we went there to fact check and collect evidence that Azerbaijan is using banned weapons" (Ani Grigoryan, personal communication, April, 29, 2022).

When on October 7th, 2020 Azerbaijani forces bombed Shushi cathedral, one of the most important churches for Armenian believers, Grigoryan and her team went there a few minutes after the shelling:

"On the 7th of October, Azerbaijani bombed Shushi cathedral and we went there after 5 minutes because we were in the city and after that the [Azerbaijani] government said they

bombed it because there were soldiers hiding there. But we saw there was no one in the church. There was just one family in the shelter: a woman with 2 or 3 kids, no weapons at all” (Ani Grigoryan, personal communication, April, 29, 2022).

This is how this story came into being.

On the other hand, Ami Chichakyan, an Armenian female reporter, had a slightly different approach.

In fact, out of the four reporters on the ground she had more of a *proactive* approach to story ideas. In her case, it was the environment she found herself in to inspire most of her stories. For example, the protagonist of one of the stories discussed during the interview is a Syrian-Armenian family who moved to Karabakh after the outbreak of the Syrian war. During the 44 days war the whole family remained in Karabakh and was helping to provide food for soldiers and journalists. After eating at their stand and chatting with this family for days, Chichakyan realised it was important to tell their story:

“When we were in Karabakh it was very hard for us to survive, to find something to eat, there were several shops open but we were staying at the press center which was located in a school, so we didn’t have a kitchen or any place to eat. Luckily there were some places that provided free food and their shop was one of those. Everytime we would have a very interesting discussion with Hovik, the father of the family and this is how we got the idea. It was also because we stayed in their basement during the bombing. I found out they escaped the war in Syria and they came to another war really understanding what war is. Usually when you escape the war you don’t want to go to another one. But I was very impressed by this story and by this family and I finally decided that I had to write this article, I did not want to miss it” (Ami Chichakyan, personal communication, April, 6, 2022).

The second time she went to Karabakh during the war, she was embedded with the military, following her editor's advice. At the beginning she struggled to be accepted in the masculine environment of the army. As the only woman in the group, the soldiers felt like they could not behave as they would do if she wasn't there:

“Because I was the only woman they felt limited. For instance, they felt like they could not swear because I was there. I remember hearing someone saying “that is not her place, let her go back to Yerevan. I came to war and I have to swear. I don't care about her” (Ami Chichakyan, personal communication, April 6, 2022).

However, It was her professionalism that helped her get accepted among the soldiers and therefore, allowed her to do her job:

“I spent more than two weeks with them. There was an adaptation phase for me and for them. I was living with 50+ men and I was an alien to them. They did not know me, they didn't understand what I was doing there. They were told that I was a journalist, not a spy, but they were sceptical about what I would do with that info. It was after a couple of stories I did that they started trusting me” (Ami Chichakyan, personal communication, April 6th, 2022).

On the other side, Safarova, an Azerbaijani female reporter, believes being a woman is advantageous for a journalist in her country:

“If you are a woman and go to places people are more keen to talk to you. They see you smiling, being sweet and it is more likely they will open up to you.

If a man goes to film them, they will feel more defensive. It depends a lot on society though,

but for example for me as a woman it was quite easy to find people to talk to” (Gunel Safarova, personal communication, April 14th, 2022).

The two apparently opposite experiences of Chichakyan and Safarova are in reality extremely linked: as we saw in the literature section, Harris et al., (2018) highlighted that in chauvinist environments being a woman can give the reporter easier access to sources and stories, as patriarchal norms of both societies depict women as more obedient and kind than men, but this relies on the sexist idea that women are inoffensive (Melki and Mallat, 2014). While on the other hand, finding her place in the hyper masculine environment of the army can be more challenging for a women war reporter, as patriarchal norms place women in the private sphere and certainly not in a war zone.

Melikyan and Kasimov pointed out that their own judgement of a story's relevance varies depending on the media they are writing it for and whether it is a local or an international media.

Melikyan noticed that when he worked for CNN, the choice of the story and the angle were depending on the editors, who were mainly interested in covering the fights:

“The format was unknown to me and in the way we did, we were very much dependent on the editors. So me and Arzu were contributing for our countries although she is located in Turkey because she had issues with her government in Azerbaijan and then we were editing together. At the beginning there was a lot of interest in what was happening on the battlefield, the missiles, the rockets but by the time gone, the interest was gone as well in regard to international media. So it was the 5th of October, just one week after the beginning of the war and there was still a bit of interest so we were pitching stories saying Armenia

accuses Azerbaijan for this and Azerbaijan accuses Armenia for this” (Aren Melikyan, personal communication, April 13th, 2022).

The same journalist believes several factors made it very hard for this war to reach international media and make headlines. Among some of the reasons there is the fact that not many people know about the region and that media players do not have interest in it. Therefore, in order to reach an international audience and avoid collaborating with Armenian media, whose way of covering the war did not align with his, he decided to compromise his style of journalism and work for CNN:

“There was a time that I was obliged to do that [type of coverage] because that was the requirement, so it was a decision I made for many reasons. I still have a lot of questions like: should I have gone to Nagorno Karabakh or not? But I did not want to cover the war for the Armenian media, I was really exhausted with all that propaganda and I was not sharing all the views and ideologies that Armenian media was propagating and this is why working for international media was the best solution for me at that moment (Aren Melikyan, personal communication, April 13th, 2022).

Melikyan showed the complexity of the struggle between the journalist’s ethical standards and the necessity to be heard and find a good space for the stories.

His work experience was different with the BBC, whose style of journalism is closer to his. BBC showed more interest in covering the Karabakh war as they sent almost all their services to the region, but what Melikyan found very important was the fact that they wanted to give space to human stories, something that, he argues, was missing both from the CNN coverage and from local media:

“Armenian journalists were really busy covering the authority statements and the human part was really missing while the foreign journalists were coming to Armenia to cover the human stories. This is why I think it was good that there were many foreign journalists. For instance the Armenian media never showed a funeral. They did it only once, when the Prime Minister himself went to the funeral of an ordinary soldier. Human stories is my style of journalism. This is what I have done over the years apart from that one month of coverage for CNN” (Aren Melikyan, personal communication, April 13th, 2022).

While collaborating for CNN he tried to think of suggesting more human stories, so he reached people in Karabakh by phone, but the internet connection was not working well and it was not possible to rely on it. The BBC, on the other hand, gave him space to do the journalism he believes in. Thanks to the connections spontaneously established within the years, his curiosity, the doors that both speaking the language and working for the BBC opened to him, he found a story that soon became very popular:

“I was asked to find a story and I did not know the girl personally but we used to go to the same bars to drink, like years ago and that bar was a very friendly place that even though you do not know people you need to sit around the same table, so was the way that we added each other on Fb and this is how I found out that she could not find her brother for a while. I thought this is a story that should be told and I contacted her and luckily she was happy to talk. Also, I believe that when you are introducing yourself as from the BBC, it opens up a lot of doors and many people are willing to talk to you more than with local media” (Aren Melikyan, personal communication, April 13th, 2022).

Writing from Tbilisi, Sabine Abubakirova used more of a *reactive* approach for the stories discussed as she received the input for both the stories we discussed, either from her editors or from a contributor of the same newspaper:

“During the war we were working as one team and we had total freedom of initiatives. I could offer anything. Of course if they saw that I was a bit one sided or too emotional we would discuss it.

For example, for the story about peace activists, I remember one contributor sent us links to twitter where people were threatening activities and the person said “I guess it is going to be big”. So I talked to my editor about it and he said you should talk to more people and find out more. That is how I started (Sabine Abubakirova, personal communication, April 28th, 2022).

Kasimov, Melikyan and Harutyunian believe that an additional factor that influenced the war coverage was the impossibility to access Karabakh for Azerbaijani journalists and Azerbaijan for Armenian journalists. The obstacles both governments and -in Melikyan’s case the media- created for the press to access what was happening on the ground played a significant role in the choice of stories the reporters ended up covering:

“The Azerbaijani government created big obstacles for journalists to work. They did not allow them. Not even international journalists. We couldn’t work. We could have worked more professionally, got a lot of info, but we had big obstacles, barriers that we could not move on.

We couldn’t work in the way we wanted but in these circumstances, I think we did our best” (Seymur Kasimov, personal communication, May, 10, 2022).

“If it would be up to me I would I have covered it from Nagorno Karabakh, but CNN did not allow me to go there because there were serious security issues and if I am going there as a contributor they need to send someone who will look for my security and it means a lot

of expenses and they were not willing to do that” (Aren Melikyan, personal communication, April 13th, 2022).

“What I learnt is that the Prime Minister himself did not know what was happening in the frontline.

There was a huge communication problem between the political leaders, the military leadership, the commands, the regiments and the frontline. It was a real mess” (Karen Harutyunian, personal communication, April 29th, 2022).

Several factors played a role in finding the stories’ ideas:

from the constant flow of events and the immediacy required by the news industry, to the complexity of the struggle between compromising personal ethical standards and the need of publishing the story somewhere to give visibility to a war that did not exist for the majority, to the obstacles the Azerbaijani governments created for its journalists to access war areas and the strict laws the Armenian one passed to punish anyone who reported anything different from the official statements, to the challenges of being accepted as a female reporter into the masculine environment of the military, it is in the maze of this scenario that those stories were created.

4.2 Story narration

The story narration is the second step of news production and it refers to how a story is told, meaning what angle and what frame is used.

While some of the reporters had to follow the style of the newspaper they were working for, others had more editorial freedom. What emerged as a recurrent theme in this part of the analysis is the use of what some respondents described as the

‘correct’ terminology to refer to the situation on the ground and the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. In fact, some of the journalists highlighted the words chosen varied if the piece was addressed to an international newspaper which expects more ‘neutrality’ or a local media that would more likely support the country’s dominant views on the conflict. In doing so, local reporters fuel the war narratives of the respective countries, pushing further and further the construction of peace.

Additionally, the fear of being targeted for sharing a different view on the conflict from what the general public expects to hear, the possibility of recruitment by the Armenian army and the traumas faced by some of the Azerbaijani reporters who were refugees themselves from the first Karabakh war in the 90s, are all components that play a role in the choice of the reporters’ story narrative.

Grigoryan, Melikyan and Isayev for example, had to follow the style of the newspaper they were working for:

“In the fact checking department there is a specific style to follow:

First you write the fact that you are going to check and then you write: is it true or not?

So we wrote that Azerbaijan is claiming that they are not using prohibited weapons, but we went to Stepanakert and Hadrut and we found this evidence. Also, we were using exif data for our photos so that our colleagues from Kazakhstan for instance could verify them; they could see where it was taken, when and if it is photoshopped or not”. (Ani Grigoryan, personal communication, April, 29, 2022).

“For the explanatory articles, we don’t use primary sources. We usually use secondary sources like government statements, activists. For the one we discussed, we use Armenian media and Armenian government statements” (Heydar Isayev, personal communication, May 1st, 2022).

“I think they know better than I do all the info provided by the government is bullshit and cannot be trusted, this was the only thing they were willing to do and could do at the moment, because for example even sometimes when I would report that the Armenian side says that Azerbaijani forces bombed a certain civilian building, they will wait until Arzu reports that Azerbaijan accuses Armenia of doing the same so they will make a piece out of it.

As a journalist, that is not my signature at all. If you look at other pieces published by me you will see that they are human centred, my storytelling focuses on people. (Aren Melikyan, personal communication, April 13th, 2022).

Chichakyan and Abubakirova on the other hand, had more editorial freedom:

“During the war we were working as one team and we had total freedom on any initiatives, I could offer anything. Of course if they saw that I was a bit one sided or too emotional we would discuss it. (Sabine Abubakirova, personal communication, April 28th, 2022).

As Chichakyan was on the ground in Nagorno-Karabakh, her editors gave her the freedom to choose what story to tell and how to tell it.

What stands out in Chichakyan’s stories is the facts that the edits to her characters’ stories are very limited:

“It is my style. It is their story, not mine. I think it feels more sincere, more open, more plausible if I give them space to talk for themselves.

If I write it, I will write it my way. But it’s their story, their way of telling it. In these cases you need to be very careful about what you are writing. You are talking about people whose

lives are in danger and you don't want to mess up their stories and what they are trying to say. If you paraphrase it, it won't be a person's story anymore" (Ami Chichakyan, personal communication, April 6th, 2022).

If Chichakyan leaves her protagonists' stories almost untouched, Melikyan on the other hand, decided to not include the opinion of someone who was insulting the other side:

"I tried to connect with people living in Stepanakert but the internet connection was very bad and it was not possible to talk to people on the phone. The only person I could reach, gave me a glossary of a lot of labels on the president of Azerbaijan that were completely swear words and I would have never used that" (Aren Melikyan, personal communication, April 13th, 2022).

In doing this, Melikyan, an Armenian male reporter, actively chose not to fuel the hatred that war brings with it, embracing the peace journalism approach.

Another aspect that emerged from Isayev and Kasimov was the importance of using the "correct" terminology.

For Kasimov, the words he would use to cover the war would not be the same if he had to write for an international or a local media:

"Regarding the terminology, in the Azerbaijani media outlets I used the word 'liberated', while in Aljazeera I wrote 'taking the control'. These are two different terminologies. Even some of my Armenian colleagues did not agree with it and asked why you used 'liberated' and I said because it is actually liberated, I am physically staying there, I am physically in

the area now controlled by Azerbaijani army. Plus, the international community recognises these territories as the Republic of Azerbaijan and I am staying here. I never used words like ‘Armenian terrorists, bastards’. I am always using the ‘Armenian armed forces, Armenian soldiers’. I am professional in this field and I know what type of terminology I should use, but for international media outlets they are trying to be neutral, so you will not see the word ‘liberated’, you will see ‘taking under the control’.

Frankly speaking, I do not think it is the correct approach.

There are two parts of the conflict: aggressor and victim, as we see in the Russian-Ukrainian war. If Russia invades the internationally recognised territory of Ukraine, how can we use ‘under the control’? It is an invasion! Because one country attacks another country. It is an invasion” (Seymur Kasimov, personal communication, May, 10, 2022).

“We tried to be objective but there were topics we did not touch upon.

We also report about what is said against Azerbaijan, but for instance if it is a statement from Karabakh authorities, we would call them ‘so-called authorities’,” (Heydar Isayev, personal communication, May 1st, 2022).

The war over the use of the ‘correct’ terminology is at the core of the Karabakh conflict.

Azerbaijan claims territorial integrity over Nagorno-Karabakh, which is recognised by the international community as part of Azerbaijan, while Armenia appeals to the principle of self-determination of the Karabakh’s population and reminds that the majority used to be Armenian. These radically different views on the status of this piece of land fuel the respective national narratives and the fight over the terms to use to describe the situation.

Considering these circumstances, If journalists and editors decide not to align with the country’s war propaganda and stand for peace instead, Melikyan, Harutyunian,

Chichakyan, and Grigoryan agree they need to be ready to be targeted as traitors:

“If we talk about peace journalism, many people would hear things they are not used to and that they would not like to hear and second, it creates an urge to fight back and the only person that they can fight back is the journalist. I have tried to work with Azerbaijani journalists before and I tried to work on pieces that were trying to give an alternative view given by the Armenian media and I have always been targeted either as a foreign agent or as a traitor. The labels are many and all horrible. So it is really difficult to give an alternative view on conflict because you are gonna be hated by both sides, nobody is going to like you. (Aren Melikyan, personal communication, April 13th, 2022).

“We also had teams travelling to Karabakh and to the South of Armenia, Syunik, which also became a frontline. We reported bravely and became a target for ultra nationalists groups for not serving state interests or so called propaganda, but it was all false as we saw after the war”. (Karen Harutyunian, personal communication, April 29th, 2022).

“During the years we did it a lot and many people targeted us for doing this, but it was really important for us to talk about it, to look at everything from different angles” (Ani Grigoryan, personal communication, April 29th, 2022).

“The audience would call you traitor, Azerbaijani spy, they will attack you. Do you want to be in that position? You have to decide for yourself.

For instance Tatul Hakobyan, who was saying “we are defeated” was attacked by everyone, not physically but verbally. You need to be very courageous to be in that position and understand if you can take that” (Ami Chichakyan, personal communication, April 6th, 2022).

In this regard, referring to the above-mentioned Armenian journalist Tatul Hakobyan, Melikyan added there might be a difference in the type of risks a journalist can take depending on their popularity.

Hakobyan is a very well known journalist in Armenia and even under martial law he can rely on powerful connection at high levels, while young journalists might not have this advantage:

“I can never compare my position with his, because a part from the fact that he was on the ground and I was in Yerevan, he is also very popular and under the circumstances of martial law when you cannot talk about anything, maybe Tatul would not endanger anything because none would put him in jail because he is well known also outside the country, but perhaps for young and less known journalists it could be more challenging” (Aren Melikyan, personal communication, April 13th, 2022).

But if talking about peace seems to be almost impossible for local journalists in war times, Harutyunyan believes that if the media and the government would have been more transparent about what was actually happening, instead of reporting the war propaganda, they could have helped to stop the war earlier.

By affirming this, Harutyunyan highlights the major impact media have of conflict de-escalation.

For Melikyan, the narrative the story takes is a compromise between their idea of journalism, the media landscape of their countries and the need to suppress all the emotions that come with covering your own war:

“I did not like how Armenian journalists covered the war because it fueled the fire, all the glorification of the army, I feel they made things much worse and I should say that I even blame journalists among the people who are responsible for the public perception of the

conflict for failing because many of them they could not distinguish patriotism and nationalism and at the same time those who were trying to do that were really blamed, including me.

I had to make my social media account private because the Armenian diaspora did not like how CNN covers the war. I did not like it much either but it is really hard to explain to them how journalists work because they are used to watch Armenian public TV where you just see the Armenian perspective of the conflict and when you see how the conflict is covered in the international media which provides the opposite side as well and the view of the opposite sides are the things that you do not like you are in this state of cognitive dissonance and I try not to blame them and understand them but still I doesn not make things better and those people would blame me to be a betrayer for working with an Azerbaijani journalist or quoting an Azerbaijani authority” (Aren Melikyan, personal communication, April 13th, 2022).

Safarova and Kasimov are refugees themselves. They are among the families who had to flee Karabakh as a result of the war in the 90’s. For them it is not just their war, it is something that affected the life of their families for more than thirty years.

“ I have lost family members because of the war. We were struggling for more than 20 years with housing, we were living in wagons, we had lots of traumas, deats, it was a huge mess because of this. But despite this, I never wished there would be war.

For instance, my cousin has one child. He went to war and came back with a concussion.

He couldn’t talk for months and then my brother wanted to go [to war] and I was quite afraid because he has 2 children and you know I did not think about the future at this point, I was thinking not as a journalist, but as a person “maybe we should go till the end, so this conflict will end”.

I have a nephew who is 14 years old and in 4 years he will go to the military and this conflict you see, not even now is over. Everyday someone is dying. So probably as a person

I just wanted this to be over, so these kids will not die again and again, every 30 years. I do not want these children to experience the trauma I had to go through. So I was never a pro-war person and with the BBC we did not have any restrictions, censorship. Our material was just based on what people were thinking.

How can I dictate to them “no I want peace”. People wanted war because they were fed up and the BBC did not want to change their opinion, their minds.

So no restrictions for them. I was feeling conflicted because I was a refugee myself, but it never did influence my professionalism. I have never used words that I should have not used, because I understand what journalism is and I respect its principles (Gunel Safarova, personal communication, April, 14, 2022).

“There are two types of war: your war and not your war.

I am originally from Jabrail. My father passed away during the first Karabakh war. The rest of my relatives are IDPs. And during the war, October 15, I lost my cousin. He was a military man of the Azerbaijani army and was killed. It is our war and the one of Armenians. Ukraine is not. But my stories are the same. Not even one analysis. Principally, I just avoid it (Seymur Kasimov, personal communication, May 10th, 2022).

Melikyan on the other hand, risked to be recruited from the Armenian army at any time as he was in the list of military reserves:

“ It is very difficult to report about war and that is obvious and it is even more difficult to report on a war that you are part of. I mean I have never took side but I am a citizen of Armenia and I have a pretty difficult and marginalised image of the conflict and many Armenians wouldn't like and Azerbaijani wouldn't like either, but I never took a side. I have always thought and tried to be as objective as possible but still you can try to understand both sides, this is what you can do to try to be a good journalist. But at the time it was especially difficult because I served in the Armenian army and as there was martial

law I could have been drafted to fight at any time and knowing that you could be one of those fighting just the day after or couple of hours later, makes the coverage very difficult and at the same time you are trying to keep the balance and on the other hand you know your bestfriends are there, the husband of your closest friend is there, you could be there and it changes a lot of things and it becomes much harder (Aren Melikyan, personal communication, April 13th, 2022).

As we saw in the case of Abubakirova and Melikyan for example, the editorial line of the newspaper dictated the story narrative. But if for Abubakirova the story frame was peace oriented as peace is one of the values of Open Caucasus Media (OC Media), with CNN, Melikyan felt the coverage was dehumanising. Another interesting finding was the choice of the use of different terminologies for international and local media: more ‘balanced’ in the first case and ‘aligned’ with the national narrative in the second case.

Additionally, the impossibility to access the war zone forced some to rely on official statements, which in war times are mainly war propaganda.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the personal life experiences of a few reporters, who were refugees themselves or that risked being called to join the army, added a layer of difficulty to their narrative’s choices.

4.3 Peace journalism

Galtung (2003) described peace journalism as a type of journalism where the media not only informs about the problem but widens the story with its causes and gives space to possibilities of resolutions and preventive measures. Adding to Galtung's work, Jake Lynch argued that peace journalism should not be associated with advocacy, but should be associated with the editors and reporters' choices to illustrate the range of nonviolent responses to a conflict.

Ndhlovu (2021) highlights four core characteristics of peace journalism:

- 1) It's proactive; it examines what caused a conflict and searches for ways to boost dialogue before violence breaks out and in case it occurs, it explores solutions.
- 2) It recognises a common ground between parties, and refuses the simplistic narrative of "Us vs. Them" and "Good Guy vs. Bad Guy".
- 3) Peace reporters do not amplify propaganda from any source, but seek facts instead.
- 4) It is balanced; it tries to cover issues/suffering/peace proposals from all sides of a conflict, giving space to the voiceless.

As Hoxha and Hanitzsch (2018) pointed out in their study, with the aim of simplifying complex war stories, journalists have to decide which facts to tell, what to emphasise and how, reminding us of the simplest fact that their reporting does have an impact on the way people see the conflict, contributing with their narrative to its escalation or de-escalation.

This being said, when asked to share their views on peace journalism, eight out of nine respondents agreed that it is something needed in the region.

Abubakirova for example, talked about the different perspective her generation had on the war:

“I am from a generation that I was too little when the first Karabakh war happened and I have just heard about it. We did not know what war was. We had this idea of the enemy that we grew up with. Some of us really believed it, some managed to be critical, but during the war you understand that people are people and sometimes when terrible videos were spread on social networks, from both sides, when people were killed you understand that peace journalism is absolutely needed it because when we hear about war from the past we think the whole nation want it or stuff like that but when you are in it, you understand that mostly people are just affected by it, not all of them want it or they fall under propaganda and that’s why they start thinking like that. So peace journalism is absolutely needed so that people will understand common values, ordinary values of everyday life and be able to see the other side having the same values too” (Sabine Abubakirova, personal communication, April 28th, 2022).

However, some also highlighted several challenges this concept encompasses. For Melikyan and Isayev, the government has the responsibility to push peace negotiations forward and therefore, peace journalism too.

According to Melikyan, nowadays the media has no interest in peace journalism as it gets its viewers and money from drama, the reason why they are eager to cover wars and catastrophes and not showing how two nations live peacefully:

“None benefits from peace journalism and with this I mean those who control the media, because eventually people would benefit from it. But not the media or the government do unless it’s a government policy because if one day the state would say that they would go into peace negotiation with Azerbaijan they will start to force the media owned by them or controlled by them to give voice to alternative views as they are doing now. An example I just recalled is when in 2008 Armenia and Turkey were trying to normalise their relations. I found a very old edition of the Armenian state newspaper and there was a big poster saying”

two nations one goal “ in a peace contributing way and it was showing the two flags of Armenia and Turkey on one ball showing that we are different but we have one goal. Of course it did not last and the same newspaper started to shit throw at Turkey” (Aren Melikyan, personal communication, April 13th, 2022).

From the Azerbaijani side, Isayev believes the country’s President has the biggest impact on the way people think about peace:

“I can’t say that people are against the idea of peace or normalisation of the situation, because when the president says that we have to live with Armenian people, that the conflict has been resolved and that now we have to talk about economic opportunities, normalisation of relations, people would support him” (Heydar Isayev, personal communication, May 1st, 2022).

But as for now, Safarova and Melikyan believe peace journalism is an approach carried out by a niche of journalists and independent media that had little impact on the broader audience:

“Only a marginalised group of journalists will go for non benefits, non profit organisations or media outlets that are financed by some philanthropies or some initiatives and are willing to promote the idea of peace but we will never reach bigger audiences because whatever we do it’s for a small niche.

(Aren Melikyan, personal communication, April 13th, 2022).

“It is not happening, but I think it should. It’s now time for this. There is still too much hatred towards Armenia. Even when the BBC was doing videos from the Armenian side or Meydan TV or RFL, there were a lot of comments full of hate: they need to die etc. But I

think some media are working with peace journalism. I mean not the government media, they are still supporting nationalistic statements, pro war ideas, but international media with Azerbaijani workers are actually working towards it and I really appreciate it. There are also smaller ones trying to do so” (Gunel Safarova, personal communication, April 14th, 2022).

Grigoryan believes there should be visible efforts from the Azerbaijani sides as well if they want peace journalism to have an impact:

“ I think peace journalism is very important but there should be peace journalists on the other side too, because you know, in Armenia before the war I would not say there was Azerbaijani fobia, people were talking very positively about them but after this war people need time. But when you see the armenophobia and propaganda against Armenia is very hard. I think we should talk about it, we should search for this type of story, looking at it from another angle” (Ani Grogoryan, personal communication, April 29th, 2022).

On the other side, Kasimov suggests a different approach Azerbaijani journalists should adopt to include more peace journalism into their work:

“We are always thinking about our own needs.

Peace journalism should always be in the talk because war ends and the peace process starts.

But we are never considering others.

What can I suggest to them to talk to me and reach this peace agreement?

I want this, this and this, they want this, this and this. Peace journalism should help change our approach to peace” (Seymur Kasimov, personal communication, May, 10, 2022).

However, he also believes at the moment there is not much room for it in the

Azerbaijani media landscape as he thinks 90% of the Azerbaijani journalists do not adopt this approach.

Among the 8 respondents, Ami Chichakyan, a female reporter from Armenia, is the only one that cannot see peace journalism working during war times. In her opinion, if you want to cover wars, you cannot talk about peace:

“In war zones I don’t think it can work and in this particular one either. The tension was very high and I cannot really imagine discussing peace.

Yes, there were reports about civilian suffering, but they were mainly from war zones and because of your “enemy”, that is how Azerbaijani are usually called and I do not really consider it peace journalism. They were also part of the war and they were also fighting and the topics they were discussing were about war and not their lives. I think it could have worked in Yerevan or in other parts of Armenia, but I did not want to do that because I wanted to cover the war” (Ami Chichakyan, personal communication, April 6th, 2022).

In addition to that, Melikyan believes the challenges of peace journalism are rooted into the way Armenian media frames the war:

“One of the biggest problems is the way the media sees the war. Of course the media representatives are people who grew up in the same society that they are working for but then they are going to the media and they are normalising war and from my personal point of view this shouldn’t be what a journalist does. Like you never cover a rape like a normal thing if you are a good journalist, right?

There are even things that obviously show that this is shameful and should not be done, but when it comes to war it seems like a completely normal thing and I remember some of the armenian media were showing it as an opportunity like: ‘we waited for so long for this and

this is finally the time for us to accomplish the justice we want' that is always different from the justice the other sides wants. When the media contributes to this ideology and represents war as normal and an opportunity, there is no place for peace journalism. I would love to be optimistic and I am, but I can't see a place for peace journalism in the near future because we fail to understand the meaning of peace" (Aren Melikyan, personal communication, April 13th, 2022).

For Isayev, the major challenges from the Azerbaijani side for applying peace journalism are: the accountability of the government's statements and data as well as challenging the expected war narrative:

"The first challenge I would say is accountability with the government or government responsiveness. Usually it is not necessary for conflict reporting but like in our case, when we do not have access to all the places that the government says are liberated or to what the idps are demanding and they are putting down some statistics from this area, but we do not have access to people or officials, we can't really verify the info.

Also, I would say that the general Azerbaijani public would not like the Azerbaijani media to report against Azerbaijan, I mean they do not like this type of reporting, even though we are doing it.

Additionally, when you interview soldiers or whoever has been part of war, they feel patriotic, nationalistic and they think you will be on the same page because you are reporting about them, so you should report about how they want" (Heydar Isayev, personal communication, May 1st, 2022).

As we saw in the literature section, the unequal freedoms of Armenia and Azerbaijan provides an obstacle for the prospects of peace journalism. In countries where governments have partial or full control over the media, some expect the same institutions to make some steps forward in peace journalism, even if it is very

unlikely. The traditional war reporting narrative is ingrained in mainstream media of both countries and peace journalism initiative results are marginal and with little chance of success. In an ideal environment, both governments and media should make visible efforts to apply this practice. However, if taking into account also some of the findings of the reconstruction section, there are several factors that play a role in the journalists' views on peace journalism practices: the constant flow of events and the speed required by the news industry, the influence of certain economic agreements the media groups signed that do not include covering peace, the obstacles created by the respective governments in terms of accessibility to the war zone and censorship, the fear of being targeted as well as the reporter's personal views on the conflict.

4.4 Peace journalism and the role of the reporter's gender

As highlighted in the literature section, several studies underline the importance of including more women into peace building initiatives. However, there is not much evidence on whether the reporter's gender plays a role in applying peace journalism practices.

Despite the fact that the number of interview partners is low and not representative enough to make general conclusions on a quantitative basis, it is worth mentioning that -

contrary to what was expected- this section of the study showed that the amount of respondents that believe the reporter's gender matter is equally distributed between men and women. In fact, half of the journalists interviewed said they believe the journalist's gender plays a role, while the other half thinks gender does not make a difference.

What is notable however, is that more Azerbaijani journalists tend to believe women

are more keen on applying peace journalism than their male counterparts compared to the Armenians interviewed. This result however, might be dependent on the specific respondents who participated in this study and might change completely with a different group of journalists.

The most interesting finding of this section is certainly the fact that those who see women reporters more keen on applying peace journalism believe the reason for this gender difference roots back into the patriarchal structure of the Azerbaijani and Armenian society, where men that talk about peace or possible solutions are likely to be seen as ‘weak’ and therefore, women are more inclined to take this role.

Harutyunian, Chichakyan, Grigoryan and Isayev are the ones who do not see the influence of the reporter’s gender in peace journalism practices. For Chichakyan and Grigoryan, two Armenian female journalists, whether or not peace journalism is applied, it is the journalist’s personal choice:

“One of the most famous Armenian journalists, Tatul Hakobyan, was doing peace journalism.

I wouldn’t say there is a difference between women and men, I did not feel that. I guess it’s just personal. Many journalists in Armenia are pro war rather than pro peace” (Ani Grigoryan, personal communication, April 29th, 2022).

“Frankly speaking, I don’t see the connection. Gender doesn’t matter, it’s mostly on a personal level. I can talk about myself. Even though I covered the war, I also wrote articles about peace and peaceful solutions and I know many male journalists who do the same. So for me gender does not matter” (Ami Chichakyan, personal communication, April 6th, 2022).

Also Harutyunian and Isayev, two male journalists, cannot see a connection between the reporter's gender and their attitude towards peace:

“I could see that many women like the wife of the prime minister were having photo sessions with the military, with uniforms and guns etc. So I did not see any difference between women and men even before the war” (Karen Harutyunian, personal communication, April 29th, 2022).

Isayev however, introduces once again the relevance of the government's decision into influencing the way journalists report about the war and the possible peaceful solutions:

“I do not think there is a difference between male and female attitude towards peace journalism.

You would need a survey to assess that, but if female journalists think more positively about Armenians I can't say it. I have not noticed any differences between male and female Azerbaijani reporters regarding what they think about Armenia.

Especially before the war people were afraid of Armenians and it has been the same for male and females. It poorly reflects on journalism. When the President says something about Armenia and journalists introduce it as a fact, I do not think being female or male would make any difference. Or about war crimes or description of Armenians, I do not think there will be any difference in their reporting” (Heydar Isayev, personal communication, May 1st, 2022).

On the other hand, Melikyan, Safarova, Abubakirova and Kasimov believe women would do more peace journalism than men.

According to Kasimov, an Azerbaijani male reporter, women are more likely to use

a soft rhetoric than their male colleague:

“All war reporters were men. But when it comes to peace reporting I see a lot of ladies. They never work in the field as war reporters, they haven’t seen the war itself but they write more peace stories. For eg. to show the grief side, to show the victims of both sides, using some soft rhetoric, using not harsh terminology.

In these circumstances ladies are the first in Azerbaijani media outlets, and the majority work in independent media, not in pro government or pro opposition. On this side, ladies are first.

During war let's say there were 50 journalists, 49 were men and 1 was woman.

We have a lot of ladies that do peace reporting” (Seymur Kasimov, personal communication, May 10th, 2022).

Melikyan, an Armenian male journalist, believes the reason of this tendency can be found looking at the reporter’s role during Soviet times, when journalism was not a profitable profession at all and reporters were not respected:

“Gender definitely makes a difference. Many of the people engaged in peace building activities are women mostly supervised by men and the same happens in the newsrooms. In a country like Armenia journalism is a female profession so men are not very attracted to journalism and this has social and economic reasons and just to explain what I mean with social reasons for instance in Soviet times reporters were not respected.

Like you are reporting on someone and it is not what a man is supposed to do and also the financial aspect of it, journalism is not the most profitable profession so we end up having more women than men. I can’t say that more women or all of the women in journalism in Armenia contributed to peace journalism than men and I am afraid in this case the gender aspect is relevant in peace building activities but when It comes to reporting I do not see

interests in general regardless of the gender of the journalist. I know maybe one or two journalists who are actually writing and contributing to peace journalism and I think that it would be something like 3 women, 1 man and I definitely do not see interest from my male colleagues” (Aren Melikyan, personal communication, April 13th, 2022).

Melikyan, Safarova and Abubakirova also touched upon another aspect that is likely to play a role into applying peace journalism practices: the patriarchal society they live in and the expectations from men:

“Sometimes I think that talking against the war makes people think I am a weak person. I am not sure it is like that, but knowing how the conservative society works in Armenia and how the role of the men is viewed, usually people that do not want war are seen as weak.

I know there is a circle of people that really respect the work done in peace journalism, but they are definitely a minority and I can’t be sure what is the perception of the wider majority” (Aren Melikyan, personal communication, April 13th, 2022).

“I do have a lot of female journalists around me and I see that they are different. Not pro war and that is why I think they are more tolerant, but there are women who are quite nationalistic too” (Gunel Safarova, personal communication, April 14th, 2022).

“In our region what I saw and I understood especially during the war is that the imagine of manhood is about dignity and honour that you have to defend your land, going to war for it, no matter why you are doing it, you just play on your complex that was put on you when you were a child. For men, this complex is going deeper and it is very hard for them in Azerbaijan and perhaps in Caucasus in general to want peace and talk about it. They usually feel ashamed, they are more traumatised and have more conflict in themselves. But women are not so triggered by that. Women protect what they have, their lives, their future, and express their emotions more. Maybe it is a bit sexist to say that, but actually I would say that

because of the rules of this society, for women it is easier to just try to be more diplomatic and don't feel so ashamed of it as if you are a men" (Sabine Abubakirova, personal communication, April 28th, 2022).

Taking into account the fact that peace journalism is a marginal practice in the region and that for this reason some believe it's rather the journalists' personal decision than the gender to influence the choice of applying it or not, what stood out in this section is the link with the patriarchal structure of both the Armenian and Azerbaijani societies, where gender norms expect men to be courageous and defend the motherland while women are more likely to find space to talk about peace and this seems to apply both for peace building initiatives as well as for peace journalism practices.

5. Discussion

The present study is subject to several limitations. Firstly, it is worth mentioning that as with any other method of data collection, the reconstruction interview approach has its own constraints. Relying on human based declarations exposes the research to a series of biases such as: narrow self-reflection and knowledge that can become particularly evident with journalists who might tend to be uncritical (as cited in Reich & Aviv Barnoy, 2016).

Furthermore, interviewing reporters can be challenging for other reasons: they can try to guess the expected answer, leading to social desirability bias or self-complacency (Reich & Aviv Barnoy, 2016). Finally, as it is an item-anchored method one should bear in mind that while it highlights the steps of the news production process, it rules out the published output and possible routines that are not item-specific (Reich & Aviv Barnoy, 2016).

Moving to the particularities of this research, the language barrier is among the major limitations. In fact, as the author is not sufficiently familiar with either Armenian or Azerbaijani languages, this constraint might have tightened the sample to those who have at least a basic knowledge of the English language, excluding other potential local respondents.

Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that the selected journalists are more likely to have been exposed to different cultures and media content than the national war narratives compared to some of their colleagues in Azerbaijan or Armenia.

It is also noteworthy that none of the respondents worked for governmental media.

Their contribution would have diversified the sample and given perhaps more insights on this specific work environment where the majority of the local journalists operate.

Furthermore, the sample size could have been larger. However, the limited freedom of expression, especially in Azerbaijan, made it very hard to find local journalists willing to share their work experiences as many fear for their safety. Plus, several local war reporters were unavailable as they were busy covering the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and its consequences on the feeble balance in the South Caucasus.

Investigating the micro-level of the news industry, or in other words the news production process, through the reconstruction interview approach, helped spotlight some of the challenges local journalists face in applying this practice that perhaps would have never emerged with a traditional semi-structured interview approach.

It became clear that while covering the war, most of the local reporters had to quickly respond to the speed of both the events and the news industry, having almost no time for further reflection on the angle or frame of their stories. In this regard however, some highlighted the fact that they used a different terminology when writing for international or local media. In fact, if on one hand reporters were asked to be balanced and use ‘neutral’ words when writing for international media, on the other, some tended to align with their country’s’ views on the war, fueling the national war narratives. This choice might have been motivated by several factors such as the reporters’ biases on the war, the fear of repercussions and censorship for instance.

When looking at relevant differences in the work practices of female and male local reporters, it is worth underlining that gender played a role when considering the journalist’ access to sources: Chichakyan for instance, found it hard to be accepted into the hypermasculine environment of the Armenian army as the war zone is not considered a woman’s place, while on the other hand, outside the battle zone in Azerbaijan, Safarova found it easier to find people to interview as a female reporter.

These apparently different experiences, spotlight one of the major findings of this study:

the role patriarchal norms of both societies play in the reporters' work practices.

In fact, as described in the literature section, patriarchy places women into the private sphere, it pictures them as kind and obedient beings devoted to the family. So when a woman challenges these norms by deciding to access a hostile environment like the war zone for instance, where she 'is not supposed to be', it generates confusion and some might try to obstruct her work. On the other hand, if a female reporter covers human sufferings and war victims that it is seen as a more natural thing to do given her 'characteristics', she might find her work easier. That is also why some of the respondents believe it is expected to see more Armenian and Azerbaijani women reporters talking about peace instead of their male counterparts, as patriarchal norms would depict men as 'weak'. In a society where men are seen as the 'defenders of the motherland', it is less likely that male war reporters, who themselves grew up in this environment and have most likely served in the respective armies, would challenge this narrative. In fact, doing so might expose them to the hatred of an audience that is not ready to listen to a different perspective and many reporters, women and men, might not be ready to bear with the consequences this choice might lead to.

Furthermore, this study highlighted some common challenges peace journalism practices face: from the speed of the news industry that does not encourage a more reflective approach, to the fact that the media does not economically benefit from peace, to the governments' strict control over the press, the obstacles to peace journalism appear major.

Given the powerful control both governments have on the media and therefore, on the national war narratives, some respondents believe the first step to encourage peace journalism should come from the governments that have the responsibility to push peace negotiations forwards and as a consequence peace journalism too.

But if this sounds like a very unlikely scenario to happen in the near future, local

reporters should start by acknowledging the fact that, despite the significant obstacles, the ones who believe in the necessity of this practice are more than what one can expect.

The results and limitations of the study open new questions for further research on the role of gender in peace journalism, like for instance: how do practitioners of peace journalism in the region face the above-mentioned challenges? What is the impact of patriarchal norms into the journalists' work practices? In other war contexts, does the reporter's gender matter when considering peace journalism practices? What is the impact of a certain war or peace frame on the audience?

6. Conclusion

This study's aim was to investigate peace journalism practices in the context of the 44 days Karabakh war and the role of the reporter's gender in applying this approach. In order to collect some insights on how Armenian and Azerbaijani female and male war reporters covered the war and find out any relevant differences in their coverage habits, this research relied on a data collection method called *reconstruction interview*, which basically consists in understanding how the reporters' news pieces came into being. Once having reconstructed the 'biography' of the selected pieces, the journalists were asked to share their views on peace journalism and whether they thought the reporter's gender mattered in applying peace journalism and if so, how. The micro level approach of the reconstruction interview was useful to reveal some of the challenges Armenian and Azerbaijani reporters have to deal with while doing their job and it highlighted some of the obstacles peace journalism practices face in the region: such as the press freedom restrictions under martial law, the prohibition of accessing the war zone especially for the Azerbaijani reporters, the fear of being targeted as traitors if adopting a more peaceful approach and the additional difficulties of exercising this profession being refugees themselves. It is amidst these challenges that local reporters covered the 44 days Karabakh war and developed their stories. Furthermore, when applying gender lenses to the analysis, it emerged that both countries' patriarchal norms impacted the reporters' work. Women, seen as kind and obedient beings, were more likely to access war victims, but faced challenges when embedded in the super masculine environment of the army, where 'they do not belong'.

In a society where men are the soldiers protecting the motherland, it is less likely that male war reporters, who themselves grew up in this environment and have most likely served in the respective armies, would challenge this narrative. Doing so, might expose them as easy targets for the hatred of an audience that is not ready to

hear a different point of view and many reporters, women and men, might not be ready to bear with the consequences this choice might lead to.

This study showed that, although there is no shared view on the role of the reporter's gender in applying peace journalism practices and that most of the male and female reporters from both sides showed willingness to apply peace journalism, the societal structure of both Armenia and Azerbaijan in terms of gender roles, helps explain why female reporters are seen as more likely than their male colleagues to find the space for embracing peace journalism into their work practices.

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List of appendices

Appendix 8.1: Interview transcription of Aren Melikyan

Aren:

I need to re-read it because it has been a while.

Teresa:

Can you give me a little bit of background about this story?

How did you come up with the idea, the structure of it ?

Aren:

I should say that this was the first or second piece published by CNN with my contribution, the format was unknown to me and in the way we did, we were very much dependent on the editors. So me and Arzu were contributing for our countries although she is located in Turkey because she had issues with her government in Azerbaijan and then we were editing together.

At the beginning there were a lot of interests in what was happening on the battlefield, the missiles, the rockets but by the time gone, the interest was gone as well in regard to international media.

So it was the 5th of Oct, just one week after the beginning of the war and there was still a bit of interest so we were pitching stories saying Armenia accuses Azerbaijan for this and Azerbaijan accuses Armenia for this.

The interest over the war in NK was very low and it required a lot of effort to appear on international media and make headlines. There are many reasons for this, for example the fact that not many people know about the region, the fact that there are not a lot of benefots of the media players in that region. This is why it was kind of like more of business coverage because the media craves drama and the war gives it to them . At that time, although it was covid period, the world was pretty peaceful and this kind of extraordinary situation at the border of Europe was something that brought a lot of attention to the piece.

So it required a lot of effort to convince them that this was important to write about and only as a result of many many addressing to the editors it became possible.

I hope I gathered all the pieces written from CNN during the 44 days of war, but there are only a handful, maybe not more than 10.

Although at the same time we were working for CNN digital, which is the news agency, we sent bulletins, updates there were sent to other agencies too just for general knowledge but the ones that appeared on the website are really not enough.

Teresa:

How did you build the story then?

Aren:

I would do the Armenian part and Arzu the Azerbaijani one and then people sitting in London (we were working with CNN London newsroom) were kind of merging our point of views and then they would send it back to us to make sure everything was okay because there were many sensitive issues that they were not aware of like toponymous or names of locations that they would use that they would find on wikipedia or a propagandist platform, but we as locals knew that it was sensitive and could not go public, so were checking it, polishing it and then sending it back. We are not native speakers so someone else should proofread it and then it will be published.

But yeah, a lot of things were dependent on the editorial decisions.

Teresa:

I notice while reading your pieces that they are all about background, government statements. I guess that is how they told you to do it, but what would you have done differently? Was this style imposed on you?

Aren:

As a journalist, that is not my signature at all.

If you look at other pieces published by me you will see that they are human centred, my storytelling focuses on people.

But there was a time that I was obliged to do that because that was the requirement, so it was a decision I made for many reasons. If it would be up to me I would I have covered it from NK, but CNN did not allow me to go there because there were serious security issues and if I am going there as a contributor they need to send someone who will look for my security and it means a lot of expenses that they were not willing to do that. They were constantly thinking about sending a crew to NK Karabakh and we were constantly planning their arrival, but they never came.

Luckily I got a chance to do the BBC piece, which was a human story and then all the podcasts I did afterwards were completely about people because personally this is more of an ideological thing. I really do not trust all the sources I had to mention in the pieces I wrote while covering the war. I agree that it was not the best way to do it but there was no interest from the media and the only times there was interest we fail to provide that because I tried to connect reach people living in Stepanakert but the internet connection was very bad and it was not possible to talk to people on the phone. The only person I could reach, gave me a glossary of a lot of labels on the president of Az that were completely swear words and I would have never used that so basically we failed because of the situation on the ground.

Teresa:

Especially during war times also the statements from the governments can be problematic and I guess you need to verify from the ground what is true, what is not. Was there any editorial discussion about how careful you should be also to report governmental statements?

I remember that case of Tatul hakobyan for instance. It was quite problematic because he went against the government statements on the situation.

Aren:

What he did should really be appreciated. But I can never compare my position with his, because a part from the fact that I was on the ground and he was in Yerevan, he is also very popular and under the circumstances of martial law when you cannot talk about anything maybe Tatul would not endanger anything because none would put him in jail because he is well known also outside the country, but perhaps for

young and less known journalists it could be more challenging. But concerning the editorial discussions I think they know better than I do all the info provided by the government is bullshit and cannot be trusted, this was the only thing they were willing to do and could do at the moment because for example even sometimes when I would report that the Armenian side says that Azerbaijani forces bombed a certain civilian building they will wait until Arzu reports that Azerbaijan accuses Armenia of doing the same so they will make a piece out of it.

The reasons are again really low knowledge of the conflict, really little interest. Some people did not know anything about NK or caucasus and ...

So basically they know how journalists work but they should be interested in making it work, because the coverage of Ukraine is completely different.

I think I have learnt a couple of things from my experience with CNN, first of all it is very difficult to report about war and that is obvious and it is even more difficult to report on a war that you are part of. I mean I have never took side but I am a citizen of Armenia and I have a pretty difficult and marginalised image of the conflict and many Armenians wouldn't like and Azerbaijani wouldn't like either, but I never took a side, I have always thought and tried to be as objective as possible but still you can try to understand both sides, this is what you can do to try to be good journalist.

But at the time it was especially difficult because I served in the Armenian army and as there was martial law I could have been drafted to fight at any time and knowing that you could be one of those fighting just the day after or couple of hours later makes the coverage very difficult and at the same time you are trying to keep the balance and on the other hand you know your bestfriends are there, the husband of your closest friend is there, you could be there and it changes a lot of things and it becomes much harder when you are covering the war for others because when you are working for local media you know what to use, although I should say i did not like how Armenian journalists covered the war because it fueled the fire, all the glorification of the army, I feel they made things much worst and I should say that I even blame journalists among the people who are responsible for the public perception of the conflict for failing because many of them they could not distinguish patriotism and nationalism and at the same time those who were trying to do that were really blamed including me because basically at a moment I had to make my social media account private because the Armenian diaspora did not like

how CNN covers the war, yeah I did not like much either but it is really hard to explain to them how journalists work because they are used to watch Armenian public TV where you just see the Armenian perspective of the conflict and when you see how the conflict is covered in the international media which provides the opposite side as well and the view of the opposite sides are the things that you do not like you are in this state of cognitive dissonance and I try not to blame them and understand them but still I doesn't make things better and those people would blame me to be a betrayer for working with an Azerbaijani journalist or quoting an Azerbaijani authority.

You cannot explain to them how journalists work.

In the journalists they see they hear what they want to hear but in this kind of journalism especially if we talk about peace journalism, many people would hear things they are not used to and that they would not like to hear and second it creates an urge to fight back and the only person that they can fight back is the journalist. I have tried to work with Azerbaijani journalists before and I tried to work on pieces that were trying to give an alternative view given by the Armenian media and I have always been targeted either as a foreign agent or as a traitor. The labels are many and all horrible. So it is really difficult to give an alternative view on conflict because you are gonna be hated by both sides, nobody is going to like you.

Teresa:

The other story I would like to discuss with you is the one you did for the BBC.

That one is a completely different work from the one you did for CNN.

It's human centred. Can you tell me a bit about it and about the differences between working for BBC and for CNN?

Aren:

Personally, I believe that the BBC is the closest thing to good journalism that we can think of.

But of course, a few days ago they disseminated misinformation about Russian taking mercenaries via Armenia, but it was not checked and it does not seem true to me. Still they spread disinformation. But still they could be the closest thing to good

journalism especially compared to my previous experience, so it was easier to work with them and they sent a lot of crews to Armenia to cover the war and they showed a lot of interests as they sent a lot of journalist like the world service, russian service, the arabic service, almost all of them were there to cover the war. Obviously both their policy and the attitude towards the conflict was different also depending on the journalists that were covering it because it was obvious that there some arguments between the journalists who were covering it from the different sides about how it should be done, but yeah, I was in a really good crew and I was asked to find a story and I did not know the girl personally but we used to go to the same bars to drink, like years ago and that bar was a very friendly place that even though you do not know people you need to sit around the same table and that was the way that we added each other on Fb and this is how I found out that she could not find her brother for a while and I thought this is a story that should be told and I contacted her and luckily she was happy to talk. Also I believe that when you are introducing yourself as from the BBC that opens up a lot of doors and many people are willing to talk to you more than with local media.

Because for example something I was so surprised of and that is worth mentioning, the Armenian media was copying that video and sharing it on their platforms, but come on, that girl lives in the same city as you do, but not an Armenian journalist went there to talk to them or find a story like that because they were really busy covering the authority statements and the human part was really missing and the foreign journalists were coming to Armenia to cover the human stories and the Armenian journalists on the other side were very busy on spreading the propaganda, this is why I think it was good that there were many foreign journalists. For instance the Armenian media never showed a funeral, they did it only once, when the prime minister himself went to the funeral of an ordinary soldier, but that was the only time during the war that Armenian media showed an illustration of a funeral and whatever we saw was from foreign media because for example DW was filming funerals of Armenian military.

This is why I Thought it is really important to have human stories because that is my style of journalism, this is what I have done over the years apart from that one month of coverage for CNN.

So we talked to her and she wasn't sure if she wanted to talk about it or not, but she was hoping that would help to reach the Armenian officials that were not giving any information about the brother, but yeah, in the end a year later they found out that he is dead.

Teresa:

Did the BBC give you any guidelines about the story they wanted or did they trust you as a local reporter?

Aren:

They said they would expect a human story and this is how I came up with this story but yeah, working on the ground is really more difficult than working in front of a computer, like what I did for CNN.

I still have a lot of questions like: should I have gone to NK or not? But I did not want to cover the war for the Armenian media, I was really exhausted with all that propaganda and I was not sharing all the views and ideologies that Armenian media was propagating and this is why working for international media was the best solution for me at that moment.

Sofia was the producer and Gabriel was the director (BBC).

I liked that experience, maybe it's not the best piece of me but it was something important and it became for sure the most seen work of mine because it spread around the country.

Teresa:

To move to your personal views, how do you see your role as journalist especially at the time of war?

How do you think it shapes people's views about it?

Aren:

About the role in general, it's changing and I cannot give one answer, but I am hoping I am giving people that are not heard the chance to do that.

This is why I am not covering politics, going to parliament sessions and asking what the government thinks, I think there are enough journalists doing that, but what I really love is to talk to people that perhaps have never given an interview but that

definitely have stories and they want to be heard and I kind of feel good when I do it for them and most of my interviews are with people who meet a journalist for the first time.

As for my role, I do see it as telling the stories of people who do not get the chance to do so.

of course it is because of my personal values, childhood values, but anyway eventually they brought me to a place where I want to work in a way to help people to be heard.

When it comes to conflict it changes a little bit. It is also to contribute to people who have different views on the resolution of the conflict and do not have a place to talk but it also my mission becomes to give you an alternative that you will not like and I have always done that , many people did not like it.

But for instance in a podcast I did that zoomed on the conflict, the first episode I did was in conversation with an Azerbaijani translated into Armenian.

It was entitled: Is the NK conflict over? Because for Azerbaijan it is, but for Armenia it is not.

So I talked to an Azerbaijani and an Armenian and of course I chose the Azerbaijani wisely, I knew her for many years and I knew she has very balanced perceptions of the resolution of the conflict but she was also sharing the view of the majority that the Armenian side would not like at all, but I thought it was important to translate her and to spread it on the most listened radio in the country hoping that they are not the only one that believes they are right and I see the same when I am talking to my Ukrainian friends they are saying the same things as my Armenian friends would tell me during the war. Of course Ukraine is completely different because in this context is obvious to see who is right and who is wrong, but it is very difficult to say who is right and who is wrong on NK conflict because were very convinced that they were right and maybe they were both right but here is when you come as a journalist to show that you both believe you are right let's see what we can find in common. I believe if many journalist would do that the situation would be much different because for 30 years Armenians have been told that they are the only right party in this conflict and same for Azerbaijan and in the end this irrational feeling of injustice or justice, depending on which side you look at it brought us here which took more than thousands of lives.

Teresa:

Do you see peace journalism as something possible in this context? Both in your personal views and considering your perception of other journalists' work?

Aren:

I wish it would, but I am a bit pessimistic.

None benefits from peace journalism. I mean those who control the media, because eventually people would benefit from it. But not the media or the government unless it's a government policy because if one day the state would say that they would go into peace negotiation with Azerbaijan they will start to force the media owned by them or controlled by them to give voice to alternative views as they are doing now. An example I just recalled is when in 2008 Armenia and Turkey were trying to normalise their relations I found a very old editing of Armenian state newspaper and there was a big poster saying "two nations one goal" in a peace contributing way and it was showing the two flags of Armenia and Turkey on one ball showing that we are different but we have one goal. Of course it did not last and the same newspaper started to shit throw at Turkey. In these countries we should consider that the role of the state in controlling the media is very big and if we are talking on behalf of the media, the media do not benefit from peace journalism at all. Media gets its viewers and money from drama, that is why they are eager to cover wars and catastrophes. None is interested in showing how two nations live peacefully. This is not how the media gets its audience.

So at first, when the media will start to benefit from peace journalism, only at that time it will work, but now I cannot see it because they see crave drama, tears blood to get more likes to get more shares and to get a bigger audience and as long as it works this way I can't see a place of peace journalism. Only a marginalised group of journalists will go for non benefits, non profit organisations or media outlets that are financed by some philanthropies or some initiatives and are willing to promote the idea of peace but we will never reach bigger audiences because whatever we do it's for a small niche.

I would love to be optimistic and I am, but I can't see a place for pj in the near future because we fail to understand the meaning of peace.

Teresa:

One last question I would like to ask is about the gender aspect of peace.

Women are often portrayed as more keen on being peace agents. Do you think that Armenian female journalists would be more keen on applying peace journalism practices than their male counterparts?

Aren:

Gender definitely makes a difference.

Many of the people engaged in peace building activities are women mostly supervised by men and the same happens in the newsrooms.

In a country like Armenia journalism is a female profession so men are not very attracted to journalism and this has social and economic reasons and just to explain what I mean with social reasons for instance in soviet times reporters were not respected.

Like you are reporting on someone and it is not what a man is supposed to do and also the financial aspect of it, journalism is not the most profitable profession so we end up having more women than men.

And I can't say that more women or all of the women in journalism in Armenia contributed to pj neither men and I am afraid in this case the gender aspect is relevant in peace building activities but when it comes to reporting I do not see interests in general regardless of the gender of the journalist. I know maybe one or two journalists who are actually writing and contributing to peace journalism and I think that it would be something like 3 women, 1 man and I definitely do not see interest from my male colleagues.

Sometimes I think that the fact that I am talking against war makes people think I am a weak person. I am not sure it is like that, but knowing how the conservative society works in Armenia and how the role of the men is viewed, usually people that do not want war are seen as weak.

I know there is a circle of people that really respect the work done in peace journalism, but they are definitely a minority and I can't be sure what is the perception of the wider majority.

One of the biggest problems is the way the media sees the war. Of course the media representatives are people who grew up in the same society that they are working for but then they are going to the media and they are normalising war and from my personal point of view this shouldn't be what a journalist does. Like you never cover a rape like a normal thing if you are a good journalist, right?

There are even things that obviously show that this is shameful and should not be done, but when it comes to war it seems like a completely normal thing and I remember some of the armenian media were showing it as an opportunity as well and when the media shows it as an opportunity like: yeah, we waited for so long for this and this is finally this is the time so we can accomplish the justice we want that is always different from the justice the other sides wants. You show it as an opportunity. When the media contributes to this ideology and represents war as normal and an opportunity, there is no place for peace journalism.

Appendix 8.2: Interview transcription of Karen Harutyunyan

Karen:

So the 44 days war was a real nightmare for all of us, for Armenians living in Armenia in Karabakh and diaspora.

It was not just about covering a war, it was about covering your own war, where your sons, your brothers, relatives serve in the army, fight in the frontline.

For instance, my nephew was serving in Karabakh. He is still there. He will come back in July and this is the last wave of conscripts from Armenia to Nagorno Karabakh. He was there, among heavy shells, bombardments. We used to talk to him, it was a real nightmare.

Many of these soldiers are coming back home with traumas, PTSD, they need psychologists, although they do not get this service in Armenia, even though we had almost 4000 soldiers killed in the war. We do not see any political responsibility for it. The only thing we can see is cynicism by the political authorities about the losses Armenia had.

Yes, of course, the war has been a catastrophe for Armenia and we have been covering it, we have been watching what is happening on the frontline, we know what is really happening and we know there was the official propaganda that had imposed certain limitations to media outlets to cover only the official news and releases, but we manage to tell what is really happening on the frontline.

They were also confessing [our losses]. They had every evening press briefing, were showing maps of the advancement of Azerbaijani forces and we could see that the situation was completely changed in detriment of the Armenian forces, but at the same time you were restricted to openly speak about it, to say that the Azerbaijani forces advanced in Karabakh but on the other hand you could see that the defence minister representative was showing maps indicating what I am talking about. So that was a disaster, so many journalists coming from international media outlets are covering war. You know, like it does not matter, it is a war, an earthquake, a wedding, it doesn't matter. They need good footage. If there is a broken building they would go and film it. If there is a wounded or killed soldier, they will film it. They do not have that empathy, they are trying to show the calamity that is beyond this footage, the way that people were serving. It was not sexy for international

media. We did not have that compassion from the international community. We only could see this both sides from the international organisations and capitals unlike the war in Ukraine.

We were covering this war with caution, not to harm anyway what is happening on the frontline.

It was our war. It was not just a war to cover by a media. It was a war were our relatives, sons are fighting. My nephew is coming this summer and my son is going this summer.

He is 18 years old and he was born in Stepanakert, he could serve both in Armenia and Karabakh but he chose to serve in Karabakh.

But no conscripts to Armenia are sent to Karabakh anymore.

It was hard. I posted several Facebook posts during the war, I was critical about the diasporan Armenians that were not really understanding what is happening here. That was just showing their military rhetoric, their hawkish attitude with the slogan “we will win”. I never used it.

I was critical of these people. Of course there was huge diaspora support during the war, but almost no diaspora Armenian came to fight. Of course they were providing medical support, financial assistance and other things, but almost no diaspora Armenia came to fight here. Especially not the ones living in the West. There were some Armenians from Russia and from the former Soviet Union but not the traditional diaspora Armenians.

They lamented me because of my posts, they told me I had no rights to be that critical. But you know, it is not a football game between Madrid and Barcelona. It is a real war and when your son serves in the army, you really have different priorities. Those who were claiming these seven territories are integral part of karabakh territory, I was praying that the Armenian political leadership had the courage, understanding and the wisdom to stop claiming these 7 territories in order to save the rest of Karabakh and save so many lies. The war could have stopped in early October. Most of the victims came in the mid and after October. But the government did not have the courage. It was and still is cynical. Some people are making political dividends on Armenian defeat and capitalising their political games. It is really hard to understand what is happening in Armenia. On one hand you have a

government who lost the war and on the other you have an opposition who was corrupted and also bears certain responsibilities for Armenian defeat, for not modernising the army, for not equipping it with necessary advanced equipments. The society needs to ask questions to ask questions itself to really assess and understand the causes of the war rather than labelling someone as traitors.

Teresa:

What was Civilnet's policy during the war?

Karen:

We have an office in Karabakh, we opened it in August 2020 and on Sept 27th the war broke out and nobody could ever predict this so early. At the beginning of the war there were almost no reporters and I am not speaking about internationals, but no reporters. Most of them left the territory, most of the population left and were evacuated to Armenia. Our team was there and were reporting from the basements about what is happening and that helped us very much to not have a restricted coverage of what is happening in Karabakh in the basements, in the streets under shelling.

We also had teams travelling to Karabakh and to the South of Armenia, Syunik which also became a frontline.

We reported bravely and became a target for ultra nationalists groups for not serving state interests or so called propaganda, but it was all false as it happened after the war.

Teresa:

Was it possible to fact check the government lies?

Karen:

It was difficult to report everything we knew.

But we were reporting cautiously. For example, at the end of October the war became very close to Armenia's borders. There was this David Beck village south of Syunik and Tatul was reporting from there about the fighting. Then there was this

backlash from the ministry of defence, from the government saying what are you reporting?

What I learnt is that the prime minister himself did not know what is happening in the frontline.

There was a huge communication problem between the political leaders, the military leadership, the commands, the regiments and the frontline. It was a real mess.

We were reporting from the hospitals, the villages, the frontline.

At the end of the war it was very dangerous to go to the villages for reporters to be in open air.

Teresa:

How did you perceive your role as an editor in this situation?

Karen:

Sometimes you just need to ignore what the government imposes on you, especially when you see that what they impose is not right and the society needs to know info close to reality.

I do not say that you would sit panic in the society by reporting Armenians retreating in the frontlines, but reporting what is close to reality and Armenian people were persuaded during these 44 days that they will win and when the defeat happened it was out of the blue for most of the society.

How could we sign that capitulation agreement with Azerbaijan if we were winning?

If the media in general and the state propaganda and the government communication played a more logical role closer to reality the war could have been stopped earlier. Society could have been prepared earlier for stopping the war.

But this government and especially the prime minister was having his addresses all the time during the war, calling for mobilisation, calling for going to war instead of stopping it and there were clear messages from Aliyev. At the beginning of the war he wanted 5 territories. Then when they were advancing the appetite was also becoming bigger .

It is really hard to live in Karabakh now. You are surrounded by Azerbaijani and the road is controlled by Russians, but it is so shaky, so fragile. They can do any

provocation; they are interrupting the gas supplies, they are doing everything to support this creepy annexation, invading Karabakh villages, while at the same time talking about peace prospects. I do not know.

Teresa:

Going back to the article you shared with me. What feedback did you get and what was the process behind the publication of that piece?

Karen:

I was going to write such an article during the war but because of some reasons I didn't want to do that. So I wrote it after the war. The feedback was positive. Society became more realistic after the war. More logical. Everyone was having this hawkish rhetoric that these territories belonged to them. For example, the national assembly speaker was eating a pomegranate in Aghdam, an Azerbaijani town that was under Armenian control and was saying that Aghdam was his motherland but now he doesn't seem to have any pity about losing Aghdam, instead he is having this luxury life, they are buying new BMW for him, he is having a lot of trips to Bali and other places. They are just enjoying their power and that is immoral. But I am deviating from the topic.

For most Armenians it was out of the blue because most of Armenian society was cheated for years about what is NK, what is not Nk, what is the price of peace for Nagorno Karabakh, for Armenia. Are we going to pay that price? Can we sustain this situation for 10/15 years?

Do you want your son to be constantly under the pressure of war?

Not such questions were asked in the society, so everyone was thinking that that is a way of life and it will keep going, but it did not. Because of the incompetence of our leaders.

And also the overwhelming reality in the region. Whatever your success, even if 3 million people of Armenia suddenly become samurai or kamikaze. You still do not have that much power to overcome your neighbours. There is Turkey, Azerbaijani with 10 million population. With the second Nato army, with very advanced military and weaponry.

So you had to consider all these realities around you and you simply failed.

Teresa:

What is your opinion on peace journalism?

Do you think it has a space?

Karen:

Yes, it does and it needs to play a certain role.

Especially in these tumultuous times, when these types or voices are dampened by the state. You need to be vocal about the future. Of course there is catastrophe, but the catastrophe happens also because of the lack of this kind of discourse in the society, the lack of discourse about peace.

There are hawkish politicians in Armenia, in Azerbaijan, they are ignoring the lives of ordinary people both in Armenia and Azerbaijan and especially for them, victory was something to retain their corrupt regime to hold on into power.

For Armenians it was about survival.

Also there was ignorant political leadership that failed. Not only this government, but also the previous one have failed to go to some compromises and solve this problem.

Even for example they were negotiating with Azerbaijan and every plan was envisaging the withdraw from at least 5 territories at the first stage than from one and half territories

They were negotiating this but they were selling completely different things.

Like all these territories are integral parts of Karabakh, we are not going to compromise, we are going to inhabit these territories.

Teresa:

One last question:

Women are more often associated with peace than men.

In the field of journalism do you think women are more keen on doing this type of

journalism than men ?

Karen:

I don't see it. I could see that many women like the wife of the prime minister were having photo sessions with the military, uniform and guns etc.

I did not see any difference also before the war.

Some women are more hawkish than men.

Teresa:

Do you want to add anything?

Karen:

No

Appendix 8.3: Interview transcription of Ani Grigoryan

Teresa:

If you can start by saying what was your role during the war and then move to tell me a bit about the articles you shared with me?

Ani:

During the war I was working at a fact investigating platform, which is a fact checking site and when the war started we were trying to find fake news, disinformation from both sides and write about it. But as you might remember there was censorship and they were banned from posting anything which will not coincide with the government statements.

So there was a lack of info and we decided to go to Karabakh to understand what was going on there. We knew that Azerbaijan was using weapons that are banned by international law. So we went there to fact check and understand what is going on and to collect evidence that Azerbaijan is using banned weapons.

We arrived on the 3rd of October and we stayed in Shushi because on the first days Shushi was not as targeted as other cities, so we started to go to other cities to understand what is going on and we started to collect the evidence that Azerbaijani is using these banned weapons.

You saw in the article, according to the Geneva convention it is prohibited to use these weapons and we collect a lot of evidence that in Hadrut, in Stepanakert, in Martuni e Martakert they used them.

We took photos and sent it to Human Rights Watch and they released a report about it.

We also wrote about it.

During the war there were so many fake news especially from the Azerbaijani side, they were saying that they are targeting civilians and they were just bombing military buildings etc. but we went to the cities and we shot everything, they are

targeting everything and there isn't exception and mostly the building and apartments of civilians.

On the 7th of October, Azerbaijani bombed Shushi cathedral and we went there after 5 minutes because we were in Shushi and after that they said they bombed it because soldiers were hiding in the cathedral and they are in this church and this is why we targeted it.

But we saw there was no one in the church, just in the shelter there was a family, a woman with 2 or 3 kids, only them were there, no weapons at all.

During my time in the city I did not see soldiers around. So we wrote about it and after a while they stopped talking about it and supporting this narrative because there was so much evidence.

Also, there was news that soldiers are in the hospital in Lachin, so we went there to verify and we stayed in Lachin for a while because staying in Stepanakert or Shushi was already quite dangerous. The news said that that hospital is used as a military base and we went to that hospital and filmed the fact that it was actually working as a hospital and there were no soldiers there. We were trying to catch what they were doing and what type of narrative was circulating and we were writing about it, we were translating it into Russian and English and we were sending it to international organisations trying to stop it.

Teresa:

Did you send it to any Armenian media?

Ani:

Yes, we were publishing it on our site Fip.am and then sending it to other media for republishing.

During those days we worked very organised and we were trying to circulate it as much as possible.

Teresa:

How did you build the reports? (eg. the one about cluster bombs)

Ani:

So in the fact checking department there is a specific style to follow:

First you write the fact that you are going to check and we write: is it true or not?

Sometimes we also write about facts that are true but we need to investigate if it is actually true or not.

So we wrote that Azerbaijan is claiming that they are not using prohibited weapons, but we went to Stepanakert and Hadrut and we found this evidence. Also we were using exif data for our photos so that our colleagues from Kazakhstan for instance could verify the photo, they can see where it was taken, when, is it photoshopped or not?

We were putting all the evidence so they could see it and verify themselves.

Teresa:

Did you have any guidelines from your editors?

Ani:

I was an editor, so I was doing it.

Sometimes I was calling my colleagues and telling them to write about it, I sent photos and so on. Often because we did not have the internet for a long time it was difficult for us to work, so I was telling them what to write, but mostly I was doing it.

We went to Karabakh for 10 days and then came back to Yerevan and we understood that it is impossible to stay here and went there again until the 9th of November when Pashinyan signed the agreement.

Teresa:

How do you see your role as a journalist when it comes to war reporting, fact

checking?

Ani:

It is really hard when you are covering your war, it is really sensitive and I would say that I was really adequate because I was trying to calm my emotions down and work as professional as I could, but of course it was really hard for me and tense.

But anyway, I knew I should be there and we were doing the work that other journalists were not doing. Also our government was trying to work against disinformation, but the international media and society thought it was propaganda and they did not believe the government.

But when an independent media provides all the evidence and works very professionally, then it is more reliable and trustworthy.

I think the role of fact checking journalists was very important and of course it was very hard to work in this area when they are bombing all the time and you are wearing this heavy bulletproof and you are running and you are afraid that something is going to happen but during that time I was thinking that I am doing a very important job and understand what is going on and try to do my job as good as I could

Teresa:

What do you think is the impact of these reports?

Ani:

You know when you see the results of the war, people do not care.

For example there was one case of an investigation I did with a colleague.

During the war the press representative of the president of NK wrote that airport in Ganja is bombed and it is vanished. After 15 days we finally got satellite image of this area and we saw that the airport was in good condition, that it was not bombed. So they wrote disinformation but we could check it 15 or 20 days later because satellite images were not available during the war. Bu after the war, when you have this result, it is very hard to talk about the impact of your job because like Azerbaijan

bombed civilian infrastructures, you are writing about it, you are showing it but you can't do anything. Where to go? To whom to ask to punish them?

It is very disappointing when you are showing all these things and you know there is international law and there are documents saying that these weapons are banned and you should not use them. You write about it, you show the evidence, but you see no results.

I am happy that human rights watch wrote about it, but in general it does not make any results or impact, but you should remember that your job is to find out, to talk about it you can't do anything more.

In the war in Ukraine we see how the international community and organisations use sanctions against Russia and talk about Russia. We saw a very similar situation in Karabakh. They were bombing people, civilians but we did not see one person having this reaction. Of course it is very disappointing. We did what we could. I cannot have any impact on the results.

Teresa:

What did you notice from the Armenian side?

What was the impact of doing good, fact checked journalism from the Armenian side?

Ani:

We got a lot of positive feedback. We wrote about Ganja and everyone now knows that Ganja is not bombed that our government lied to us.

When we lose our lands though, nobody cares about journalism, they are just disappointed.

Teresa:

Do you think peace journalism has any chances in this context?

Are you familiar with this concept?

Ani:

We were doing peace journalism for many years in Civilnet.

We were going to Tavush to other borderline villages and we were talking with people about how to live with Azerbaijani and mostly they would say very nice things. They would say they were nice neighbours, they did not have any bad comments. During the years we did it a lot and many people targeted us for doing this, but it was really important for us to talk about it, to look at everything from different angles . I think pj is very important but there should be peace journalists on the other side too, because you know in Armenia before the war I would not say there was Azerbaijani fobia, because people were talking very positively about it but after this war people need time. But when you see the armenophobia and propaganda vs Armenia it is very hard. But I think we should talk about it, we should search for this type of story, looking at it from another angle.

Teresa:

Women are often associated with peace, do you see any gender differences in journalism? Do you think female journalists are more keen on doing pj than men?

Ani:

I don't think so.

Like one of the most famous journalists, tatul hakobyan, he was doing peace journalism and he found that one of the ministers of Azerbaijan used to live in a village that is now part of Armenia, he went there, found his teacher and did very interesting stories about that. I wouldn't say there is a difference between women and men, I did not feel that. I guess it's just personal. Many journalists in Armenia are pro war rather than pro peace.

Appendix 8.4: Interview transcription of Ami Chichakyan

Teresa:

How did you get the idea of the first story?

Ami:

When we were in Karabakh it was very hard for us to survive, to find something to eat, there were several shops open but you know you are a journalist, you are living in a hostel and at that time if I am not mistaken we were staying at the press centre which was located in a school, so we didn't have kitchen or any place to eat and luckily there were some places that provided free food and theirs was one of those.

Not everything was free there because they needed to survive and they were trying to help the army, so they needed money and that is why they had some free options and they sold something. It became a hub for journalists and not only. In the evening it was packed with international journalists and not only. So there we got to know some families that had very interesting stories like them. Leaving a war zone and coming to another one.

Until mid of the war they kept their kids with them and they were cooperating. The kids were serving food and helping everyone in the war zone to survive.

Everytime we would have a very interesting discussion with Hovik, the father of the family and this is how we got the idea. Also because we stayed there during bombing, we went to their basement. So I thought this is a story, we need to stick to it. He is a father who stayed with his kids and wife. I think at some point they sent the kids to Yerevan but at the beginning they were there helping everyone.

Before the war they had this cafe in Stepanakert, I did not know about it and then from other colleagues I heard about it. There were not many places open and it was inevitable to meet them, because you have to survive, you have to eat.

Teresa:

Did you have any guidelines from the media on what stories to cover or did you have editorial freedom?

Ami:

I was mainly free because nobody knew what to expect there. When I went there I had no idea what to expect. I went to see what was happening.

From time to time I was calling my editors and I was asking if he had any advice or criticism about my work but they said do whatever you want, we can't feel what you feel. We are happy about what you are doing there, so continue to do that.

Teresa:

When you decided to write this story, what were your thoughts about the structure?

Ami:

Let me re-read it.

I interview them very late because most of the journalists interview them.

So I thought maybe this is not the exclusive staff that you are searching for but we were having these discussions with Hovik and his wife, again and again and again and I thought they are people who know what war is. They escaped Syria and they came to another war really understanding what war is. Usually when you escape the war you don't want to go to another one. But I was very impressed by this story, this family and I finally decided that I am writing this article, I don't want to miss it.

The angle was based on our off the record discussion.

And it was interesting also because usually this type of people are individuals, alone, but this family had two kids.

Teresa

Moving to the second story about the volunteer.

What happened in that case? How did you come up with that one?

Ami:

So my director here didn't really want me to go to war. Everytime I would return from war he would tell me, no you are staying, you're not going again and then one day he called me into his office and told me "you are going to war again" and I said oh wow, what happened, how did you change your mind? he said I was not going to be alone.

So he was a member of this volunteer group and he knew everyone there and he decided that if I am going to war, I need to be safe and volunteers (soldiers) are the only people who can keep me safe, so they kind of offer me to go there with them.

For me every option was fine because I really wanted to go there, so I went with them, lived with them.

I was thinking that everyone writes similar stories about volunteers and people who stay in the basements.

That was a crisis situation for journalism and storytelling because you need to find some angle that is different from other stories. Everyone was telling the exact same story and you need to find someone interesting and sometimes when you are living with them you know them somehow and you have this expectation from people like “he sounds interesting, so if I interview him I can get a story”. But it happened that I interviewed a couple of people but I did not get anything and I did not even publish, but with this person (the volunteer) I never thought he is so interesting. We were living together in the same building, we were meeting each other almost every day and I remember doing it automatically and starting recording with my smartphone, but then he started to talk and I was shocked to get all that information from him. This person made the story.

If you have read other stories of volunteers they kind of repeat themselves, but this one stood out.

I remember showing them how many people commented and watched the video on facebook and they were proud of what was happening.

At first they did not like the fact that I was there, but afterwards they were proud of me. They saw all the comments on social media and realised that people knew what they were doing and they were thanking me for this opportunity.

As a person, I was really impressed by his speech. It was mainly him, not me in this case because I was shocked when I was interviewing him.

Teresa:

You were saying that at the beginning they did not accept you, why was that?

Ami:

Because I was the only woman and they felt limited, like for instance they felt like they cannot swear because I was there. Like I remember hearing someone saying “that is not her place, let her go back to Yerevan. I came to war and I have to swear. I don’t care about her”.

If you know Armenian tradition, nobody swears and for me it was an interesting case to hear that.

So It was a bit stressful, but as soon as I started writing stories, they accepted me. They understood I am not as useless as they thought.

Teresa:

You mentioned that your editor sent you with them for safety reasons. Do you think he did it because you are a female journalist?

Ami:

We have male journalists but they are 60+ years old and they cover mainly sports and culture, so we did not have anyone to go there.

They were worried about me, because I was not ready to cover an actual war.

I covered part of the 4 days war in 2016, but it is not comparable with the recent one in 2020.

He was afraid for me and I think he would have done the same for any other person.

Teresa:

I would like to understand a bit more how you came to select this specific volunteer. How did you realise this was the one who would give you an interesting story?

Ami:

So I spent more than 2 weeks with them. At first I was just observing and trying to understand who can talk, who is media and camera friendly. I started with them and then when others saw that nothing happened, I didn't bite anyone, it was just a camera and they are just speaking, so that your friends can see you.

I remember that I received a message saying “omg this is my friend, I thought he was lost. He does not have a phone, he doesn't write to us and I thought he was dead. Thank you for sharing this”.

That was an adaptation phase for me and for them. I was living with 50+ men and I was an alien to them. They did not know me, they didn't understand what I was doing there.

They were told that I was a journalist, not a spy, but they were sceptical about what I would do with that info.

But after a couple of stories they started trusting me.

Teresa:

I have noticed that in your articles you give a lot of space to sources to talk for themselves. Is it your style or some guidelines from the company?

Ami:

It is my style. It is their story, not mine. I think it feels more sincere, more open, more plausible.

If I write it, I will write it my way. But it's their story, their way of telling it. In these cases you need to be very careful about what you are writing. You are talking about people whose lives are in danger and you don't want to mess up their stories and what they are trying to say.

If you paraphrase it, it won't be a person's story anymore.

Teresa:

And for example, how do you perceive your role as a journalist?

How much impact do you think you have on how people in Armeni perceive the conflict?

Ami:

Honestly, I don't know. And during the war I was trying not to read news because it was stressful and it was mainly fake news and propaganda. When you are living in war zones you know the truth and you do not want to read that.

So I was ignoring everything and from time to time I was calling my editor to ask for the most important updates and she was telling me the most important things.

So I don't know the impact I had. I did not follow it.

Teresa:

So when you write a story, do you feel like the way you write it might influence the way people see the war?

Ami:

Hopefully yes because you are there, you are trying to tell the truth but you can't. You are kind of leaving these hints that you don't know if people will get it or not. Hopefully they will understand.

I heard they appreciate my work during the war and that is what matters.

If not everyone, but at least some of the audience knew my name and thank me for not posting fake news and posting human stories instead.

But I don't think about that when writing. I just want to write the story I got and hopefully the readers will understand my style and the message that I and my interviews are sending from the war zone.

Teresa:

One of the focuses of my research is to understand if peace journalism can work at all in this context and I would like to know if you are familiar with this concept?

Ami:

Not really.

Teresa:

Basically, there are two main views on how to cover conflicts. The major one is "war oriented" and it is usually the most common one. You usually give more space to governmental statements, to the narrative "us against them". Basically,

everything related to fighting.

Whereas peace journalism gives more space to possible solutions, non violence, the impact of war on civilians, human suffering. In very general terms these are the main differences.

Ami:

In war zones I don't think it can work and in this particular one either. The tension was very high and I cannot really imagine discussing ...

Yes, there were reports about civilian suffering, but they were mainly from war zones and because of your "enemy", that is how Azerbaijani are usually called and I do not really consider it peace journalism.

They were also part of the war and they were also fighting and the topics they were discussing were about war and not their lives.

I think it could have worked in Yerevan or in other parts of Armenia, but I did not want to do that because I wanted to cover the war.

Teresa;

And I guess you feel the audience wouldn't be ready to receive that type of info.

Ami:

Exactly. The audience would call you traitor, Azerbaijani spy, they will attack you. Do you want to be in that position?

You have to decide for yourself.

For instance Tatul Hakobyan, that was saying "we are defeated", everyone was attacking him, not physically but verbally.

You need to be very courageous to be in that position and understand that you can take that.

Follow up question on June 7th:

women are often associated with peace. Do you think female journalists will be

more keen on reporting about peaceful solutions to the conflict than their male colleagues or do you think gender makes no difference?

Answer (written):

Frankly speaking, I don't see the connection. Gender doesn't matter, it's mostly on a personal level. I can talk about myself even though I covered the war. I also write articles about peace and peaceful solutions, and I know many male journalists who do the same. So for me gender does not matter.

Appendix 8.5: Interview transcription of Seymur Kasimov

Seymur:

I wrote a lot of articles, reportage and news updates between September 27th and November 9. I also visited a lot of liberated areas during the war and wrote articles from the front line itself.

I sent you some articles from Aljazeera because I used to cooperate with them and an Azerbaijani media outlet. These 5,6 critical stories I wrote it just for Aljazeera about the bombing of Barda and Ganja. I think you also saw some of my pictures.

I am a reporter and I am not travelling with a photographer. I am writing and taking pictures of myself. The same thing I did in Ukraine, before the Karabakh war, in Euromaidan, in Turkey so it is not my first experience as a war reporter and I do not think it is the last one because wars continue everywhere.

I send you these stories for you to see the international approach to the conflict. As you see there is no analysis because during the war I didn't write any comment, because I wanted to hide myself. I used to work in the frontline. If I was working in Baku, sitting at home, drinking my tea than yes, I could do an analysis, but when you are in the frontline people want to get info about what is going on there, because you are actually there and nobody needs your analysis, your comments, everyone wants to know what is going on there. I tried to hide myself and all stories have been written in third person, not in the first person.

Regarding the terminology, in the Azerbaijani media outlets I used the word "liberated" , while in Aljazeera there I wrote "taking the control". These are two different terminologies. Even some of my Armenian colleagues did not agree with it and asked why you used 'liberated' and I said because it is actually liberated, I am physically staying there, I am physically in the area now controlled by Azerbaijani army. Plus, the international community recognises these territories as the Republic of Azerbaijan and I am staying here. I never used words like "Armenian terrorists, bastards, never." I am always using Armenian arm forces, Armenian soldiers. I am professional in this field and I know what type of terminology I should use, but for

international media outlets they are trying to be neutral, so you will not see the word “liberated”, you will see “taking under the control”, whatever.

Frankly speaking I do not think it is the correct approach.

if there are two parts of the conflict, aggressor and victim, as we see in the Russian-Ukrainian war. If Russia invades the internationally recognised territory of Ukraine (Crimea, Donbass). How can we use “under the control”? It is an invasion!

Because one country attacks another country. It is an invasion.

Let’s say Italy recognises the territorial integrity of Ukraine and Azerbaijan, based on some documents, like the European Union has a lot of documents based on the recognition of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. So we are journalists and if we use the word “occupation” it needs to be based on some documents. If you write news you cannot use “occupation”. When you are writing a reportage or a script from the area and you are the only journalist in the area, the battle continues and you see everything with your own eyes.

I was in Donetsk, I was in Kharkiv, in Shusha, I was in Jabrail, in Fizuli. In some places there was not a single journalist there, so I didn’t put my personal emotions, but I used the word “liberated”, because I saw Azerbaijani soldiers there.

Ukraine, it is not my war, but when I was working there I saw the Russian army occupying Kherson and I cannot move there. So what word should I use?

So in the conflict reporting we should take into consideration the international law.

Yes, we are journalists, we can do whatever we want but so what. When I was suggested to visit Mariupol by Russia, I said no, I will not do it because I am not going to violate the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Yes, I am a journalist, but it does not give me the privilege to violate the law. Is it possible?

Like is it possible to go to Italy without a Visa? No. I applied for the Visa and then I went.

I am a journalist, but I need a Visa. Journalists should respect a country’s territorial integrity.

I was suggested to visit Crimea before the war and I refused.

I used to work in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, I entered these breakaway regions via Georgia, I crossed the Inguri bridge and went to work there.

Sometimes colleagues from Europe and from Armenia think you are a journalist and you have the right to everything. No. You are a human being also and you should respect the law.

Yes, you need to cover the war, the post conflict situation, but you must have been given the chance because when you are punished, you are punished as a person not as a journalist.

If I entered Crimea or Mariupol nobody cares that I am a journalist, they will punish me as a person, a human as a citizen of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

So if you look at my pictures from Ukraine I do not write analysis, I try to write what I see, I take pictures around bombing, people suffering, cars burning, apartments bombed.

Could I work on the Russian side? Yes, but there is no war in Russian territory.

War took place in the territory of the republic of Azerbaijan: Karabakh.

But unfortunately, Azerbaijani journalists did not have access to cover the war from Shusha until the liberation. We just went to Shusha after a while. Last year I was in Shusha. But other regions like Hadrut, Khalbajar, I visited them during the war.

Also, the Azerbaijani government created big obstacles for journalists to work. They did not allow them. Not even international journalists. Azerbaijani authorities, I am always stressing it, we couldn't work. We could work more professionally, get a lot of info, but we had big obstacles, barriers that we cannot move on.

We couldn't work in the way we wanted but in these circumstances, I think we did our best.

Also about these stories for Aljazeera, they reached out to me.

They told me, we know you are on the frontline and we would like you to cooperate with us, send us stories and ideas. During the bombing of Barda, Ganja I was there and I told them I was there and asked if they were interested in stories from there. They said yes, so we started to collaborate.

It was just during the war situation. Now I do not have contacts with Aljazeera.

Teresa:

Did you decide what type of stories to write or did they give you any guidelines?

Seymur:

I decided because I was on the ground.

They had questions of course and based on the questions, I answered them.

For example, you are writing your thesis now, right?

So you have some plans, angles. But in the war you do not have plans, everything happens suddenly. you cannot choose your focus. You are on the ground and you have to decide right now what type of angle it's interesting for international media. Because cooperating with Aljazeera or azerbaijani media is different.

For you is great, for them is nothing.

So you should keep in mind this angle, that you are writing for the international community but it doesn't mean you should write propaganda. From a journalism perspective, your pictures, your words, your respondents. For example Aljazeera asked me to find some officials, it was impossible to find a city mayor so I told them there are mps from those cities and they said it was okay. So it was a cooperation between me and Aljazeera. Sometimes I give them ideas, sometimes they will give me. It was a great cooperation.

The same thing happened in the Barda region. Bara and Ganja were far from the front line.

Ganja 100 km, Barda 60km.

There was no relations with Karabakh, no bombing, just civilians, no military objects.

This topic was interested for Aljazeera: why are Armenian arm forces bombing civilians?

and the territory that has no relationship with Krabakh or the 7 regions.

Teresa:

How did you approach the people you interview in the article?

Seymur:

Good question.

If you see the picture there is one girl, Hadija, she is sleeping.

I will tell you her story: when I went to the hospital, I was there alone and I knew that she lost her family: father, mother and 11 months sister.

She was alone and sleeping. Near her bed there was her aunt but she did not know what happened to the rest of the family.

Imagine, I know, but she doesn't.

So I just asked: How is she?

And she told me: she is fine but I have no information about my sister, her husband and Hadija sister. I knew they all died, but I did not tell her.

I asked the doctors to take me away. It was a tough situation.

Imagine knowing that they lost everyone.

I just shut my mouth and left.

Also, there were a lot of wounded people in the hospital. So I approached them, I said I was a journalist and asked if I could take their picture. They all told me yes and gave me the interviews.

I also went to the bombed area and took pictures of people standing in front of their destroyed houses. You know, during the war, people were talking a lot.

I did not have any problems. I always asked permission of course, but they were eager to talk.

They wanted someone to listen: maybe local authorities, maybe the international community because war was continuing and they were the primary victims of the war.

But I haven't seen the same situation in Ukraine. It was very hard to talk to people.

Yes, Ukraine is a big country, it is not Karabakh. I used to work in all areas of

Ukraine, except Mariupol.

I started in the West and finished in the East. It was so difficult to talk to people.

It was everyone's problem. Also my colleagues from Italy and other countries were having the same issue. If you approach 21 people just 1 will talk to you.

It was easier to talk to authorities than to normal people in Ukraine, but in Azerbaijan it was the opposite.

Teresa:

Why do you think it is so?

Seymur:

I would say that Azerbaijani people are more sceptical than others because they know talking to journalists will not help, but it was a war situation and post conflict situation.

Usually they know journalists would come, collect their stories and perhaps never publish it.

But during the war, they were the first victims and they were the ones approaching you: they were angry and they wanted to shut the camera, show their grief. I did not have problems with the respondents in Azerbaijan during the war, but the situation was a bit more problematic.

For instance, it was a few days after the bombing in ganja and Aljazeera asked me to write a feature story for them, because a lot of families were going back to take some of their items and so on. So I said okay, I will go.

Have you seen the picture of the father holding a small child?

He is not the father, he is the uncle. A lot of media wrote he is the father, but he is not.

Everyone took this picture, it became very famous.

After a few days, he was still there and I asked him to talk to me.

It was very hard. He didn't want to talk. He said there is no reason to do that. Have you seen, I lost everything, I lost my beloved?

I said no, you need to talk to me. I need you.

Then, after my story it appeared that he is the uncle, not the father.

I understand it was very difficult for journalists during war times to determine who is who. How can you approach him and ask: are you the father or not?

But after a couple of days he said, I am the uncle of this kid. My brother was in a battle and I just took Kevin on the shoulder myself.

Anyway, after a while I talked to him. He showed the place of the houses where the bombed dropped.

In Ukraine, have you heard of the city Chernobyl at the border with Romania?

This city has not seen any battles nearby but it hosts so many IDPs: there are like 100 000 IDPs staying there. My trip started from there, I entered from Romania. Just 2 families talked to me. Imagine. I was quite angry. I was like, guys please, just give me an interview.

I wrote a story about these two families: one was from Mariupol, one from Donetsk.

They were staying in a dormitory with 20 other families, but just 2 agreed to talk.

But it was very hard.

Maybe in the post conflict situation in Ukraine something will change.

I was in Mykolaiv and people were shouting at me like, are you a spy?

Why are you taking our picture?

I was telling them I am a journalist and I am working here. And local authorities were asking me to understand.

In Azerbaijan it was different, I had a chance to compare:

In Ukraine it was easy to talk to authorities, whereas in Azerbaijan during the war it was not.

Of course it depends on the person themselves during that situation.

Teresa:

What was the name of the newspaper you were writing for in Azerbaijan?

Seymur:

pressclub.az

There is some news from the frontline and some stories from the area itself.

During the war, all of my stories were published in English, Azerbaijani and Russian.

Teresa:

Were you able to do more in depth stories, analysis for them or not?

Seymur:

It was my principle: I don't do analysis. I was afraid I would not be objective.

There are two types of war: your war and not your war.

I am originally from Jabrail.

My father passed away during the first Karabakh war. The rest of my relatives are IDPs.

And during the war, October 15, I lost my cousin. He was a military man of the Azerbaijani army and was killed.

It is our war and the one of Armenians. Ukraine is not. But my stories are the same. Not even one analysis. Principally, I just avoid it.

Politicians do some analysis. I just see bombs being dropped around. What kind of analysis can I write?

I am taking pictures of destroyed houses and burning areas. Let the people themselves analyse it.

Yes, I am commenting during the interviews, but my stories are authentic.

There is still some tension in the area where Russian peacekeepers are staying and I am avoiding myself from the analysis.

The analysis comes when everything finishes, when you can write a new chapter, but there is no peace agreement, no one can guarantee that it will continue forever.

Now, we can analyse the ongoing situation: Armenians, Azerbaijani military are there, Russian peacekeepers are there. Sometimes they kill each other. What type of analysis should I do? You need a reason for analysis and there isn't.

Teresa:

I am curious:

You said you were not satisfied with how the international media covered it.

I feel many local journalists think the same.

What is it that it was missing from their coverage in your opinion?

Seymur:

Interesting question. There were two problems during the war:

1. The Azerbaijani government did not allow international media outlets or international human rights organisations on time in the area.

2. The second big problem was this big scandal around Syrian mercenaries:

When the BBC service wrote this article without any attribution. They said we cannot give name, age, they just published an interview with a Syrian supporting the Azerbaijani side but there is nothing about this Syrian.

For the entire duration of the war, the Azerbaijani media were trying to find these Syrians. Where are they? We were in the frontline. Where are these Pakistanian?

I was in the frontline and I got a call from RFE and they asked me a question about them and I was telling them, guys I am here but I do not see them, maybe they are somewhere but I don't see them.

Yes, there were other nationalities in the Russian army: Russian, Jewish, ..., (34:31) Ukrainians, Georgians, but they are citizens of Azerbaijan. If you compare Azerbaijan with Armenia: Azerbaijan is multiethnic and we have two Russian soldiers killed, a Georgian was killed too. He came from the areas bordering Georgia.

But there were no Syrian or Pakistani.

And BBC Azerbaijani service translated this news in Azerbaijani.

We told BBC service, this is a serious claim: you should identify your sources,

It's like I am talking to you without giving the name and I am saying, one lady from Italy called me this, this and this.

No name, no age, no photo, just your nationality. Italian lady.

What type of sources is it?

Is it the primary source? What is it?

After that, all the international media started writing about it and until now, I don't know. I recently met in Brussels with my Armenian colleagues too and they asked me about it, but I have no idea.

These also created problems between local authorities and international media and was one of the reasons why they did not want to allow them to come. But I was telling them that they should allow them to come to see everything with their own eyes. Then BBC, CNN, Aljazeera TV, France 24, some Italian media managed to come to Azerbaijan, but it was in the middle of the war, so before that no international media was allowed. It was just me among the Azerbaijani journalists to collaborate with international media outlets.

If we compare it with Armenia, international media were there since the first day of the war.

In Azerbaijan, just Turkish media which was there from the beginning.

Teresa:

How do you perceive your role as a journalist especially in times of conflict and the impact you can have on people who read you?

Seymur:

It is my specialisation. I covered a lot of wars, I am well known in my country and It was kind of expected of me to do that. I never wrote propaganda and my government doesn't like me because I never write what they want.

Also, I have great communication with international media and organisations with whom I used to work or cooperate and that they know me personally and I

understood that they were waiting for some info from me.

If I am on the Azerbaijani side, I will write about it.

I remember one Armenian colleague, she unfriended me on FB and she was like: why don't you write about Stepanakert? And I was like, I can't, I am here.

She was like, yeah but the Azerbaijani army bombed a maternity hospital and I was like, I can't, because I am not there. I am physically in another area.

I told her, you go there, write about it and let's give Armenian, Azerbaijani and international media two versions: from Az and from Armenia without propaganda, without emotions.

War reporting means you are on the ground. Nobody needs your emotions, your feelings. Everybody needs info. Everyone is hungry for info especially during the war.

I would be glad if Russian authorities would create opportunities for journalists. I could have worked from Kharkiv and from where the Russian army is.

But Ukrainian authorities gave me accreditation and they created this atmosphere for me.

If Russian does the same, then maybe I could go.

Also, now I am in Baku for eg. I cannot write about what is going on in Lachin. I am hearing something, but I am not physically there, so I cannot write about it.

So I told my Armenian colleagues, go to Stepanakert, to Shusha and write stories from there. I believe you, you are professionals. I cannot. I am in Karabakh from the Azerbaijan side.

In my stories as I said there are not my feelings, no emotions. I understand nobody needs them. Maybe some local people, but I don't give them. I never based my journalism on my emotions.

I lost my cousin during the war, he was an officer of the Azerbaijani army, but I did not say anything about him.

He was a military man. I am a journalist. No emotion, no sympathy, no antipathy, no empathy. "Oh miserable guys, we are crying with the people with destroyed houses". No, sometimes you must "stone your psychology". You will read my peace book. It's me and a South African expert. He is theoretical, I am a practical expert. So we combine our knowledge. If you cannot avoid emotions, do not become a war

reporter. Write about fashion, about politics, whatever you want, but not war reporters. You need to be psychologically ready and if you cannot avoid yourself then do not write about it.

Teresa:

What was the impact of your stories?

The ones you wrote for international media or the Azerbaijani one in different languages?

Seymur:

The impact was great, especially the one for Aljazeera because when they posted it on their Twitter page, facebook page there were huge amounts of likes, shares. Of course Armenians also wrote something. It is open source. Many foreigners, you don't know the names. The same in Azerbaijan. I am the first journalist who entered one of the half liberated areas.

I was in Jebrail, 50% under occupation, 50% liberated and I was physically there. I was in Zengula, I was in Kubable?? The war was continuing and I was there. It was the first story from this area and it was of big interest and because it was published in 3 different languages I realised the impact was great.

Some people with whom I used to work, they knew I am not a liar and shared my stories.

Accredited embassies in Azerbaijan were also interested in my stories. One of them was the Italian one that was interested in my stories from Shusha. It was the first story. If it wasn't from this area it would not have been so interesting. For eg. I was in the regions: Jebrail, Fizuli, Kupable, lachin, and it was 26 or 27 of October and my story was published at the beginning of November. I got a huge amount of criticism from Armenian colleagues and others. I did not blame anyone because it was war and I could understand their psychology. I did not fight, let's say. It is impossible to say that all love you or adore you. Maybe 60% loves you, 40% hates you. Maybe 70, 30 but not 50-50.

Even some Armenians that have been knowing me for a long time told me they know I am not writing propaganda. Some of them hate me, but I do not understand why because I have never written anything bad about the Armenian nation,

Armenian nationality. I never used “Armenian bastards, terror” not even on my FB. During the entire duration of the war all my posts were in English. and for the public.

Yes, I wrote: Fizuli, liberated. Jebrail was liberated because it is what happened. But I did not write Azerbaijani army killed Armenian terrorists and liberated ..

It is not correct.

I do understand them, maybe in some years they will understand me too.

I used to work in the field, I am a field journalist, I am not a room journalist. Even though I do respect all of us because I think we all have our responsibilities. But if you call yourself a war reporter then you need to be on the ground. Sitting in Baku or in Yerevan or in Stepanakert or Khankhendi writing stories about the war, do not write it.

You need to go there.

Teresa:

For instance, when you were writing the stories for Aljazeera, were you thinking about the impact the angle you chose might have?

For instance, if you write about people whose house was bombed that has a different impact that if you just write about the army.

Seymur:

Good point.

I start thinking about the impact before starting to write, before actually going to talk to the people because it is important how you approach these people.

I cannot come to you and be like: Teresa, how did you feel when you lost your father?

I started from structuring my questions. You need to be a little bit of a psychologist in the way you choose your question. How can I ask for it?

You can ask it directly and hurt the person or you can ask the same question but in a different way.

Yes, it is difficult, but you have another responsibility: do not harm.

Then, when you think well of the questions you receive the answers easily because you did hurt him. Interview technique is very different during the war, after the war. When you stand in front of his house or in front of the coffins of his beloved.

Little details make the difference.

There are huge amounts of mistakes among the Azerbaijani journalists, like how did you feel when you saw your father dead? Why?

How did you feel when you saw the bomb coming to your house?

How can you ask this question?

Maybe sometimes you have to wait hours or days and give them time.

So you have to observe.

In war reporting you need to pass this level of technique, psychological level, write questions, and observe the interviewers.

For example, with my uncle, I had to wait. But after a couple of days I saw he was quiet, he smiled a little bit and I approached him and tried to create a good atmosphere, but imagine when he was holding the coffin I could not do it.

Teresa:

What are your thoughts on pj?

Do you believe that pj and I mean a type of journalism that gives space to negotiations, possible peace agreements, resolution of the conflict, and attention to people?

Seymur:

It is in my book.

I think sometimes we should ask ourselves a question: what can I offer to Teresa?

What does Teresa want?

We are always thinking about our own needs.

Pj should always be in the talk because war ends and the peace process starts.

But we are never considering others.

What can I suggest to them to talk to me and reach this peace agreement?

I want this, this and this, they want this, this and this.

Pj should help change our approach. What can I offer?

Because I should attract you to sign this agreement with me. of course some points we can discuss further. during the war you have your own positions, that's it. But when you go into a peace agreement you should consider both sides.

Yes I agree with pj. I am involved in this kind of project.

I never consider myself as a peace builder. I am a journalist, but during my stories I am always thinking what do you want? Do you know my needs?

We should come together, share our ideas. Maybe it is impossible to do what you want, but I should ask. Maybe you can give me 10 points, maybe just 5 are possible, but let's discuss it.

I am for pj. Sometimes it's more difficult than war reporting because for it, all the process is in front of your eyes, but in peace journalism you should create the atmosphere for it.

You should find everything yourself.

Teresa:

Do you think there is space for it in Azerbaijan?

Seymur:

Unfortunately, it is not at a high level.

Yes, we have peace journalism, but we cover our own needs.

We want this and this, so let's sign an agreement.

Unfortunately, this is the type of peace journalism we have.

I cannot say we are professional in this. But nobody considers the other side. Peace agreement is a mutual process. Like how we agreed for our interview?

We suggested day and time and agreed for 11am Friday morning. We asked about our needs.

It's the same process, you should ask and then consider the possibilities of realisation of the proposal.

Unfortunately, I think 90% of Azerbaijani journalists do not work in this way.

Teresa:

One last question:

Women are often more associated with peace, perhaps also considering the role they play in society like the Azerbaijani one.

Do you think female journalists are more keen on doing pj than male journalists?

Seymur:

During the war, there was just one lady war reporter. Very beautiful lady, she works in one of the national tv channels in Russian language.

All war reporters were men. But when it comes to peace reporting I see a lot of ladies. They never work in the field as war reporters, they haven't seen the war itself but they write more peace stories.

For eg. to show the grief of sides, to show the victims of both sides, using some soft rhetoric, using not harsh terminology.

In these circumstances ladies are the first in Azerbaijani media outlets, and the majority work in independent media, not in pro government or pro opposition. On this side, ladies are first.

During war let's say there were 50 journalists, 49 were men and 1 was woman.

Teresa:

Why do you think it was like this?

Seymur:

I know her well. She comes from a military family. Her father is a military man and she is interested in the military even in peace times she runs military TV programs.

Her angle is military journalism. She is not a peace journalist. She is fully involved

in war.

She is Azerbaijani and speaks in Russian.

She did a program about military navy or air forces.

We have a lot of ladies that do peace reporting.

Appendix 8.6: Interview transcription of Heydar Isayev

Heydar:

It's an explanatory article about what happened in Armenia on November 10th, after the signing of the ceasefire agreement.

That night Armenians stormed the parliament and beat up the members of parliament.

But why did people do that? This is the kind of story we make at Mikroskopmedia: explanatory articles, so when some big news stories happen and people may not understand what is going on, we come up with some explanations for it.

Teresa:

What triggered this story?

We know that during and after the war both societies, Armenian and Azerbaijani, were interested in one another, so we were trying to introduce some explanatory articles from Armenia to the Azerbaijani public, so this event of Armenians storming the Parliament, unhappy of the ceasefire, was definitely something we wanted to talk about.

Teresa:

What is your relationship with the sources?

Heydar:

With this kind of articles we don't have primary sources, we usually use secondary sources like government statements, government, activists.

For this one we use Armenian media and Armenian government statements.

Usually we use first hand sources with video stories.

The protagonists can be soldiers, families, IDPS, and statements from the government.

During the war it was easy to find soldiers, idps, people supporting the war and as

soon as we were talking about victory, return of territories then people were talking.

Teresa:

What was the editorial line during the war?

Heydar:

We tried to be objective but there were topics we did not touch upon.

But for eg. Amnesty international recently published a report where it is said that Azerbaijani bombs killed mostly elderly in Nagorno Karabakh, we translated and reported it too.

We also report about what is said against Azerbaijan, but for instance if it is a statement from Karabakh authorities we would call them “so called authorities”.

Teresa:

How do you perceive your role as an editor?

Heydar:

We are three editors and I will speak on behalf of all of them.

Our role is an informative and investigative role. We do not try to push some agenda or collaborate with civil society or something.

When there is a big story happening, we report about it, if it is in the interest of Azerbaijani people. Like for instance if there are some arrests, or political prisoners etc, we do report about it.

Teresa:

What type of impact do you think your stories have on the way your audience sees the conflict?

Heydar:

It is very difficult to talk about the impact of our stories on the audience because you know, people have this mindset, that is in line with the government narrative.

Teresa:

What are your views on peace journalism?

Heydar:

I can't say that people are against the idea of peace or normalisation of the situation, because when the president says that we have to live with the Armenian people, that the conflict has been resolved and that now we have to talk about economic opportunities, normalisation of relations. When he says that, people would support him, so I can't say that Azerbaijani are totally against Armenians or the normalisation of the conflict.

Media stories I do not think have too much of an impact. I mean we do have an impact on some of our audience like for example when Pashinyan says something nice about Azerbaijani or he is optimistic about peace, it may have impact on our audience, it might change their mind about Pashinyan thinking that he is a peaceful leader, but I do not know to what extent. It is very hard to talk about this thought, because I do not think we have ever done audience surveys.

Yes, we are familiar with the concept of peace journalism, but we are not ready to make it part of our journalism. It sounds like we are afraid, but it's not, it's more like we are trying to arrange our team of reporters to work better on stories, investigations of all types. But about peace, this is not a priority of our media now.

The priority is returning of IDPS for eg. and the government is saying what they need, what they demand or the soldiers that are still serving, their wellbeing in the army. Now they have some demands, they want some privileges from the government, they are in the centre of attention, so we can't really do a story about peace.

We do stories about the normalisation of relations, but peace has not occupied the main agenda right now. Once there is a peace treaty, then we can do some stories about this.

There are many challenges for peace journalism:

The first one I would say is accountability with the government or government responsiveness. usually it is not necessary for conflict reporting but like in our case, when we do not have access to all the places that the government says are liberated or what the idps are demanding, but they are putting down some statistics from this area, but you do not have access to people or officials that are responsible of this rebuilding work, you can't really verify the info.

For example, a few months ago there were some issues with the construction workers who were taking care of rebuilding those territories, but we could not follow up.

Eventually they got their salaries and left the job, but how that affects their work we do not know.

I would say that the general Azerbaijani public would not like the Azerbaijani media to report against Azerbaijan, I mean they do not like this type of reporting, but we are doing it.

Also, when you interview soldiers or whoever has been part of war, they feel patriotic, nationalistic and they think you will be on the same page because you are reporting about them, so you should report about how they want.

Teresa:

Do you think female journalists are more keen on applying peace journalism than men?

Heydar:

I do not think there is a difference between male and female attitude towards peace journalism.

Again, you would need a survey to assess that, but if female journalists think more positively about Armenians I can't say it. I have not noticed any differences between male and female azerbaijani regarding what they think about Armenia.

Especially before the war people were afraid of Armenians and it has been the same for male and females.

It poorly reflects on journalism.

Let's say when the president says something about Armenia and journalists introduce it as a fact, I do not think being female or male would make any difference i.

Or about war crimes or description of Armenians I do not think there will be any difference in their reporting.

Appendix 8.7: Interview transcription of Gunel Safarova

Teresa:

How did you come up with the idea of the first story? What about the relationship with the sources?

Gunel:

I was in Ganja during the first bombing. Do you remember it was between the 10th and the 11th. I was staying in a place that was 40-50 minutes by car.

I was covering the first bombing and than (*Ighicevin?*) ... was bombed as well.

I don't think someone died, but someone was injured and some houses were damaged.

And *Minghichevin??* was also under attack and we had a thermal power plant there, so that was why it was almost every day under attack , so there were two main rackets so they sent me there. I went there. It was on the 13th or 12th. First I went to the houses that were bombed, than I did a video, but then my editor asked me to just talked to people in the street. So I just took my phone and mic and talked to anyone who wanted to say something. A sort of vox pop. So I was asking something like: this is happening, so what do you think about it.

It was nothing special, I did not have this idea for days. It was something special, but with BBC azerbaijan we always wanted to do this vox pop because it is easy to do and people are talking, you hear their voices that's why i did it. It took like half an hour and then I went back to ganja.

Teresa:

Was it the BBC who asked you to do this type of report?

Gunel:

Yes, to stop people and ask what they think because it is under attack. They were very close. they had thermal power plants and what they think. Also because in that area there are a lot of refugees especially from Agdam. So it was just to ask them

what they think. Nothing special.

Teresa:

Did you expect their answers?

Gunel:

I did not have specific expectations. I was just asking a lot of people, men and women and then I left.

Teresa:

Are there any other videos among the ones you made that you would like to discuss?

Gunel:

You know the second bombing of Ganja, I was walking around the ruins of the buildings, people were searching for each other. I woke up because of the rocket. I got so scared, it was the second time and then my editor called me and told me: you had to go there. So I just wore the flak jacket and I went.

But it was quarantined and I was scared also because after midnight cars were not allowed.

Also, it was night and I did not really know where to go because I do not know Ganja that well. So one person secretly took me to the place, but he could not find the exact spot so he left me 2 kilometres away and I was walking and asking people where the place was.

I went there, filmed and got back at like 6 in the morning. Then I edited the piece and then went back again at 9am. It was a hard day because I was going to the house of people who lost their families, I had to find them, film them. I was crying with all the families. I was crying behind the camera with them. I left Karabakh when I was 5 years old, but Ganja showed me what war is, because I was a kid, I did not know what the war was, everyone was talking about it, was saying the war is bad, but I experienced it when I was 32 years old, when it happened in Ganja.

That was the hardest for me, especially working with the families of missing people.

You cannot just go there and say “it’s war, it’s okay, we are winning”, it is not that simple, when you see these people crying and saying “we are not even in the border, why are they bombing us”?

I was smoking and I was quite overweight in 2019. I was 150 kg or something, it was not easy for me. Then the doctor told me, you have diabete, so I switched to a healthy lifestyle for a couple of months in the summer of 2020. I quit smoking and drinking, I was quite happy with it, I lost a couple of kilograms and then I was on vacation and came back on the 27th of September and that was the day when the war started and during the war I started to smoke 3 times more and I just got all my weight back in one month.

Then after the war I decided that I had to change my life and I went to the biometric operation. I cut my stomach so that I could feel better, because the doctor said in a couple of years I would not be able to walk because it was getting out of control.

The war changed me. After that, I could not stay at the BBC anymore. I left after a month and it was quite sarcastic because for my last job for them I went to Shusha and it was kind of the triumph of my career.

Teresa:

Why did you leave the BBC?

Gunel:

It was my problem. I became quite angry. I had issues controlling it and I didn’t get satisfaction from my job. I was doing it for 6 years so I must say it was a nice place, I learnt a lot of things and I had many experiences. I am grateful. But I think something in me changed. I wanted to be another person. I wanted to be someone else. I wanted to get thinner, healthier, the only thing I could not quit were cigarettes.

I left in July. I had some issues with my editor and I thought why am I putting myself in this? Maybe it’s time. But yea, quitting journalism was after that.

Teresa:

Did you have editorial freedom or were you restricted somehow?

Gunel:

No, I never admire war itself.

I can't . I have lost family members because of it. We were struggling for more than 20 years with housing, we were living in wagons, we had lots of traumas, deats, it was a huge mess because of this, But despite this, I never wished there would be war.

For instance, my cousin has one child. He went to war and came back with a concussion.

He couldn't talk for months and then my brother wanted to go [to war] and I was quite afraid because he has 2 children and you know I did not think about the future at this point I was thinking not as a journalist, but as a person "maybe we should go till the end, so this conflict will end".

I have a nephew who is 14 years old and in 4 years he will go to the military and this conflict you see, not even now is over. Everyday someone is dying.

So probably as a person I just wanted this to be over, so these kids will not die again and again, every 30 years. I do not want these children to experience the trauma I had to go through. So I was never a pro-war person and with the BBC we did not have any restrictions, censorship. Our material was just based on what people were thinking.

How can I dictate to them "no I want peace". People wanted war because they were fed up and the BBC did not want to change their opinion, their minds.

When the war was over we went back to Bagda, Tartar, Aghdam, we were travelling and those ideas about Kalbajar or Lachin people, if you remember I did some stories about them.

I wanted to write about people going back?

As you saw they were quite colourful videos and I am quite happy about them.

So no restrictions for them. I was feeling conflicted because I was a refugee myself, but it never did influence my professionalism. I have never used words that I should have not used, because I understand what journalism is and I respect its principles.

Teresa:

How did you reach the family in the last link I shared?

Gunel:

We were in Bagda and the main source for me there were taxi drivers. They know everything. You just tell them “bring me to the region where there are water problems” and they will bring you there.

So there was one guy who was also a refugee from Amdara??

and I was asking him where I could find people from Khankendi (Stepanakert).

He said they are living in Adjakent, where the government built some houses for them.

So it was one hour by car and my editor and I went together. I filmed and he took the interviews.

I don't remember exactly how we found this family. We probably searched on knocking at people's doors and asked whoever wanted to talk. No wait, I remember. The driver had the number of the second woman, the elderly one. I think we called them and we said we need to interview some refugees from Khankendi and they agreed.

the woman with the head band, she was her niece and she was quite emotional. She went there, when we were taking the interview and came to. She had a nice story and we filmed her. But the 3rd woman from Khojali, I asked my editor to shoot her because I read on social media that there was this family from Khojali that was baking bread and giving it to soldiers without asking for money. And when we went to the family we stopped there and I just asked about interviews and then I had to convince my editor that I felt like that woman from Khojali had a story to tell and I was right, it was quite nice.

After the interview she made bread and then they brought this mountain of honey, cheese and we were all together, even with the taxi driver. We were all together and it was such a nice ending of the day.

They were quite hopeful that Khojali would come back.

For the third woman I got a feeling that she had something to tell. Then I was thinking how to connect them and that is how the video was created. I like it a lot.

Actually they have shared many more stories than what we could include in the video. But because of time constraints we had to cut some of them off.

They shared some very nice stories about their Armenian friends, neighbours.

Teresa:

What was people's reaction after the publication of this story?

Gunel:

Surprisingly, they really liked it.

I was quite afraid for the families actually, but I quoted the older woman and she said "thank you" because they liked it.

When people are angry and you want to show something neutral, they could blame you for working for Armenians and for the BBC it was the main thing they would tell you, just because we were reporting about the Armenian side too.

I did not have any problems with this story. I think people were actually writing good things about it. There was no hatred in the comments either.

Teresa:

How do you see your role as a journalist in time of war?

Did you feel you had an impact in the way people saw the conflict?

Gunel:

I was quite happy that I was able to go to Ganja.

They were sending just people with accreditation and we have quite a few problems with the government because of it.

They were giving accreditation to foreign BBC correspondents to go to places, but for us it was problematic.

For example in the first days of war I was with my editor in Bagda and they did let us go to Tartar or other places.

They were saying your name is not on the list of names that the administration gave us, so you cannot go there.

It was kind of problematic. Then Ganja was bombed on the first of October if I remember correctly. One person died and several people were injured. It was quite calm that is why a few days after they sent me there even without accreditation.

Then on the 4th of October I went there to shoot the place that was damaged by the first bombing. I was sleeping and then this huge bombed came. It was horrible.

It was by chance that I was there.

I wasn't expecting the second bomb you know? I was planning to come back for a day but that the second bomb came and I had to stay for 2 days.

I think it was really important to be there.

It was really important to show without any filters what was happening.

I thought that the international media was kind of biased towards us and I do not feel they are representing what is happening in Azerbaijan. I don't think they are approaching it with justice.

You know I guess one of my main successes was when I found this little girl, the one who lost her mother and sister and is now living with her grandparents.

I found them, I went to their family, she was sleeping and could not open their eyes. I knew the address and after I came back from the interview BBC Russia called me and asked me about this story, where they should go. So I shared with them their contact information, their address and then they met with the president of the administration office and they reminded him there is this girl that needs help and after that Asis Anjar?? (Turkish scientist) gave her funds for her future, for university or something and this story also appeared on BBC News English and Russia. It was a quite popular story in these three languages and I am happy her story was not silenced and she became sort of the face of Ganja.

I was trying to show the human side of what was happening. Just saying in numbers 11 people died , but who are they?

One family in 1 night lost 5 members. I think it was very important to show that.

Teresa:

What is the impact you want to have as a journalist?

Gunel:

I want to show people's stories. I did not care about houses, about the city. I cared about people. What will happen to them?

I cared about showing the consequences of war.

I think the most traumatic thing for me was this video about the martyrs' families.

I was crying all the time, while filming, while editing.

For some families it was their only child. This shows what war is actually like.

And while talking to these families I was remembering that my nephew is 14 years old.

In 4 years I can lose him.

Teresa:

Are you familiar with peace journalism?

Gunel:

I think we did it many times.

For instance with the refugee stories from Khankendi, even though it's not a territory occupied by Azerbaijan. We did a lot of stories about living together [Armenians and Azerbaijani]. We interviewed some Armenians and Azerbaijani. Yeah, we did it quite a lot.

Teresa:

Yes, that is exactly the idea of peace journalism. It is based on the belief that journalists do have a role in shaping the way people see and perceive the conflict and that is our responsibility to show not only soldiers and bombing, but also the human side of it, civilian sufferings and possible diplomatic solutions.

Gunel:

I think one of the missions of BBC Azerbaijan is peace journalism.

In fact, BBC Azerbaijan also has an Armenian correspondent, Arisen Marbelian. He is from Ganja but he fled during the war, but we have a very great relationship. He speaks Azerbaijani better than me!

He is quite popular among the Azerbaijani audience. He has lots of fans and haters.

My first time meeting with an Armenian was in 2014, before entering BBC, I came to Georgia for Gipa. We became really good friends. There was one girl and two boys and with the girl I was very very close. Now we do not have a great relationship, but I remember after GIPA we saw each other again for training and we were staying at the same hotel and when we saw each other we hugged and cried.

After that I was part of Chai Khana and International alter. I was part of many cross border projects. Even now. In my workplace we are planning a cross border project in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Teresa:

Do you see peace journalism as something feasible, that can happen for instance in mainstream Azerbaijani media?

Gunel:

It is not happening, but I think it should. It's now time for this.

There is still too much hatred towards Armenia.

Even when the BBC was doing videos from the Armenian side or Meydan TV or RFL, there were a lot of comments full of hate: they need to die etc.

But I think some media are working with peace journalism. I mean not the government media, they are still supporting nationalistic statements, pro war etc, but international media with Azerbaijani workers are actually working towards it and I really appreciate it.

There are also smaller ones trying to do so.

People are hating it, but we need to get used to it. we need to be able to live together.

In 1918 there was a huge massacre in Baku by Armenians, but after that they were quite friendly to each other.

My mother's name was given by an Armenian woman that was living in Baku.

But then people got brainwashed by politicians and something changed. But I do believe people can change and their minds too. Maybe not now, but in time yes.

Teresa:

Women are often associated with peace.

Do you notice any difference between female and male journalists in their attitude towards peace?

Gunel:

yes.

When they say that men are going to war and are dying and women are struggling less, it is not true. They are the ones who are also losing their husband and children.

In the Azerbaijani society it is not easy to live as a single woman.

I do have a lot of female journalists around me and I see that they are different. Not pro war and that is why I think they are more tolerant, but there are women who are quite nationalistic too.

But in general, if you are a woman and go to places people are more keen to talk to you. They see you smiling, being sweet and it is more likely they will open up to you.

If a man goes to film them, they will feel more defensive. It depends a lot on society though, but for example for me as a woman it was quite easy to find people to talk to.

Teresa:

Did you also feel that men would open up to you?

Gunel:

Yes. I found a lot of women and men.

There were a few times I had to beg them to talk to me, but during war not that many people refused. It was happening, it was not a taboo and people talked about it.

Teresa:

If you think about your male colleagues do you feel it would be less likely that they would do something like you did (video of the two sides living together) than your female colleagues?

Gunel:

Azerbaijani society is quite patriarchal. It means all the decisions are made by men and there are many more nationalistic men than women.

There are not that many women who would come to politics and express their feelings. I mean having a house, children. I mean they do not know if they can or should express themselves. The approach of many families in Azerbaijan is that I have food on my table, I do not care about the rest.

Teresa:

Is there anything else you would like to add to our conversation?

Gunel:

Not really. I feel like I have told you my life story of the past 2 years.

I am living in Tbilisi now.

I am running away from my country. I feel like if I stay there I would never stop hearing people talking about killing someone.

Appendix 8.8: Interview transcription of Sabine Abubakirova

Teresa:

What triggered the first story?

Sabine:

About this first article my editor asked me to make a summary of the statements and it was not so hard, it was like listing everything very shortly, but another one about the peace activists, I do remember how I did that.

I was asked to talk to several people that day. It was a bit hard to write that because I had a situation with my friends because during the war I really tried not to be emotional and just to deliver what is known, because really, we were working without days off for months. I did have one day, but generally it was great pressure. During this article I had one problem with one of the protagonists. She was really threatened in Azerbaijan and I really wanted to get her confirmation the reports that I read on social media, that she got rape threats and she was very emotional and we had a misunderstanding because she thought that I just wanted to get information and that I really did not care about what is really going on in that situation, but while writing that article I really understood how activists in Azerbaijan feel. It was a big experience for me.

I remember very well most of them and this particular article, even though it happened a long time ago.

Also, we were doing live updates from September till the end of October. I was working on live updates for the website from 9 am, or 10 or sometimes 1pm, but mostly we would finish at 1am.

Teresa:

What was OC Media's editorial line during the war?

Sabine:

We had an editorial policy that we will deliver information only confirmed or not by officials of the ministries closely involved in the war. If Armenia or Azerbaijan was

claiming something then we were writing that they claimed but then we had to give another side too. If any of them did not give any comments we would write it.

We did not want it to be one-sided and if the comments would come later, then we would give the comments later, but we would remind our reader that before that Azerbaijan and Armenia claimed this and that. So we tried to always show both sides.

Teresa:

In the case of the article about peace activists, you were told by your editor to do it or how much freedom did you have to pick your own topics?

Sabine:

During the war we were working as one team and we had total freedom on any initiatives, I could offer anything. Of course if they saw that I was a bit one sided or too emotional we would discuss it but about peace activists I do not remember actually who offered it or no, wait I do.

One contributor sent us links to twitter where people were threatening activities and the person said “I guess it is going to be big” . So I talked to my editor about it and he said you should talk to more people and find out more. That is how I started.

Teresa:

I guess in the case of OC media giving voice to peace activists is one of the core values.

Especially I remember that OC media had this section for opinions of journalists or activists from both sides who wanted to speak up about peace, it was not something common to do in the region.

Sabine:

Exactly, moreover one of the core values as it is stated in Oc media is that they are standing for peace and the whole team thought alike.

Teresa:

Did you receive threats or any comments after you published that piece?

Sabine:

Well yes, it was not very welcomed in Azerbaijan.

Actually it was not welcomed in both countries but yeah, I do not remember what comments on Fb but we were very used to negative ones. Of course we got them, but it was okay during the war. They were treating them as traitors, they thought they were united with Armenians and in Armenia they hated their peace activists. They definitely were under pressure too.

The reaction from Azerbaijan was negative, but the majority of OC media stable audience is from caucasus but more progressive, so these people really welcome this article and thanked us for that and said it was really needed.

Teresa:

To talk more in general, how do you see your role as a journalist especially in time of war?

Did you think of the impact that your articles could have on how people see the conflict?

Sabine:

I saw the impact on my friends who are from Azerbaijan but live abroad.

They really wanted to know what was going on. They were reading OC media to have more or less balanced positions on the war.

Like a journalist I felt like I could not do more. Maybe going to the frontline, but it was impossible because the Azerbaijani side did not let journalists go there and maybe by giving balanced info about the war, although I am not sure people from inside Azerbaijan read us.

Only the same people who were reading us before and saw this information as something needed.

Teresa:

Are you familiar with the concept of peace journalism?

Do you think it is something feasible in the context of this war or do you see it as something hard to achieve?

Sabine:

I am from a generation that I was too little when the first K. war happened and I have just heard about it. We did not know what war was. We had this idea of the enemy that we grew up with. Some of us really believed it, some managed to be critical, but during the war you understand that people are people and sometimes when terrible videos were spread on social networks, from both sides, when people were killed you understand that peace journalism is absolutely needed it because when we hear about war from the past we think the whole nation want it or stuff like that but when you are in it, you understand that mostly people are just affected by it, not all of them want it or they fall under propaganda and they start thinking like that.

So peace journalism is absolutely needed so that people will understand common values, ordinary values of everyday life and being able to see the other side having the same values too. Actually, I applied for Imagine initiative and I really want to try to be part of peace journalism.

Teresa:

Do you think that women journalists are more keen on practising pj than men?

Sabine:

Yes, definitely. In our region what I saw and I understood especially during the war was that the image of manhood is about dignity and honour, that you have to defend your land, going to war for it, no matter why you are doing it, you just play on your complex that was put on you when you were a child. For men this complex is going deeper and it is very hard for a man in Azerbaijan and perhaps in caucasus in general to want peace and talk about it.

He usually feels ashamed, he is more traumatised and has more conflict in himself. But women are not so triggered by that. Women protect what they have, their lives,

their future, and express their emotions more. Maybe it is a bit sexist to say that, but actually I would say that because of the rules of this society, for women it is easier to just try to be more diplomatic and you won't feel so ashamed of it as if you are a man.