

## **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 persepective 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.

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 where 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 lives. 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 soldier 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 imagine 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 Seymour Kasimov

### **Seymour:**

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 professionalist 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 11 am 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 elderlies 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.

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 diabetes, 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 bariatric 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?

**Guel:**

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.