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# THE ROLE AND INFLUENCE OF MASS MEDIA DURING FOUR-DAY WAR IN ARTSAKH IN 2016

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                    |    |
|----------------------------------------------------|----|
| <b>Abstract</b>                                    | 2  |
| <b>Introduction</b>                                | 2  |
| <b>Literature Review</b>                           | 5  |
| <b>Research Question</b>                           | 13 |
| <b>Methodology</b>                                 | 13 |
| <b>Findings</b>                                    | 16 |
| Interview                                          | 16 |
| Valid sources                                      | 16 |
| Ethics of Journalism                               | 17 |
| Opinion on sharing the Photos of killed people     | 19 |
| Propaganda                                         | 20 |
| The Engagement of Diaspora                         | 21 |
| International Organizations                        | 23 |
| Who Won the Media War                              | 23 |
| Online Survey                                      | 25 |
| <b>Conclusion</b>                                  | 33 |
| <b>Limitations and Avenues for Future Research</b> | 34 |
| <b>Bibliography</b>                                | 34 |

## **Abstract**

This ethnographic research aims to cover the role and influence of Mass Media during 4-day Artsakh War, which happened on April 2016, when Azerbaijan has violated the ceasefire agreement of 1994 and launched a large-scale offensive along the contact line between Artsakh and Azerbaijan. The goal is to show the seriousness of the Media War and how Mass Media became a tool to influence the progress of the escalation. This has been done by examining the reasons and components of the conflict, considering the observations of the experts and making an online questionnaire of the Armenian public. Upon this examination, it becomes clear that Mass Media was mainly used for propaganda and changing the situation to someone's advantage. Taking into account the possibility of such kind of escalations, this research highlights the importance of developing a well-planned strategy and tactics for the Armenian Mass Media, as in case of war it becomes a psychological weapon against the society.

## **Introduction**

Armenian-Azerbaijani relations are always one of the most discussed issues within the Armenian society. As we know, the conflict was born between two neighboring countries when Artsakh has decided to become independent from Azerbaijan in 1988. Nowadays, Artsakh has reached its goal but the conflict, tension and military actions between Armenia and Azerbaijan still exist, which bring different economic, social and political problems especially for Artsakh.

Since 1993 when Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a ceasefire agreement, the biggest tension on the frontline was in 2016 when Azerbaijan launched a large-scale offensive in order to occupy the territory of Artsakh, which it has lost more than 2 decades ago. The war was called 4-day Artsakh War as the harshest military actions were taking place for 4 days from April 2 to 5.

Besides the military actions, the war was started also in the field of media. My capstone project will present the analysis of what plans Azerbaijan, Armenia and Artsakh had as a strategy for media war, how they used media as a tool of war propaganda and statistics representing the public's opinion, its perception and the level of being influenced by media during the 4-day War.

“If you do not read newspapers, you are uninformed. If you read newspapers, you are misinformed,” Mark Twain (CMTS, 2018). This quote from the 19th century perfectly fits into our days. Media warfare is a way of manipulating the public's opinion by media in order to propagate certain policy and/or destroy already formulated morale, belief or values. It is a part of a wider concept of psychological warfare, as media war is mainly targeting on public's mental state. The main reason of starting media warfare, therefore psychological influence, is planned spreading of propaganda for economic, political, diplomatic, social or military purposes. By pressuring on psychological state of a person, the probability of destroying a strong society is very high. Propaganda works the best when the public is already under a psychological pressure. The April war in 2016 was one of such cases, when the war on Media platform was going harsher than the war itself.

While looking at different statistics and information spread by the parties, the interpretation of the situation was drastically different. One of such differences is the

information about the casualties and losses. The Armenian and Azerbaijani sides presented the statistics about their casualties and losses of the opposite side differently. For example, regarding the number of Armenian troops killed, Armenian media reported 91 soldiers, meanwhile, Azerbaijani media presented 320 (Jarosiewicz, 2016). This and other differences of sharing the information show different approaches and tactics that different media publications used to cover the war.

In order not to be misunderstood, Armenian Government was highly encouraging to follow only the Armenian official sources of information. Unfortunately, following the local state sources of information do not always mean being correctly informed about the situation. Even in critical situation, the government will never present the reality as it is in order not to create panic and mass disorder. In case of physical war, not being frankly is a right tactic for the government as it is not in a favor of a state and nation to spread panic and deepen the existing tension within the society.

As in case of any political conflict in the world, Armenia and Azerbaijan were not the only countries that were engaged in April War. As always Turkey, USA, Russia and Europe were standing in the background and trying to maintain their own benefits. Alongside with the international media coverage, they were also participating in the Media War and trying to have their indirect influence on the situation. Depending on the outcome of the war, their political influence on the participating countries may be changed. For example, in case of Russia if Armenia lost the war, Russia would lost a territory, which was under its control and supervision for a long time. In fact, the media outlets of those indirect parties were not reacting on the situation when the war had just started. “They entered the media war few days later because the tension was raising between two parties, the situation

was becoming more serious and it might become something worse than a war between Artsakh and Azerbaijan in 1992,” said Bella Lalayan, journalist from Artsakh.

Based on the historical and long lasting feud between Armenia and Azerbaijan, it is important to know about the last clash on April 2016 between those two parties not only in the field of military actions but also on the media platform because it is going to have its significant influence in the process of negotiation between them. More precisely, it is important to know how the media war started, how the parties acted in the field of media and what they came to at the end.

## **Literature Review**

Azerbaijani publishing Center of the Union of Journalists called “Yeni Nesil” has conducted a report of the project implemented by Baku and Yerevan press-clubs, which involves the attitude of the broad public of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Karabakh in terms of their perception and attitude towards the coverage of Karabakh conflict by mass media. The survey was carried within six months and distinguishes 10 different public variables in order to analyze different layers of the society. Besides three different countries and society layers, the report analyzes different sources of information, how many people have access to them, what kind of information they spread and what techniques they use to present the material.

In order to find out what sources the public rely on for information of interest to them, the survey by Journalists Union has shown the results of interviewing 250 respondents from Nagorno-Karabakh by a random sampling method. According to the results 87,6%

follow television in order to find answers to the concerning questions, 56,4%-press, 36,8%-conversation with colleague, 29,2% get the information from conversation with their friends, neighbors and family members, 8,8% from other source and 0,8% found the question difficult to answer (Publishing Center of the Union of Journalists, 2002, p. 55). By conducting such kind of survey the research presents the analysis of the role of media, its influence on the society and how Azerbaijan, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh shape their public's opinion through mass media propaganda.

Fortunately or unfortunately, Armenia is not the only country in the world, which has problems with media propaganda and mass media in general. "The Media and the War on Terrorism: Where Does the Truth Lie?" article presents media propaganda after September 11 and focuses on the situation in Afghanistan after the act of terrorism in NY. Taking into account the events happened in this period, the author indicated three main implicit goals that media in the war on terrorism has, which have brought policy implications. They are "publishing a good story, presenting the US-led coalition's war aims abroad and translating the Muslim perspective to US/UK audience" (Farmanfarmaian, 2002, p. 161).

The main research question of this essay shows how the Anglo-American media turned the information platform into a stage of spectacles and used media tools as an instrument to shape the overall image of the situation. Media became a weapon for the Bush and Blair governments' own propaganda war. As in many other cases, they have restricted the access to the sensitive and other important details of the situation in Afghanistan. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabakh are not exception in the terms of hiding the truth from the public. Restricting access to some information may have a positive reason in

a way that the government does not want to spread panic within the country. However, sometimes they hide information that the public has the right to know. As the author mentions in the article, “it is the media that decides what is news and is not” (Farmanfarmaian, 2002, p. 160). As our media is under the control of the government, it always follows political purposes and shapes subjective opinion both at home and abroad.

International influence of media propaganda was also researched by Kamalipour in his book called “War, media, and propaganda: a global perspective.” It presents not only the situation in the country but also shows how media became a propaganda tool in order to shape public opinion. Media propaganda was not only targeted to the local audience but also to the international followers. The scholars and media professionals from all over the world have contributed to this survey and revealed the consequences of the media propaganda from different sides. The book includes the views of Chinese, Iranian and Brazilian scholars in order to show how different nations analyze the same situation. After bringing different opinions together, the author concluded that, unfortunately, “the first casualty of every war is the truth, which is not the only, but all the truths of the various contending parties are often turned into blatant propaganda” (Kamalipour, 2004, p. 237).

The most effective way of showing the truth is visualizing it. People trust to anything that they actually see. If they are not physically present at an event the only thing that can replace it are photos that visualize what happened. Photojournalism, as a part of media, employs the images in order to tell the information. Like writing and editing, photojournalism also has its rules and regulations of ethics that should be followed. Those regulations, both written and unwritten, restrict the publications in terms of representation of photos to the public and follow its being truthful and faithful. The rules tell the

photographers how to act while taking photos, what to shoot or not to shoot and what can be shared with the public. The ethics that cover all these questions are discussed in an article called “Ethics in Photojournalism: Past, Present, and Future” by Bersak (2006). The article is divided into three chapters; the first part presents the history of ethics in photojournalism, the second part covers the present situation and problems of ethics and the third chapter draws connection between the first two and how the ethics in photojournalism will go in future.

Looking at the same issue from different perspectives always works better. As in this case, the book “Western media coverage of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in 1988-1990” (2008) used the method of content analysis of Western articles, surveys, journals and researches in order to show the international opinion of the first ethnic conflict in the era of Soviet and post-Soviet times. Another purpose of this study was to find out what did majority of the global mass media representatives think about the situation in Karabakh and the Armenian-Azerbaijani relations.

All the credible sources of the article, found in the Open Society Archives at the Central European University in Budapest, let the author to state that “The West, thought more or less sympathetic with Armenians and the Armenian movement, was gradually ‘discovering’ Azerbaijan through their aggressive policies and violent methods of handling the conflict” (Demoyan, 2008, p. 93). After analyzing the media coverage of international journalists about the 4-day war in 2016, we will see how the international professional opinion was changed through the years and what ways of presenting the information they used to describe the situation.

It has already two years passed and the 4-day war has been already analyzed. With the financial support of Friedrich Naumann Foundation and MyMedia/Niras, Hrant Dink Foundation and Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation have prepared a report on “Four Day War in Nagorno-Karabakh and The Discriminatory Discourse Analysis of The Media in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkey” (Arslan, 2017). The report, which was prepared on April, 2017, addresses how the issue was covered by Armenian, Azerbaijani and Turkish media during the 4-day war, when the tension raised again and caused many casualties from both parties. The fact is that the situation was used as an instrument to generate biased opinion against each other. The research is mainly built on the analysis of media outlets in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey by considering different criteria such as the way of representation, circulation numbers, media ownership, political position, ideologies, etc. The authors distinguished several main questions in order to understand and interpret the situation in those three countries. All of them are related to the contextual aspect of the situation, more precisely, they looked at the most commonly used words, covering the background, primary sources of information and validity, the description of the lives of the civilians, discourse of covering the casualties and the way of mentioning the other side. For the purpose of examining the hate speech by Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey, which was obviously present in the media outlets of all three countries, Hrant Dink Foundation has conducted a project of the “Media Watch on Hate Speech” (Arslan, 2017) since 2009 and found out that the intensity of hate speech against Armenia raised. In sum, the aim of this research was to analyze the way of using biased discourse during the period of conflict and how much the media outlets contribute to the peace discourse.

The continuing tension and systematic violation of ceasefire in 1994 is the result of raising hatred among the new generation especially in Azerbaijan. A book called “Armenophobia in Azerbaijan” (Elibegova, 2013) demonstrates how the identity of Azerbaijani people is created based on the hatred towards anything related to Armenia. This is mainly done by a project called Azerichild, targeting on children, which includes works of Azerbaijani authors and children themselves that spread a certain attitude towards Armenia and absolute tolerance towards cultural and religious diversity. This fact became a reason for the authors of the book to start analyzing Armenophobia in Azerbaijan. Besides the presence of Armenophobia in political speeches, official statements, literature (especially children’s literature), textbooks and exporting it to the international platform, the book also emphasizes the field of mass media as one of the main tools of expressing Armenophobia not only for the local audience but also for the international followers. As it is known, the large portion of media in any country is under the control of its government. For the Azerbaijani media it is favorable to use its media for spreading propaganda against Armenia. In this case, Azerbaijani media receives the message, filters it in the frames of Armenophobia and shares it as its own observation, judgement and vision towards Armenia. All of this can cause a frustration aggression (Elibegova, 2013), which may become an obstacle for primary goals for a society and country such as social and living conditions, economic situation, healthcare, environmental protection, etc. Because of frustration aggression, all this kind of goals can be moved back and the only aim for Azerbaijanis becomes the issue of Karabakh. They become sure that when Azerbaijan reclaims Karabakh, they will get a sense of satisfaction and all their problems can be solved easily. According to the authors, this kind of stereotype in Azerbaijan has negative influence on raising

generation as their right to natural growth and shaping their own identity is under the risk. It is hard to imagine the future of the Azerbaijani generation when Ramil Safarov is a national hero. Every country is working towards peace in their region but it is suspicious how Azerbaijanis imagine 'peace' and what it will look like.

This kind of stereotypes, which are built on national narratives, are often proved to be incorrect. Thomas de Waal (2003) in his book titled "Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War" presents his personal observations and research made in South Caucasus, Moscow and Washington in a form of narration. He has revealed the historical background, visited the region, conducted 120 interviews, listened to personal stories and used a unique collection of historical primary sources for the purpose to describe the war and peace relationship between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the long lasting conflict over Artsakh. After the research, the author came to a conclusion that the issue of Artsakh is genetically imprinted into the minds of the current generation by the national narratives about the other party. National beliefs and narratives do not always reflect the reality and speak in a favor of their country and nation. That is why the opinion shaped within the society presents themselves as a victim and the opposite side as an aggressor. He could not also miss the role and influence of Turkey in this conflict. According to the author, Turkey plays dual role, as they want both to keep their solidarity with the neighboring country Azerbaijan and to have their input in institution of peace and security in the region. Because of the solidarity, the author argues that Turkey and Turkish society should be more unbiased and take into consideration different aspects.

Beyond the analysis of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, which seems not to find a solution, a question comes to the stage: "What should we do to solve the conflict starting

from the virtual war?” The paper “Nagorno Karabakh 2.0: How New Media and Track Two Diplomacy Initiatives are Fostering Change” by Geybullayeva tries to answer to the question above. It presents how media connects different and even opposite parties (countries) both in negative and positive ways. The information, distributed via media, creates different opinions and attitudes towards each other both within the society and among the societies. The main research question is the existence of various online initiatives and projects that are being run against the conflict and contradictions between Armenian and Azerbaijani societies connected with Nagorno Karabakh. The author offers to use the opportunities that New Media and Track Two Diplomacy Initiatives have. Through Track II Diplomacy, two opposite parties may find alternative and peaceful solutions for the conflict by getting into informal contacts between private members of the society due to the constant evolution of the Internet. The author’s offer is directly connected with the gradual development of the Internet but it will not work until the parties overcome the hatred and lack of openness within themselves and their societies. According to the author: “new media and social networks serve both as ‘humanizer’ and ‘de-humanizer’ of the other” (Geybullayeva, 2012, p. 183). Meanwhile there is an aspect of de-humanizing the society through media there will be also the manipulation and brainwashing of the society. From the other side, New Media initiatives have generated a new group of people who are ready to defend against government and media propaganda in order to get freedom of expression.

## Research Question

As media is not only about words and texts, this research is going to find the answer to the following main question: “How did media outlets cover the situation by text and visuals and how did it influence the society?” To narrow it down, this question brings a necessity to consider more specific questions, such as:

1. Did media coverage serve for the purpose of propaganda, manipulation and opinion shaping of the public?
2. How did media use *photos* and other visuals for the purpose of propaganda, manipulation and opinion shaping of the public?
3. Was it ethical or moral to post murdered or injured people from 4-day War from the perspective of photojournalism?
4. How does the Armenian society interpret the April War and what kind of sociological effect did it make?

The observation of these questions helps to find ethnographic approach to the project as it aims to detect the level of being influenced of the people.

## Methodology

In order to find answers to the research question mentioned above this project is mainly based on interviews. By answering to the specific questions, experts from different fields, including journalism, politics, government and ordinary civilians, helped to examine the situation and find out the sociological influence of the conflict.

For the people who are engaged in the governmental sphere, the questions were more political. As they mostly deal with the status and functions of the government, they were participating in the process of political resolution of the conflict in order to create cooperative relationships between the parties. More precisely,

1. What was their mission in terms of media and politics,
2. Were Armenian and Azerbaijani media acting in terms of ethics of journalism and did it influence on the political situation,
3. Was the international media covering the truth about what was going on in Artsakh,
4. How do they describe the role of Diaspora during April War,
5. Was Azerbaijani government controlling the flow of its media?

From the sphere of journalism, it was expected to help to find out the following points,

1. How their media publications covered the 4-day war in Karabakh through both the texts and visuals,
2. What tactics they were following,
3. What rules they fixed for themselves to correspond to the ethics of journalism,
4. Whether they have broken any moral aspect while publishing the information,
5. What kind of disagreement or criticism of the public they faced because of their posts if there were any?

The last question was born based on one of the photos made by a photojournalist from Hetq Investigative Journalists, which was a photo of an elderly Armenian couple (Khalapyan family) from Talish village, who were killed by Azerbaijani soldiers when they had entered the village (Hetq Investigative Journalists, 2016).



Figure 1

The photographer took the picture of that couple in order to show the inhuman action of not just killing the couple but also cutting off their ears. That photo divided the public into two groups; those who were not against of sharing such photos publically in order to show the situation to the local people and international followers, and those who found unethical and immoral to share such psychologically affecting picture. In order to support this and other beliefs that raised among the society an online questionnaire of people from both Karabakh and Armenia was organized to find out their opinion towards the overall conflict situation, how their beliefs were changed and their vision for the future of Artsakh.

## **Findings**

During the extensive escalation between April 2 and 6, the journalists along with soldiers started their defense and attack in the field of mass media. Today, media war is something which relates to the psychological attack and creates disorder and panic within the society, meanwhile the rear of the soldiers should be strong and unshakable. During the April War, the primary mission of the Armenian journalists was to ensure the firmness and steadfastness of the people's mind and spirit. During the April War, they mostly relied on the official sources such as the representatives of the ministries, posts of the press secretaries, official and social networking websites, etc.

## **Interview**

### **Valid sources**

The editor-in-chief of EVN Report Maria Titizian, after being informed from the valid official sources about the situation, immediately started her contribution by informing not only the local audience but also the international followers. "One of the main issues for the independent journalists that raises especially in critical situations, is the fact that truth gets lost and it becomes hard to separate it from propaganda," Mrs. Titizian stated. The most common way of getting the truth, which is extremely limited in Armenia, is to rely on officials.

Another active person on the media platform was Karen Ohanjanyan, a human rights activist, a laureate of Peace and Human Rights International Prizes, a coordinator of NKR

Committee of “Helsinki Initiative-92”, leader of Artsakh Republican Party. The interview has started with the fact that he had already informed the international audience and the local government that the conflict had been already escalated and something more serious was going to come in the beginning of December, 2015. Thus, Mr. Ohanjanyan himself was one of the valid sources, as he was directly dealing with the government and informing the local and international public about the updates on a governmental level.

At the period of the 4-day War, as in case of any emergency situation, the government was calling the society to trust only the official news and updates because they are the most valid sources. That is why, the other people, who deal with spreading information, rely on the official sources, which are mostly supposed to be governmental. Besides the fact of validity, governmental news are presented in a way not to psychologically influence on the society and ensure serenity and stability.

### **Ethics of Journalism**

As a journalist, Mrs. Titizian evaluated that Armenian media was not enough successful especially at the beginning. “It is the responsibility of media to report that the tanks are not in good condition,” said Mrs. Titizian.

While speaking about ethics of journalism Mr. Ohanjanyan stated that neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan had been following the rules of ethics but Armenia was more or less careful in that sense. Neither Armenia nor Artsakh had no chance to fail in any case because there would be no opportunity to regain.

Armine Alexanyan, the deputy minister of International Affair of Artsakh, was missing from the country when the clashes start. When she urgently arrived on April 5, she

started coordinating the work with foreign and local media. According to her, Armenian media was more consistent and there was no hatred towards Azerbaijan. While mentioning Azerbaijan, Armenia was using the word ‘opponent’ whereas Azerbaijani media was always using the word ‘enemy’ or ‘aggressor’. To the question of one of her employees “Why can’t we use the word ‘enemy’ as they do?”, she answered that Armenia and especially Artsakh do not have so much power as Azerbaijan does, that is why we should be 10 times more careful because even one word can be used against us. She found the word ‘enemy’ or ‘aggressor’ appropriate even in response to Azerbaijan. “Politics do not tolerate sentimentality. It should be concrete, on point and within the frames,” Mrs. Alexanyan stated.

Bella Lalayan, a journalist from Artsakh, has differentiated the functions of journalists, which can be Photojournalist, Investigative, Fashion, Foreign Correspondent, Sports, War journalists, etc., depending on a specific field of activities. It means that their professional ethics and rules are also different. Despite the fact that Armenia and Artsakh are military zone, there is a lack of war journalists. During war, their mission is not to spread panic and create chaos and do not share any kind of information, which can serve for the enemy. “A war journalist, first of all is a volunteer soldier and then a journalist,” stated Mrs. Lalayan, “who should be a bearer of the national ideology.” Their mission is to report even the worst information with the skill that does not break the rear and does not cause panic within the society. According to Mrs. Lalayan, the ethics of a war journalist is based on this principle.

## **Opinion on sharing the Photos of killed people**

During the interviews and online questionnaire, it turned out that one of the most upsetting and heartbreaking event was publishing the photos of dead people who were killed by the trups of the opposite party. There were cases of publishing such stuff by both Armenian and Azerbaijani sides. The first examples that people recalled was the photo of an Armenian headless soldier Qyaram Sloyan published by Azerbaijani side and the photo of an elderly couple from village Talish by Armenian side, whose ears were cut after being killed.

A question was raised, “Was it ethical to post photos of killed people from the perspective of journalism and photojournalism?” Both in case of interviews with experts and online questionnaire, the opinions were divided into two main parts. The discussions of ethics were mainly related to the elderly couple and their son, which was captured and shared by “Hetq” investigative journalists.

According to Mrs. Titizian, it was a very difficult decision for the editor-in-chief of “Hetq” Edik Baghdasaryan. “In this case there was not right or wrong decision,” said Mrs. Titizian. From one side it is a responsibility of a journalist to report about the situation, from the other side it can be considered as a human rights violation. They were and could not protect their right of Personal Data Protection.

In case of posting the photos of Khalapyan family from Talish village who were killed by Azerbaijani soldiers, Mr. Ohanjanyan agreed that it was not ethical in terms of journalism but it was right to share the photos as the international organization should be aware of the situation in Artsakh and the human rights violations by Azerbaijani side.

Speaking from the perspective of the state, Mrs. Alexanyan stated that the government was not controlling the actions of the independent journalists, thus, they could not put stop on sharing such kind of stuff. This kind of response had an official position behind it that in case of controlling the independent journalists they would not allow them to share such psychologically affecting events as it is against the state policy of not spreading panic within the society and keep the mood stable and combative.

### **Propaganda**

Media and propaganda. Nowadays, they are interconnected much more than it is supposed to be, especially, for the countries where the media is under the control of the country. One of such bright examples of a state is Azerbaijan.

Mrs. Titizian saw that the government of Azerbaijan was absolutely controlling the message spread by its media, which helped them to be successful at the beginning of the Media War despite the fact that they were not acting in terms of ethics of journalism. Their Media was hiding some facts and exaggerating the others according to the rules of their state. In fact, “A truly independent press rejects the role of subordination to power and authority” (Chomsky, 2017). The 2018 World Press Freedom Index, which was organized by Reporters Without Borders, presents the level of hostility towards journalists around the world. According to this report, Azerbaijan the 163rd in the list out of 180 countries included in the survey. “Independent journalists and bloggers are thrown in prison if they do not first yield to harassment, beatings, blackmail, or bribes,” the study concluded (RSF, 2018). Even when the Azerbaijani journalists leave the country, the government harass their family members, who stay in Azerbaijan. Thus, we can conclude that there is no

independent journalism in Azerbaijan both for the local and international journalists who visit Azerbaijan.

Unlike Azerbaijan, the freedom of Mass Media in Armenia and Artsakh is more or less allowed. Not only for the local but also for the international journalists it was allowed to do their journalistic responsibilities. “We had nothing to hide, that is why we took the journalist, who arrived at that period, to the frontline and wherever they wanted in order to let them cover the reality,” said Mrs. Alexanyan, “We were more interested to spread the truth not propaganda.” Azerbaijani side did the opposite. They were close to foreign journalists, as they did not want the media to see their real losses. It is not new that Azerbaijani government controls everything within their country.

During war days, some misinformation can be considered as a type of propaganda. A part of the Armenian society shared this idea but Mrs. Lalayan did not think so. She told that especially in the FB territory, many were deliberately or unconsciously spreading misinformation both the journalists and individuals, which threatened our stability. However, if misinformation is acceptable on such days, then only for one reason, which is to ensure the moral and psychological power of the rear.

### **The Engagement of Diaspora**

It is hard to imagine Armenia without its strong and widespread Diaspora. As usual, the engagement of Diaspora in the social and political events of Armenia was mainly estimated as high.

“I want to highlight the great engagement of Diaspora in terms of financial and material support and their participation in the Media War,” said Mr. Ohanjanyan.

Mrs. Titizian and Mrs. Alexanyan shared this opinion and especially the role of Diaspora in Mass Media. They became a ‘tool’ of mass media as they were spreading the information around the world and attracted the attention of the foreigners and international organizations. By making Armenia and Artsakh the center of the attention of the world, it became difficult for Azerbaijan to act.

While speaking about Armenian Diaspora, Mrs. Lalayan recalled the fact that during the 90th war in Artsakh, out of seven million Armenians of Diaspora only 150 physically participated in the war. However, we cannot forget the material support from them. By the time, any kind of support from Diaspora was becoming less but during the April War, when the situation became critical, they woke up. Due to the material support from Diaspora, we were able to make essential developments in the army, particularly in the frontline, which was supplemented by an observation system.

It is considered always to talk about Armenian Diaspora but Azerbaijan also has its wide Diaspora. It is estimated about 15 million around the world, while Armenian Diaspora is about 7 million. Nevertheless, being twice much does not help them to be as united and strong as Armenian Diaspora. The reason behind it is not definitely financial as Azerbaijan is non-competitive in that sense. It is more psychological, which comes from the history. As it is known, Armenian Diaspora was mainly formed as a result of the Armenian Genocide in 1915. It is a diaspora formed on struggle, suffering, betrayal and anguish. These feelings became an inextricable tie between them and their homeland.

## **International Organizations**

During the April War, Mr. Ohanjanyan was mainly using Facebook and Twitter to inform the international audience in order to get some support from them but the international organizations that he targeted showed interference several days later when the conflict was going to be mitigated. He even wrote an open letter to Hillary Clinton. By wishing her good luck in the presidential elections, he tried to draw her attention to the escalation in Artsakh. “I, as a representative of Nagorno-Karabakh, urge you to raise your voice against the violations that currently is taking place in Nagorno-Karabakh,” wrote Mr. Ohanjanyan in his letter (Aravot, 2016).

Mrs. Lalayan confessed that Armenian journalism should develop itself to be successful on the international media platform. “Azerbaijan does more targeted work on this than we do, by spending millions on well-organized strategies for the media war,” she stated. Armenia cannot present the information to the international organization in its favor and often act as defender, attacker.

## **Who Won the Media War**

At the end it is necessary to know the objective opinion of the experts to the question “who won the media war?” To this question the interviewed people could not give an exact answer at the beginning but after several seconds they mentioned some observations that helped one country to be a step forward.

As a journalist it was hard for Mrs. Titizian to admit that Armenia was not enough successful at the beginning of the media war. Because of being extremely limited in truth, Armenian Media was losing. However, she believes that at the end Armenia did better

because Diaspora joined the media war and there was no way left for the international organizations to ignore the situation in Artsakh.

At that specific moment when the war has started, many governmental officials of both Artsakh and Armenia were missing from the country, including the former president of Armenia Serj Sargsyan. Mr. Ohanjanyan thinks that it might be a part of a planned attack, a coincidence or an agreement. Mr. Ohanjanyan started his response with his supposition that most probably there was an agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan to cede a part of the territory of Artsakh to Azerbaijan. In the created situation, the media of Artsakh started acting by itself in order to handle the situation. “That is why, I think that Artsakh won media war and not Armenia,” said Mr. Ohanjanyan.

Mrs. Alexanyan felt more certain in her response in comparison to others. She said that no one won media war. Azerbaijan was more silent but they are more powerful and have too many hands in every field around the world. Armenia and Artsakh were more active but it did not mean that we won the media war. Being so active aimed to spread the truth and not propaganda. In this and many other cases the political and economic stability of Azerbaijan played a crucial role and helped them to take control over the situation on the media platform with minimum effort.

According to Mrs. Lalayan, Azerbaijan has chosen a right tactic for the media war by limiting the freedom of journalism. In this way, they could control the flow of information and spreading of misinformation. This was a special presidential order, which was signed in 2014 (Freedom House, 2016).

## Online Survey

As this report has an ethnographic approach it is mainly concentrated on the online survey. It was conducted to find out the opinion and psychological state of Armenians from Artsakh and Armenia after the 4-day War. Unexpectedly, the survey covered also the Armenians from Russia who shared different opinions at some points.

The research was done based on 10 questions, which aimed to find out the difference between the opinions of Armenians based on their age, gender and birthplace. The questions were:

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Where were you born?
4. What was the most unethical or inhuman post from Azerbaijani side during April War that you can recall?
5. What was the most unethical or inhuman post from Armenian side during April War that you can recall?
6. The level of engagement of Diaspora in April War
7. The media of which side was spreading propaganda more
8. Was it ethical to post photos of Killed people?
9. Who was more successful and appealing to the international audience in terms of media?
10. Who won the Media War?

This online questionnaire resulted 162 responses of Armenians from Artsakh, Armenia and Russia. People from Artsakh and Armenia were divided into groups of being born in the capitals (Stepanakert and Yerevan) and regions.

**Birthplace**

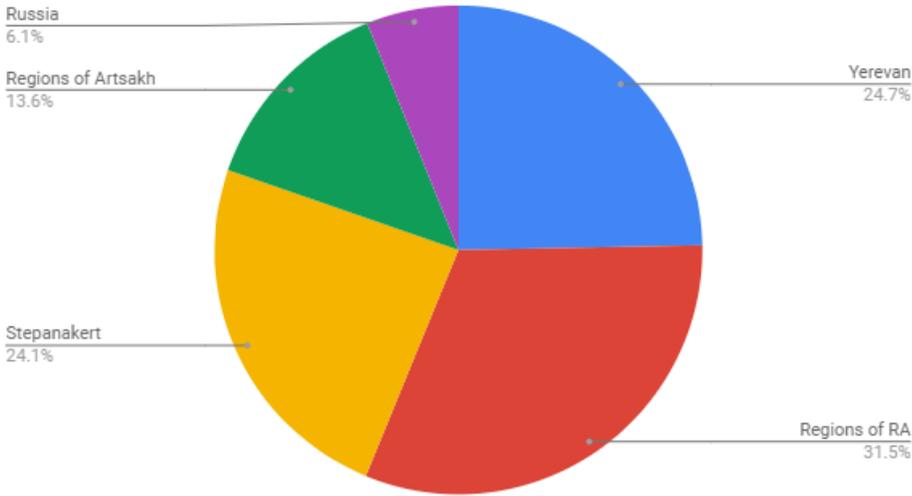


Figure 2

The proportion of the age groups was more or less satisfying. It was as following:

**Age Group**

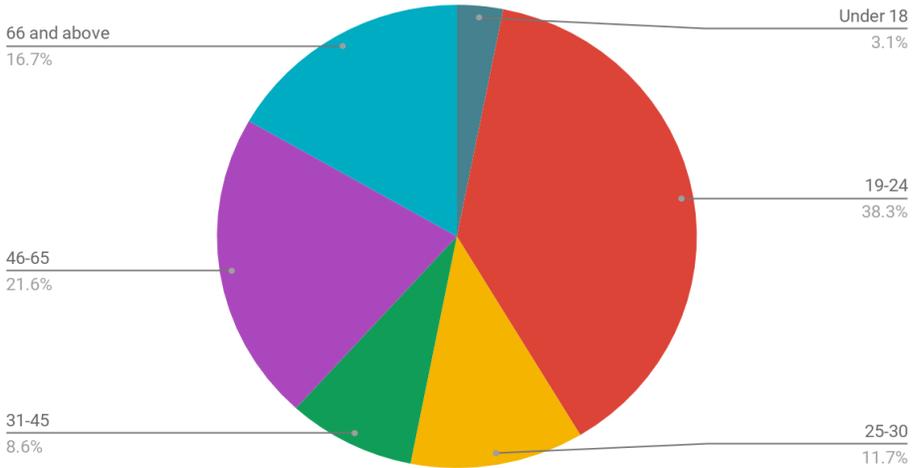


Figure 3

The research was distributed almost equally between the genders:

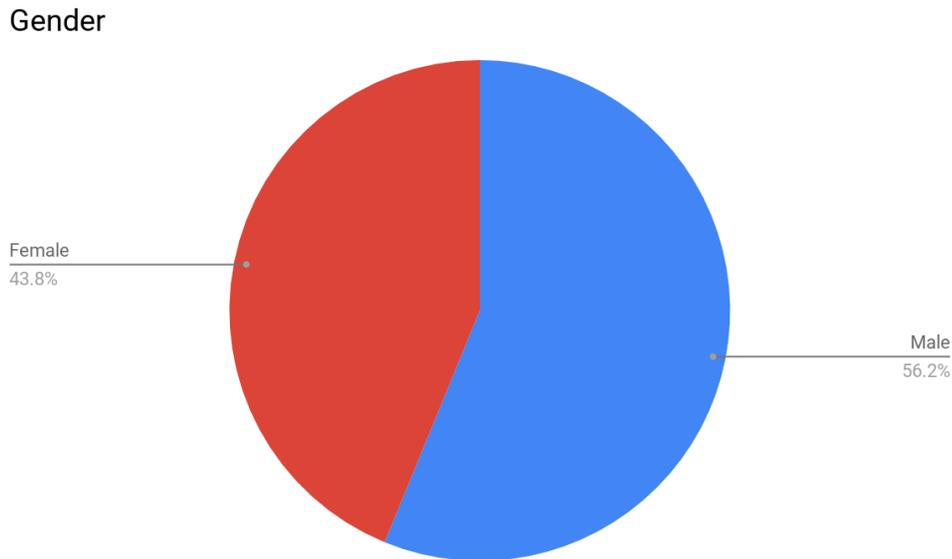


Figure 4

The fourth and fifth questions were the only ones that were not mandatory to answer to as they were open-ended questions and the participants might not recall any or thought that there was no such case. Only 63 people answered to the fourth question regarding the most unethical post made by Azerbaijani media, who mostly (43 responses - 68%) mentioned the photos of inhuman beheadings of the soldiers, especially Qyaram Sloyan.

54 people responded to the fifth question regarding the most unethical or inhuman post from Armenian side and it resulted that 34 people did not remember such cases from Armenian side. The main reason behind it is supposed to be subjectivity of the participants. In addition, only 9 people mentioned about the photos of dead soldiers of Azerbaijan and 4 people about the misinformation about the real losses of Armenia. It was surprising that only 3 people mentioned about the photo of the Khalapyan family under the question about

the Armenian media. Instead, 9 people thought that it was firstly shared by Azerbaijani media and mentioned that photo under the previous question about Azerbaijani media.

As it was expected to get responses about the photos of killed people, a question for sharing such kind of stuff was added to the questionnaire. People were supposed to choose either to share for the purpose of informing the public, to share but without showing the faces or not to share it at all.

Was it ethical to post photos of Killed people?

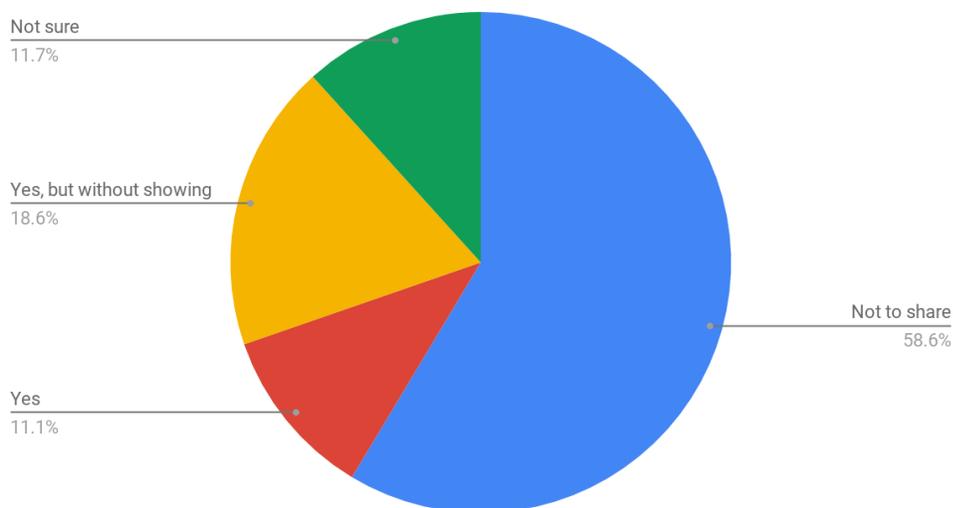


Figure 5

58.6% thought that it was not ethical to share such pictures from the perspectives of journalism. For some people it is considered to be violations of their rights as being dead does not mean that they do lost their right to protection of personal data. From the other side, it can cause moral stress to the relatives of the dead.

In order to evaluate the role of Armenian Diaspora in April War, the participants were supposed to mark them from 1 to 5 (1-lowest, 5-highest).

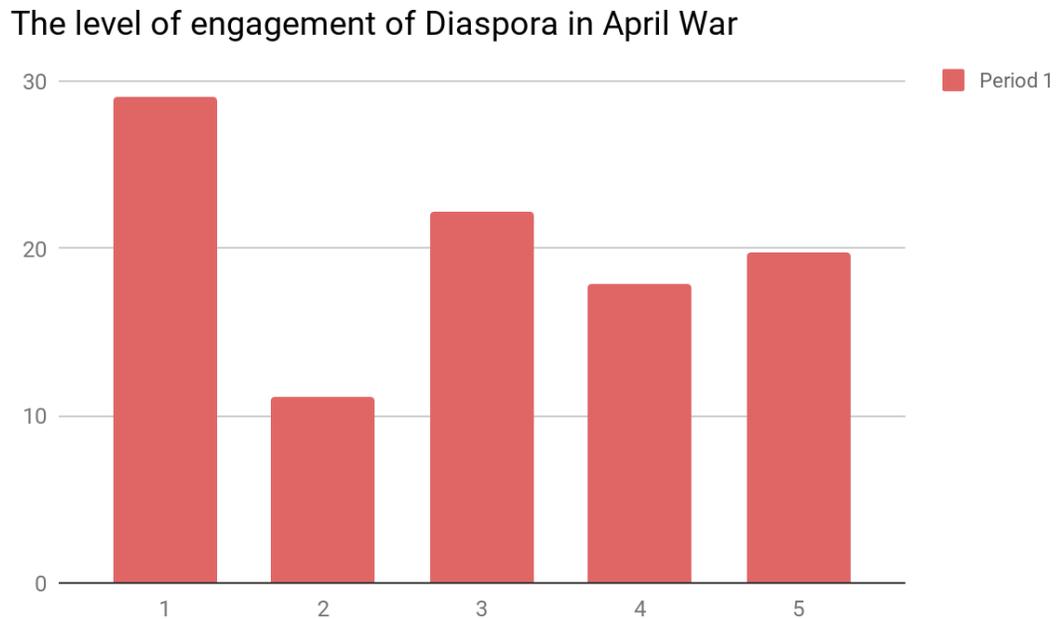


Figure 6

The research showed that all the responses from Stepanakert (39 responses) were above average out of which 46% marked the highest point and there was no the lowest one. By the level of satisfaction of the role of Diaspora the next region after Stepanakert was the regions of Artsakh, where 45% percent of the participants voted for either the highest or lowest points equally (22,7% each from the general number of participants from Artsakh regions). The participants from Armenia, including the capital and regions, felt the level of engagement of Diaspora worse than in Artsakh. The reason might be the fact that Artsakh experienced the material contribution, while Armenia felt only the psychological support. The half of the participants from Yerevan were either very satisfied or not with the role of Diaspora during April War. The difference between the highest and lowest points were 10%

for 5 and 40% for 1. 54,9% of the participants from the RA regions voted for either the highest or lowest points. The difference between the highest and lowest points was very big (5,8% marked 5, 49% marked 1 out of the general number of the participants from the RA regions).

As it is already known, Azerbaijan has strict limitations for independent activities of their journalists within and outside the country. Since 2014, most of the part of independent media in Azerbaijan was either closed by force or stifled economically. The rest are working under the strict control of the state authorities. Now, Azerbaijani government uses its media mostly for the purpose of propaganda in order to support its objectives within the country and around the world. The results of the question “The media of which side was spreading propaganda more?” showed that 74% of the participants supports the idea that Azerbaijan stifles its media for the purpose of propaganda, especially when it relates to Armenia and Artsakh.

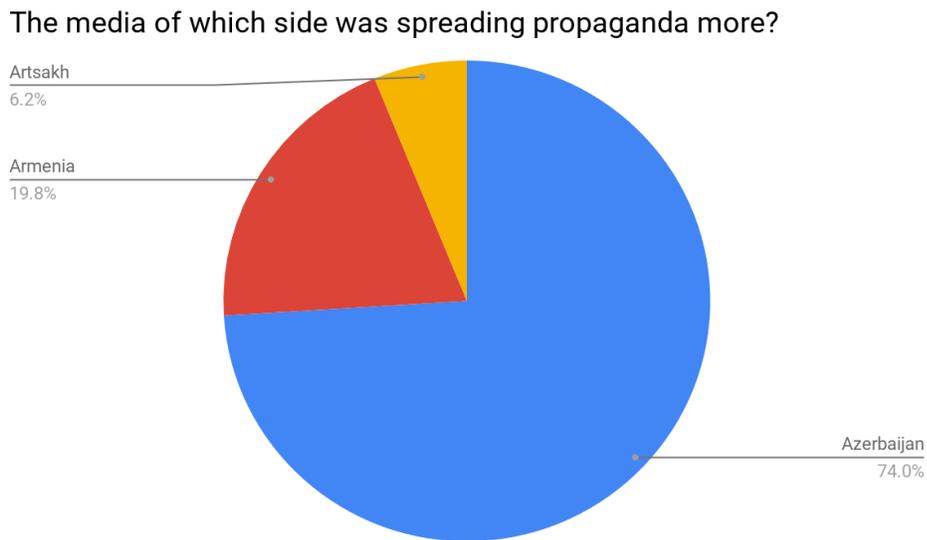


Figure 7

As the role of media is not only for the local audience but also for the international followers, the next question of the survey, which was asking “Who was more successful and appealing to the international audience in terms of media?” related to the level of being successful and appealing to the international audience.

Who was more successful and appealing to the international audience in terms of media?

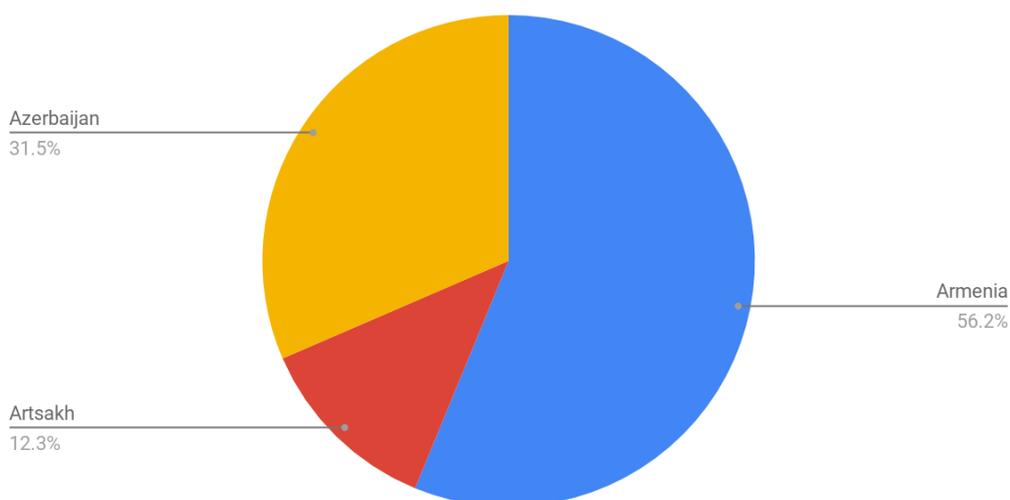


Figure 8

For this question, the opinions of the public and experts are different. During the April War, the Armenian media was putting much effort to reach out the international organizations. In fact, most of them were either neutral like CNN, or responded when there was no necessity of their support any more. This seems very logical and close to the reality that is why is it might assumed that the public showed subjectivity or an illusion created by their beliefs and expectations.

For the last question regarding the winner of the Media War, objective approach was expected from the participants of the survey. This multiple-choice question had the possible

answers to choose Armenia, Artsakh, Azerbaijan or to share their alternative opinion. The idea of separating Armenia and Artsakh raised after the interviews with experts, who stated that Artsakh was acting more or less independently in terms of media. However, it was interesting to get a response from a participant that it is not correct to separate Armenia and Artsakh, as there is one united Armenian media platform.

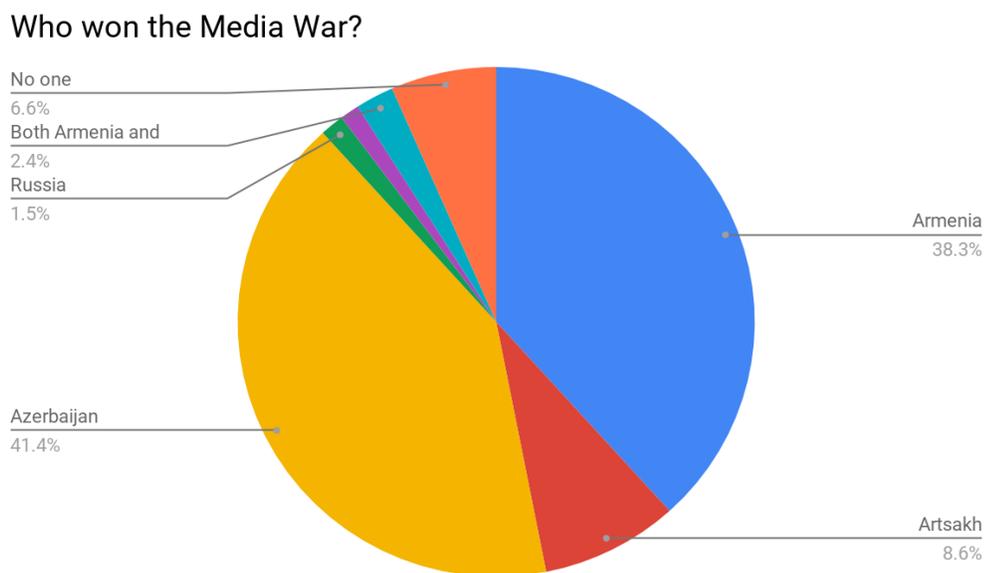


Figure 9

The research showed that 41.4% voted for Azerbaijan and 38.3% for Armenia. According to this result, it means that Azerbaijan wins but the difference between it and Armenia is not so much. Thus, it is hard to conclude. Moreover, according to one of the responses, the media of each country is intended for its local audience. By considering the values and objectives of the society, media creates appealing approach for influential result. Thus, each mass media becomes a winner for its country.

## Conclusion

To sum up, media, as a mean of providing information, follows its mission but by slightly changing the way of presenting news. By hiding or adding even one word, media may become a tool of propaganda, which is mostly done during the military actions. In 2016, when the 4-day war began, media war was going much harsher than the military actions. Because of the physical war, the psychological state of the public was already stressed. In this case, media propaganda works its best as people are tend to trust to any kind of information.

The most powerful ways of manipulating public was using photos of dead people. Media never loses the chance to use photos for the deepest influence on people. When the situation in the country gets worse, the concept of Peace journalism comes to the stage as it aims to find a new comprehensible language, which helps to find a way from conflict situation to peace. The main mission of a Peace Journalist is to try to find out and make straightforward the situation and relationships of the parties and to show the importance of cooperation among them without covering the distinction of their opinions and positions. The fact that each journalist in case of necessity and willingness is able to become a peace journalist during a critical situation gives a promising vision for the conflict resolution.

## Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

Although this research has reached its goal, it had some limitations on its way. First, as this survey has an ethnographic approach, the initial goal was to conduct a survey in Artsakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan as the actual participants of the conflict. This obstacle was expected because of the avoiding and ignoring attitude of the Azerbaijani society to this kind of surveys, especially done by the opposite party. Even in case of getting responses from the public of Azerbaijan, it would require a long time for negotiation regarding their participation in this survey. Second, it for some participants two years is a long period to remember some examples in order to support their opinion. Finally, it might be assumed that the participants of the survey expressed an objective attitude and opinion to the topic or some questions of the research.

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