



## Understanding Karabakh Through the Eyes of Women

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### Abstract

Many discourses were expressed about the Karabakh conflict, which has been going on between the states of Armenia and Azerbaijan for about 32 years. However, most of these discourses approach the events from a political point of view. Undoubtedly women are among those most affected by the Karabakh war. Therefore, the main goal is to understand Karabakh from the eyes of women who lived in the war that happened between 1988-1994 and in September and November 2020 and reveal the belief in the solution to the Karabakh problem. Almost all the women who experienced the war in the region before the Karabakh War, particularly until the start of the 1988 conflicts, stated that they had very well neighboring relations with the Armenians. However, after the Khojaly and Kalbajar massacres, they indicated that it would not even be possible for the Azerbaijani people to live with the Armenian public again. As a result, the people of Azerbaijan are shouting to the whole world; “We, as Azerbaijanis, have never looked at the language, religion, and skin color of the people and therefore did not think that Armenia would invade our lands. But once again, we were wrong.” There is a prevailing opinion that the trust of the Azerbaijani people in Armenia is exhausted, and it will never be possible to live with them. In particular, the women interviewed after the 44-day war showed harsh responses and refused the probability of the questions related to living together again.

**Keywords:** Karabakh, Women, Azerbaijan, Armenia

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## Познать Карабах глазами женщин

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### Резюме

На протяжении 32 года продолжающегося Карабахского конфликта между государствами Армении и Азербайджана было много высказываний. Однако, большинство этих высказываний подходят к событиям с политической точки зрения. В карабахской войне, несомненно, больше всех пострадали женщины. Поэтому главной задачей было видеть Карабах глазами женщин, реально видевшие войну 1988-1994 годах и в сентябре-ноябре 2020 года, выявление веры в решение карабахской проблемы. До карабахской войны, особенно до начала конфликтов 1988 года, почти все женщины, проживающие в регионе, заявляли, что у них очень добрососедские отношения с армянами. Однако, они заявили, что после геноцида в Ходжалы и Кельбаджаре азербайджанский народ не сможет заново вместе проживать с армянским народом. В результате Азербайджанский народ заявляет на весь мир: «Мы, азербайджанцы, никогда не смотрели на язык, религию, цвет кожи народа и поэтому не думали, что Армения вторгнется на наши земли. Но в очередной раз мы ошиблись». Есть даже убеждение, что доверие азербайджанского народа к Армении исчерпано и жить с ними никогда не удастся. Особенно после 44-дневной войны опрошенные женщины дали резкие реакции на вопросы о совместной жизни снова и отклонили возможности.

**Ключевые слова:** Карабах, Женщина, Азербайджан, Армения

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## Kadınların Gözünden Karabağ'ı Anlamak

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### Öz

Yaklaşık 32 yıldır Ermenistan ve Azerbaycan devletleri arasında devam eden Karabağ sorunu hakkında birçok söylem dile getirilmiştir. Ancak bu söylemlerin çoğu olaylara politik açıdan yaklaşmaktadır. Karabağ savaşında en çok etkilenenlerin başında hiç şüphesiz kadınlar gelmektedir. Dolayısıyla 1988-1994 ile 2020 Eylül ve Kasım ayında gerçekleşen savaşta fiili olarak yaşayan kadınların gözünden Karabağ'ı anlamak ve Karabağ sorununun çözüme kavuşmasına olan inancı ortaya koymak başlıca amaç olarak belirlenmiştir. Karabağ Savaşı'ndan önce, özellikle 1988 ihtilaflarının başlangıcına kadar bölgede savaşı yaşayan kadınların hemen hepsi, Ermenilerle çok iyi komşuluk ilişkilerinin olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Ancak Hocalı ve Kelbecer katliamlarından sonra Azerbaycan halkının tekrar Ermenistan halkı ile yaşamanın mümkün olmayacağını belirtmişlerdir. Sonuç olarak Azerbaycan halkı tüm dünyaya haykırıyor; "Biz Azerbaycanlılar halkın diline, dinine, ten rengine asla bakmadık ve bu nedenle Ermenistan'ın topraklarımızı işgal edeceğini düşünmedik. Ama bir kez daha yanıldık." Hatta Azerbaycan halkının Ermenistan'a olan güveninin tükendiği ve onlarla yaşamanın asla mümkün olmayacağı yönünde bir kanaat hâkimdir. Özellikle 44 gün savaşından sonra görüşülen kadınlar, yeniden bir arada yaşama ile ilgili sorulara sert tepkiler vermişler ve ihtimalleri reddetmişlerdir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Karabağ, Kadın, Azerbaycan, Ermenistan

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## Introduction

Many statements have been made about the Karabakh conflict, which has been continuing between the states of Armenia and Azerbaijan for about 28 years, involving more than 30 thousand casualties and hundreds of thousands of refugees<sup>1</sup> However, most of these statements approach the events from an ideological point of view. Undoubtedly, women are among the most affected groups in the Karabakh war.

This article attempts to understand the Karabakh conflict, which has become a century-old problem, far from being resolved through peace, and caused the two nations to hate each other, from the eyes of the women living in the region. In addition to this general statement, the text attempts to reveal all the troublesome experiences before, during, and after the two Karabakh wars, based on the thoughts of women. Besides, the text consists of research, conducted to determine the reactions of women, who have always carried the heaviest and most painful burden of the wars, to the events experienced, whether there is any hope of living together again, and what are their expectations and evaluations about Karabakh for the future.

### 1. Methodology

In-depth interviews were conducted with a total of 20 women, who witnessed the most brutal clashes (they are the family members or relatives of martyrs and war veterans) in their home cities namely Khojaly, Aghdam, Shusha, and Lachin between 1988 and 2020 and as a result of the clashes who had to migrate to Barda, Aghdam, and Aghjabadi cities, most of them live in IDP settlements. The first part of the interview consists of questions that attempt to reveal the situation before and after the war that is between the years of 1988 and 1994; 7 women were involved in the first part of the interviews. Questions in the second part that 13 women were interviewed, were designed to evaluate the situation regarding the war that took place in September and November and the negotiations that continued afterward, from the perspective of women who lived in the region and continue to live today. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with a voice recording to be analyzed later, with the permission of the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cfr.org/nagorno-karabakh> Global Conflict Tracker: Nagorno-Karabakh (4 Mayıs 2021).

women, on (15.02.2020-15.04.2020). Due to the number of participants included in the study and certain limitations, the study should be evaluated within the women living in the region. In addition, the study can be considered important in terms of being an important preliminary source for future researches and its contributions to the literature.

### **1.1. Data Analysis**

The socio-demographic information about the women interviewed is as follows. The proportion of women with primary education is 50%, making up the majority. 55% of the interviewed women are actively working. Most of the working women continue to work in public institutions based on their university education. Unemployed women, on the other hand, mostly cover their households with martyr aid and bread money provided by the state. The youngest of the women participating in the study is 40 years old and the oldest is 70 years old. The women interviewed in the research are immigrants from Shusha, Aghdam, Lachin, Khojaly, and Kalbajar, many of them continue their lives in the provinces of Barda, Aghdam, and Aghjabadi as their final place of life after having to live in different regions of Azerbaijan. Additionally, the fact that Aghdam is identified as both the migrated and currently lived region in this study is due to the fact that the region was not completely occupied. In other words, during the war, people escaped from their villages occupied by the Armenian forces and continued to live in villages still under the control of Azerbaijan. For this reason, some participants live in villages within the borders of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which are legally affiliated with Azerbaijan, but occupied by Armenians, which indicate their place of residence as Aghdam.

### **1.2. Findings and Discussion**

#### **2. Karabakh Before The War**

Despite a long history of conflicts, mutual claims and sufferings, both nations, Armenians and Azerbaijanis tried to live together peacefully in the regions until another Armenian invasion began in 1988. The good neighborhood atmosphere with the Armenian people before the war turned into mutual disrespect, chaos and the emergence of endless problems. All of the women participating in the study stated that life was very beautiful before the occupation, each of them naturally had much better lives compared to their current immigrant life and that they still try to hold on to life with the dreams of those beautiful days. The statements of woman 14, one of the women interviewed, explain the thoughts of all other women.

*“I was 13 when I became an immigrant. Everything was beautiful in Tagibeyli village of Aghdam, we expected that we would return to that beauty in our dreams, but now when we see the photos of that place, our dreams remain just dreams (due to the reason that Aghdam now looks like a ruin). It was the most beautiful and carefree years of our lives, we lived without any problems both as children and human beings. Until this war started. Living in our village was now a risk for us, our village was under fire every moment, every day. There were conflicts. We had prepared our cars and our belongings ready, to get up in the middle of the night, get in the cars, and run... But before that, there was a trouble-free life, until the war started and continued to rage. Our life after our flee turned upside down. Nothing brings back those years and nothing can replace them. No matter what they threw under our feet after that, the best years of our lives are gone. I was a 13-year-old girl when I left the village. Now, as a middle-aged woman, I will return to my ruined dreams...”<sup>2</sup>*

The stability established before is devastated by the war. 30 years after the war, no aid can restore the lives of refugees. Woman 15; *“Before the occupation, both my husband and I were working, we lived very well until our village was occupied. We had to leave the village. We had a pretty stable life. Now, no matter how hard we try, we cannot create that stability.”<sup>3</sup>* Woman 19; *“Our life was very good. Until July 23, 1993, when the war found us.”<sup>4</sup>* Women and children suffered the most painful burden of the war in Karabakh, as elsewhere. Because while some<sup>5</sup> people lost their husband, child, and stability, some lost their dreams for the future. Woman 8;

*“I was 14 years old; I was a student back then when our village was invaded. All of my dreams were connected to school. I was the best student in the class. I had imagined life to be differently back then. I never thought that our land would be invaded, we would come and live in a refugee camp, and that all of my dreams would remain as simple dreams... I would never imagine any of these happening to me. I had a regular life where I was supposed to get up in the morning and go to school, be the best student, hear the kind words of my teachers, come to my parents and talk to them about the day. So, I have a lot of good memories, memories where I was with my family. I didn't have any bad memories until the war separated me with my family.”* All this pain was not just that. People have to carry on their lives with the bad memories of the war that continue to cause pain. W7;

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<sup>2</sup> 41 years old, married.

<sup>3</sup> 59 years old, married and mother of 2 children.

<sup>4</sup> 70 years old, unmarried.

<sup>5</sup> 40 years old, married and mother of 2 children.

*“I graduated in 1990 and came to my village as an official, got engaged at that time, started working as an English teacher in high school. Then I had a son, we celebrated his 1st birthday well, everyone's life was good, but unfortunately the war started. It is true that the war started a long time ago, but they did not attack our village. There was a war in Nagorno-Karabakh. It was the 1987, and we were told that Azerbaijanis living in the territories of present Armenia were beaten, that their ears were cut off, they were loaded into wagons and sent to Baku. We all wondered why the Armenians did that. They said that they were in Semashka (in the hospital), one of the girls had relatives among the people in the hospital. She said they cut off her relative's nose and ears. We went to see them ...”*<sup>6</sup> W13: *“Our life was good; we were getting along well. We didn't have a house, we were staying in a one-room house, however, we were building a 3-bedroom house behind the house we stayed in, we had started the labor. This is how it happened... I had 5 children, two of them died.”*<sup>7</sup> The war did not only take the property or homeland of tens of thousands of people in the Karabakh region. The war had caused wounds that could not be healed in the hearts of tens of thousands of people, as elsewhere.

### **3. The relations between Azerbaijani and Armenian communities before the Karabakh War and the Effects of the Experienced Process on the War**

The majority of the women interviewed within the survey were not sure about any particular reason that would lead these two nations into a war. Because, as stated, the mutual relations of both communities such as trade, health, and education were on a decent level. W3: *“I remember a time when I was still a child attending the 6th grade at school. My mother-in-law and father-in-law would buy things from them, and Armenians would come and sell something. Ours would take from them, and they would take from ours. I never thought they would invade Karabakh.”*<sup>8</sup> W8: *“At that time, we were neighbors with Armenians in the same building, we used to come door to door, face to face. A house was given to everyone in one building, both to Muslims and to them (Armenians). No one had anything to do with one another, I swear. Relations were very good.”*(56 years old, never married). *“Our village was far from where the Armenians lived, we were not that close. I heard that they lived in a village, as neighbors, as close friends, as family friends with Azerbaijanis. They would visit each other with their families around. No one expected*

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<sup>6</sup> 55 years old, married, and mother of 2 children.

<sup>7</sup> 65 years old, married, and mother of 5 children.

<sup>8</sup> 40 years old, married, teacher, and mother of one child.

something like this to happen.”<sup>9</sup> W13: “Relations were good, we lived together. My father had recently built a house with eight bedrooms. An Armenian once said, “my brother, why are you having so much trouble trying to build this house? We will keep pigs in it, why are you taking such care?” I would never have thought of an invasion.”<sup>10</sup> W15: “Our village was very close to the Armenian villages, so, we had a good neighborhood before the war started. Armenians had vineyards and my father also dealt with vine-growing. My father was the group guide, so from time to time, he would gather the whole team to help Armenians. An Armenian built our house. From time to time, he would tell us not to build such a beautiful house. “Dear cousin, take it easy and do not establish such a beautiful house”. Now we understand what he meant then. The Armenians left before the war started.”<sup>11</sup> W17: “Until 88, no one had such thoughts. There was the village of Nakhichevanli, at the end of that village our village would start, water was brought from there, we had a mountain, next to Garagaya. Everyone used to go and graze the animals in the field of Armenians, the relations were very good. Relations remained good until the beginning of Armenian-Muslim issues in 1988. However, until that year, the relationship was pretty good.”<sup>12</sup> W18: “The relations with the Armenians were good. My father was feeding bees, and there were Armenian traders who came and bought 40-50 kg and sometimes 200 kg of honey. There were also Armenian merchants who brought tables and bedding to our village. Even once my father bought 45 chairs from them. They would come and get honey. We would never have thought that such events would happen to us, after all, they would be kind and nice to us. Once we went to Khankendi where my mother had surgery. Armenians there were very nice and kind people as well... then I don't know how, where did this problem come from ...”<sup>13</sup> Almost all of the women surveyed confirmed that their relationship was very good. Woman 7's expressions; “Everybody lived well back then, relations were normal. There was an Armenian, he would come to our house and would bring a tin full of honey so that my father would sell it. My mother was a very good woman, she distributed honey to neighbors, and we ate the other half of it. After all, we were children. When the Armenian came to take the money for the honey, my father asked how much honey was in that tin? Armenian said why he asked, my father, replied that he will pay for it. Armenian however, said, if you had sold that honey, you would have understood how much it weighed, and you would have taken the money out and paid for it. So, you did not sell it, so there is no need for money. They were righteous, for Allah. We

<sup>9</sup> 40 years old, married and has 2 children.

<sup>10</sup> 65 years old, married, 5 children, two of them were martyred in the war.

<sup>11</sup> 59 years old, married and has 2 children.

<sup>12</sup> 54 years old, married, has 2 children, her husband was martyred in the war.

<sup>13</sup> Married and has 2 children.



*didn't really sell the honey, we ate it, my mother offered half of it to the neighbors or something. My father tried very hard to give money to the Armenian, but he did not accept, he said that this would be a beyond friendship action. My father used to tell us that if we were captured or something during the war, tell them that we had many Armenian friends. So maybe they would not torture us. My father said that he had a friend named Ardash, who was like a brother, thus his children were brothers to us. When that man's daughter fell ill and died, my mother and I went to express our condolences. They made my father cut turkey for us because we were Muslims, and they were afraid that we would not eat meat cut by a non-Muslim. My father said that if you are captured, say his name, he will find you wherever you are, he will not let them do anything to you. Being captured was the thing we feared the most. Thank God we never get imprisoned... My father would refuse to leave the house, saying that what would they do to us, he would always say that we didn't do anything to them... in the end, my father was told that it is not them, but those who make them are doing it..."<sup>14</sup>*

Although there have been many problems in the past, even if it is painful or difficult, it is seen that friendships have been established beyond living together. The majority of the women participating in the study did not know which event led the two nations to war, or they believed that there was no such event to warrant war. Some women think that the events took place due to the influence of (according to the opinions of women 1, and 4), "1905 and 1918 events", some (women 2 and 14), "because we are Turkish and Muslim", and some (women 6 and 14), "foreign forces". As a summary of all these events, woman 20 said, "There were Armenians all over Azerbaijan, they are people, and some people provoked them. They were also used in a way. Whether it was politics, or another state tricked them."<sup>15</sup>

#### **4. Women and Children, in the Midst of a War**

The suffering of tens of thousands of people living in the region during the Karabakh war that took place between 1988-1994 is described as follows. W1:

*"People did not want to leave their homes, to flee. It was a very bad situation. Armenians were burning your house in front of your eyes, everything was on fire in the house, you couldn't get anything out, the immigration life also affected everyone very badly. It is possible to say that for 10 years everyone was closed to themselves. It is a very bad feeling, only those who feel it can understand what immigration means; you leave your house,*

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<sup>14</sup> 55 years old, married and has 2 children.

<sup>15</sup> 49 years old, married and mother of 3 children.

*property, whatever you have and go out: it is a very bad stress.”<sup>16</sup> W17; “After the Khojaly massacre in 1992, we did everything so that our villages would not experience the same massacre. We as the women and children left everything and came to Hindarkh. In an old settlement of the military unit, I group of elderly disabled man, the mother of 3 martyrs, 2 orphaned children and a widowed bride (herself) in a small room; we had to live 10 to 12 years in rain, mud, cold.”<sup>17</sup>*

The Armenian army, supported by Russia, seems to have succeeded in the exchange it wanted by displacing or murdering hundreds of thousands of innocent and unprotected people. During the war that lasted until 1994, 800,000 to 1,055,407 Azerbaijani Turks had to migrate to the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan, excluding Armenia and the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh, and 230,000 Armenians from the Republic of Azerbaijan to the Republic of Armenia.

There are three important regions of the world with racial-sectarian diversity, concentration of groups belonging to different language families, and many ethnic mixes: the Balkans, the Middle East and the Caucasus. Yes, one of these regions is Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>18-19</sup> As Aliyev conveys, the peaceful and happy coexistence of nations with different languages, religions and ethnic origins for centuries was ruined for the sake of the political wishes of some powers. And for the sake of these unending desires, it will last for decades and cause tens of thousands of people to die, and hundreds of thousands of people to be displaced and unable to live like humans. W8;

*“We faced so many difficulties. Until then, we had not gone anywhere other than our own homeland. We endured every cruelty, material and spiritual. We came from Shusha. At the Araz collective farm, my brother had a friend, we stayed in a room in his house, timidly. We opened a table from the floor, so many people, all of us put our knees on the floor and everyone was sharing and eating a bite of bread. We tented and lived in the open area on the side of the road, lived on someone else’s farm, gathered branches from the plows, lit a stove and cooked food in the iron house; one day when we found bread, we could not find oil, when we found oil, there was no potato. How many years have we had such difficulties? We used to*

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<sup>16</sup> 53 years old a nurse, married and has 3 children.

<sup>17</sup> At 54 years old, she lost her husband and brothers-in-law in the war.

<sup>18</sup> Beşir Mustafayev, “Karabağ’ın İşgal Süreci ve Bölgede Yaşanan Son Olaylar Çerçevesinde Çözüm Arayışları”, *Atatürk Üniversitesi, Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi*, [TAED] C.49, Erzurum 2013, s. 281-294.

<sup>19</sup> Emin Şih Aliyev, “Ermenistan-Azerbaycan Çatışmasının Yakın Geleceği: Barış mı? Savaş mı? Yoksa Ateşkes mi?”, *Ermeni Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 2013, S. 45, s. 73-92.

*go and work on the land of the hand world, we gathered onions, what else... There was a time when we couldn't find a teapot to make tea, we couldn't find a spoon or cauldron to cook, how many years we lived like this... We have seen and experienced all these difficulties. The hardest part was that I had two brothers, one of them disappeared. In Shusha, the other one came to the army, he came here, he fought in Tartar, he was wounded, the bullet was sunk, and it was poisonous. No matter how much the doctor treated, he lived until the age of 35 and died... In Shusha, we were happy, we were living well. I would love to go back there, even though I would go running barefoot despite all the pain...''<sup>20</sup>W6; "When our house burned down, we ran away and started living in a Turkish tent. Everything was difficult, work, livelihoods, living in a tent in winter in blankets ... In winter, we woke up in the morning on the blanket in the tent, even the pastel we slept in was wet and damp. I lost my brother and mother in the tent life we started with seven people.''<sup>21</sup>W2; "I was in the 6th grade when these events started in 1988, and we also had discussions at home about the political events in Azerbaijan. I remember that the first martyrs of Aghdam were Ali and Bakhtiyar. When we were in the 8th grade, we became refugees. I looked at how my father and mother suffered spiritually, suddenly you lose everything, what you have accumulated over the years, material but necessary for a person. We suffered a lot, both financially and spiritually, and suddenly we grew up. We were 3 children in the family; we were 2 sisters and a brother. They are younger than me, we grew up overnight, and overnight we started thinking like a white-haired man and an old man. I was a kid until 8th grade, I grew up after 8th grade. I feel that pain in other parts of my life, because you took that blow, you are fragile, a little girl lost her childhood... I was happy when Aghdam was liberated from the occupation, I will go back to the place where we forcibly left when I was in the 8th grade, now at the age of 42, in the heart of pain. I think I'll go and find myself there in 8th grade. Children of war like me will understand me better.''<sup>22</sup> W14; "Refugee camp life has been the most painful moments of our lives, we have experienced them under the rain, snow, water and heat, our youth, our childhood, after that I got married, became a mother, but I could not enjoy any of them. We lived in tents for 15-16 years. When my daughter was 3-4 years old, I came out of the Arab tent I entered when I was a child...''<sup>23</sup> 41 years old, marriedsimilar pains in each woman...*

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<sup>20</sup> 56 years old, never married.

<sup>21</sup> 53 years old, never married.

<sup>22</sup> 43 years old, teacher, married and has 1 child.

<sup>23</sup> 41 years old, married.

The only pain that stuck in people's hearts was not what they left behind, but the pain of their relatives who were not with them, most of them did not even have a grave.

### 5. International Institutions and Organizations Approach to Karabakh Events

It is known that many international institutions and organizations, especially the United Nations, make calls for the events to stop as soon as possible. But W19 states that these calls did not stop the events.

*“It seemed like enough for us at first. But it didn't happen, it didn't happen until 2020, it remained on paper, it was a word, they told us you will return to your village in 10 days, then they said it took 2 months and so it took 27 years...”<sup>24</sup>*

It is known that 35 out of 57 settlements where Azerbaijani Turks lived intensely until 1992, when a total war began, were occupied by Armenians.<sup>25</sup> In addition, according to reports submitted by international organizations such as Human Rights Watch and the United Nations Geneva Office, the 366th Russian motorized infantry regiment unit and regular Armenian units are only 160 lightly armed militia in the town of Khojaly with a population of 10 thousand. It has been reported that they massacred 3000 people. The Karabakh war went down in history as the most comprehensive human massacre. The United Nations Geneva Office sent a letter of the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the UN Human Rights Commission. It is stated in the letter that a total of 613 people was killed, including 83 children, 106 women and more than 70 elderly people, 487 people were seriously injured, 150 were missing and 1250 people were captured in the Khojaly massacre.<sup>26</sup> The international organization and some Armenian authors confirm that the Armenians who started the war were supported in every aspect. In addition, the statements of W7, who personally experienced the war, clearly reveal the situation.

*“One day, whichever weapon it was, there was a terrible explosion, all the windows of the house were broken and spilled. My son was little, he was 1 year old. I grabbed the boy and jumped upstairs and that's when my father-in-law told us to go. When the Armenians fired, the edge of the village was a waterway (canal), while on the other side of the canal there were vineyards, the bullets were pouring heavily near us. It was shot once from such a powerful weapon. We escaped and came to the village of Çemenli. I was walking around with*

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<sup>24</sup> 70 years old, never married.

<sup>25</sup> Arif Yunusov, *Karabakh: Past and Present*, Turan Bilişim Ajansı, Bakü 2005, s. 38

<sup>26</sup> Ayrıntılı bilgi için bkz. Letter dated 23 April 2002 from the Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/460440> (29.04.2021).

*my 1-year-old child in my arms, suddenly I saw a soldier running towards me. I asked him what happened, he said that the villages of Bağmanlar, Pirzadlı and İsmayilbeyli were occupied. Soldiers, everyone fled, Russian tanks came in and we couldn't stand it... I started screaming and crying..."<sup>27</sup>*

In an interview with de Vaal<sup>28</sup>, SerzhSargsyan, who served in the Armenian armed forces in the region at the time and became the President of Armenia in the following years, clearly expresses these terrible events as follows: "Until Khojaly, Azerbaijanis thought that they could play tricks with us and that the Armenians could not attack the civilian population. With the Khojaly incident, we have broken this understanding". Vaal from Human Rights Watch; He stated that "the incident was a pre-thought act of intimidation". In addition, as Vaal conveys; After the "dishonorable" role it played in the occupation of Khojaly, Moscow ordered the removal of the 366th motorized regiment from Karabakh.<sup>29</sup>

The massacres were not limited to Khojaly. W15; *"When Güllüce village was occupied, we went to the neighboring Nemirli village on foot, now I would get tired even if we went by car, but we went there on foot then. An hour after us in the center of Nemirli, civilians were brutally murdered, there were 10-15 people, they had murdered the husband and wife right in front of my mother-in-law's house, it was possible to retrieve the bodies when the Armenians withdrew. They brought the bodies to the villages where we were, they were parents. When I saw their corpses, I can never forget their blood spilled, they never even washed, they wrapped them with white cloth in the dray attached to the back of the animals, they took their blood flowing into the car. We left the village because the war intensified. Because it was impossible to live now, it was risky to stay there. We came out with 2 small children in Barda, then we settled in the Arab tent camp, we set up a polyethylene tent, I had a classmate from Yevlakh, he brought a mattress and a quilt, 4 of us were sleeping on a mattress. When it rained, the water was running from head to toe, there was no light, no food, we were throwing garbage to make a fire, everyone was side by side. Then the tent camp was built, we gathered there. We lived for 15 years. We weren't actually living, we didn't exist when we were there, because while others were growing plants under polyethylene, we were*

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<sup>27</sup> 55 years old, married and has 2 children.

<sup>28</sup> Ayrıntılı bilgi için bkz. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2012/02/24/president-interview-and-tragic-anniversary-pub-47283>, A President an Interviewand a Tragic Anniversary Thomas De Waal (30.04.2021).

<sup>29</sup> Abdullahzade Cavid, "Dağlık Karabağ Sorununda Ermenistan'ın Rolü ve Sorumluluğu", Ankara Üniversitesi, *Hukuk Fakültesi Dergisi*, C. 69, S. 4, Ankara 2020, s. 1541-1568.

*raising children.*”<sup>30</sup> All of the women who have experienced this pain in the region support the statements of W12. W12; *“This is politics, I know, all states come when two neighbors fight, but there is nothing, no result. Now it's up to our throats, not other countries, but two countries themselves need to solve this problem. Imagine, you come, and you beat me out of my house. You have no right to do this. This is our Armenian-Muslim cause. OSCE Minsk group, International Committee of Red Cross, other states have done nothing, they have been talking for 28-29 years.”*<sup>31</sup>

## **6. Armenian Society and the Probability of Living Together Again through the Eyes of Women**

Despite all pains, some Azerbaijani women still stated that the power behind the events was not the Armenian community, but the Armenian terrorists. W1;

*“It would have been better if the problem had been resolved peacefully. But there was a war. Armenians also shed blood and took Karabakh. Pashinyan comes to Karabakh, does what he knows, then goes... Currently, there are Armenian people in Azerbaijan as much as you want, how do they live? There is now an Armenian woman living in our Kelenterli village; She lives well, she has good relations, she commiserates our pain, she condemns the Armenian terrorists. We were living well, why did you do it? Armenian terrorists did these events, and the people do not want it. The people will probably live with the Azerbaijanis. Azerbaijanis will probably live with them. If I lost my brother, I cannot go and kill the Armenian next door, because he did not do it, he did not wage the war, he did not kill my brother. The terrorists who did this but stood at the head of the Armenian terrorists. We live with them, there is no problem.”*<sup>32</sup> (53 years old, married, nurse and 3 children). Throughout history, many peoples have managed to live together for centuries, even though their language, religion and origin are different, and they continue to live in the Caucasus, one of the most difficult regions of the world, despite the war. However, there is suffering in the region because of the desire of some strong states to become more powerful, and the dream of some weak states such as Armenia to become bigger. Almost none of the women living in the region expected that the Armenians would attempt such an invasion despite some painful events in the past. However, the suffering had turned into anger in the hearts of women. W2;

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<sup>30</sup> 59 years old, married and has 2 children.

<sup>31</sup> 66 years old, unmarried.

<sup>32</sup> 53 years old, married, nurse and 3 children.

*“The Armenian-Muslim conflict is not a conflict of place and space; it is a genocide against a nation. They terrorize you because you are Turkish and Muslim. I've seen two wars in my life, in one of these two wars I was eleven years old, I was a child, and in the other; I was a mother. War is very bad, terrible, war is a very painful thing, no matter where in the world it is. There is an enemy, let the enemy be brave, and the Armenian is a very cowardly enemy. Unfortunately, we are doomed to live with them, because they are neighbors, what we can do, we cannot leave our homeland. For this reason, we must pass on to future generations that Armenians are our eternal enemies. I am not someone who loves hostility, I am not someone who supports terrorism against anyone. Based on my life experience, I say that the Armenians are our enemies. The Azerbaijani people are a very compassionate people, our enemies have always used this mercy, and we are the people who share the last piece of our bread.”*<sup>33</sup> W3: *“A certain group of people may not want this, but I think the majority wanted war to happen. That's why I don't trust them, I don't look at them as a state, I really hate Armenians. Are they a vile nation? I don't think so, because of what they did, the Khojaly tragedy, how many tragedies... Maybe there will be a compromise, our state will reconcile, but I don't believe they will. I don't think so, I don't believe in living together, he is Armenian, something will come out of him again, and they will do something. If ours doesn't, they do. It seems to me that the war is over for us, but one day they will stand up and do something again.”*<sup>34</sup> *“I cannot forget what happened to women in Khojaly, I do not want Armenians to live. I never greet them. Before the war, Armenians were brought from abroad or settled there. They persecuted our mothers and siblings so much that I will never forgive them.”*<sup>35</sup> W2: *“Absolutely not! It is an insult to the souls of our martyrs, as it is not right for Armenians to march on lands watered with blood. From time to time, it is necessary to cleanse the Armenians of these places. We should not sit with our hands on our heads. As if they had created a monolithic country. I'm not saying we should beat and kill the rest; we just must create the conditions for them to show up in time. I consider living together as an insult to myself.”*<sup>36</sup> W5: *“I don't be neighbors, never. The first Armenian I saw reminds me of my aunt, the mother of the martyr. Then maybe I'll kill him. I hate Armenians so much. I do not want. We are women, maybe our conscience aches with our feminine feelings, but still. I can't*

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<sup>33</sup> 43 years old, teacher, married with 1 child.

<sup>34</sup> 40 years old, teacher, married and has 1 child.

<sup>35</sup> 52 years old, married.

<sup>36</sup> 43 years old, teacher, married and has 1 child.

*live in the same place with them, because they will do it again tomorrow and the next day.*"<sup>37</sup> W14; *"My opinion about Armenians is that they are an unlikely nation, I can't even call them a nation, I don't know if there is somebody as wild as they on earth. They are a nation unaware of humanity, more than savage. I don't believe them after what happened, and I never want to live with them again. We cannot forget those martyrs and look at them again, we have no right as Azerbaijanis."*<sup>38</sup> W15; *"No, I personally cannot live. Because our relatives died right before our eyes, the son of my husband's uncle died, his father died of his grief. Neighbor's son was killed. He was the only child in the house. I have been living an immigration life for 30 years because of Armenians. And we changed places 4 times. I raised 2 children in tents. How can we live with them despite all this?"*<sup>39</sup> *"I would never want to live with them again. I would like to be alone in the desert, but not meet the Armenian."*<sup>40</sup> Although the hearts of women continued to burn, they tried to express uneasily that it was possible to live with them again. But their biggest fear is 'insecurity'. Because they had experienced this situation many times, and each of them lost a life of their own in return. W18; *"Armenians also have poor people like us, let everyone sit down, let's live together in silence. I can live together again, if there is honesty, if there is no fighting, if we live as before, we will live happily ever after. They and we lived well too, trust that they should be withdrawn, we should, too, everyone is in their own place. Let's sign the contract, everyone sits down."*<sup>41</sup> W4; *"I will never like Armenians, but if they live according to the laws of Azerbaijan, it is ok."*<sup>42</sup> W13; *"If there is a good neighborhood like before, let them come and live. But similar incidents have happened before, we can't trust anymore."*<sup>43</sup>

## 7. The Losing Side of the War: Women

War undoubtedly affects individuals of all ages living in society very heavily. Although the war is waged by the soldiers in the battlefields, the most difficult thing is the women who succeeded the impossible by trying to keep those left behind after the war. W9; *"Women suffered a lot; the burden was mostly on women. When the child cried, he would run to his mother, when his clothes were dirty, when he was hungry, when his feet were wet, when he wanted to sleep, he would run to his mother again. Fathers also took on this burden, but mothers bore it the most. Because mothers would also suffer not to show their children's*

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<sup>37</sup> 40 years old, unmarried.

<sup>38</sup> 41 years old, married.

<sup>39</sup> 59 years old, married and has 2 children.

<sup>40</sup> 50 years old, married, mother of 4 children, lost her brother in the war.

<sup>41</sup> Married, has 1 child.

<sup>42</sup> 52 years old, married.

<sup>43</sup> 65 years old, married, 5 children, lost two of them in the war.



wishes to fathers. Mothers did not want to show their desperation to fathers, even this was the sacrifice of women. We saw and experienced this once again in the April 2016 clashes ...”<sup>44</sup> Despite all the pain they left behind, it has always been 'Woman' who never lost hope of returning and raised children who built the future. W14; “To women. Because there were women who lost their sons, they were away from their homes and their villages, and women were the ones who suffered the most, who lost their full house. Let me give an example from my own mother; How our mother decorated our whole house with desire, from the house she built with a lot of torture....all of those things remained, no memories of the past remained, which was my possession, or whatever. We couldn't even take our photos with us. I can tell from my mother that the harm was most worth it to mothers and women. Raising children in that water and mud, their clothes, food and most importantly their health and happiness were all mothers' responsibility.”<sup>45</sup> “We can say that it hurt everyone. But mostly to women, men cry, but women suffer more, they are very affected. The young mother, aged 40-45, seems to have aged 10 years in a month. What laments did the woman who does not like to talk to caress her martyr son ...”<sup>46</sup> The one left behind was always in greater pain. Because she had the motherland left from her martyr and her children to keep her alive, and she had to live with the desire to live stronger than ever.

“Women suffered the most; there are many women who take care of hundreds of orphans like me. I lost my husband in the war, after that I had a hard time, I worked hard, I took care of my orphans; I had to take on men's work during the day and women's work at night...”<sup>47</sup> W20; “Most to women, because women have experienced the worst of everything, all the responsibility is on women. Men were also harmed and became martyrs, but women suffered more because women were the mothers, sisters, wives and shelter of the martyrs...”<sup>48</sup> As W18 stated, Women; before the war she was a mother, spouse, sister. After the war, they also had to be father to their children.

Russia, which has been trying to change the face of Karabakh and its region with the Armenian migrations since the 1830s, causes suffering that it cannot control in the future. More than a century of conflicts and wars resulted in the death of more than 30 thousand

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<sup>44</sup> 40 years old, married and mother of 2 children.

<sup>45</sup> 41 years old, married.

<sup>46</sup> 59 years old, married and has 2 children.

<sup>47</sup> Married.

<sup>48</sup> 49 years old, married and mother of 3 children.

soldiers from both sides and the wounding of more than 50 thousand soldiers, as well as the death of thousands of innocent people and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. Neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan won the war. In the war that caused hundreds of thousands of injuries in both regions, the most profitable are the imperialist powers, which brought these two nations to fall against each other, tried to maintain their hegemony in the region through these two nations, and sold billions of dollars in weapons to both sides.

Despite all this, women, who carry the greatest burden of pain, still take a stand in favor of a peaceful resolution of events. However, the conflicts that have occurred repeatedly in the past show that people have lost their trust in Armenia. W12;

*“It has caused serious harm to both men and women. Our women were desperate, raped, girls and brides were crawled on the ground. Our men have come to such a situation that they were forced to kill their own wives with their own hands... The Khojaly massacre is in front of my eyes, one has no feet, and one has no eyes, who can stand it? Neither woman nor man. Everyone wants it to be resolved peacefully. But our beautiful children were martyred for the sake of those lands. How can we get over it, let it be over, let the Armenian come and sit there? No, never, the blood of those martyrs will never be left on the ground. We have lost so many martyrs. They don't even have graves that we go to visit them.”*

### **8. Possible Reoccurrence of War**

One of the important reasons why the Karabakh events were not resolved peacefully is the claim of both states for primary settlement of Karabakh region. It is seen that women who have lived in both Karabakh wars in the Karabakh region and despite the pain they have accumulated in their hearts, still favor a peaceful resolution of the events. W1;

*“A lot could have been done, pressure could have been put on Armenia, once a year Armenia would have stood up and attacked us. We have so many martyrs, how many mothers are in tears, only someone who has lost a loved one can understand it. If foreign states can afford this conflict, if they do so, then all the Azerbaijani people will support foreign countries... Karabakh... I'm not just talking about my own people, maybe the Armenian people are suffering there, and they are being persecuted.... that's terrorists, terrorists to those there. We can say. Maybe, all Azerbaijani people will support those foreign countries if they save*

*them. So, war is not suitable for anyone, everyone has a child, you see it on TV, you watch it, mothers who live it. She does not want war, no mother wants.*"<sup>49</sup>

It is seen that the suffering in their region is over and the problems are in favor of peace, not war. However, it is stated that there are concerns that have been going on for 30 years and that Armenia will not stand still and invade. W3;

*"I am not satisfied with the ceasefire on November 10 because there is a Russian finger there, one day they will do something because they support the Armenians more than us. But still I was pleased because the martyrs did not come, we gave many martyrs. If it had continued, the death toll would have increased. It is impossible for the Armenians to take them back in terms of fight, but they are politically supported by Russia and the West."*<sup>50</sup>  
W11; *"I do not believe that the Armenians will invade Karabakh again, they are weak, they ask for help from others. They hired soldiers from France, Russia and other states with money. If they have money, they should spend it themselves, why do they beg anyone to bring them and send them to the front in the war? Let them spend that money on themselves. They are weak, but they intrigue."*<sup>51</sup>

It is known that the conflicts that started in 1988 turned into an all-out war in 1992 and after the mutual ceasefire in 1994, especially Armenia broke the ceasefire and attacked the Azerbaijani side in order to establish the "imaginary great Armenia" state. Therefore, although Armenia was defeated after the 2nd Karabakh war and retreated on November 12, there is a concern that the events will continue in the Azerbaijani people based on the events experienced in the past. W2;

*"I don't think the war is over, because it's always a bleeding wound. This war will not end until we put our border on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. I do not want the Armenian representative to come to Azerbaijan as a tourist. I want a full edge barbed wire border. If we soften a little more, that wound will begin to bleed, we will give martyrs again, something will happen again. That's why I don't believe this issue is over."*<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> 53 years old, married, Nurse and has 3 children.

<sup>50</sup> 40 years old, teacher, married with 1 child.

<sup>51</sup> 55 years old, married.

<sup>52</sup> 43 years old, teacher, married and has 1 child.

### 9. Armenian Society and Government in Women's Thought

The bloody Karabakh events have been going on for more than a century and even though a ceasefire was made, people are worried about the war continuing after a certain time. As a result of the events that continued at regular intervals and turned into wars in 1992-1994 and 2020, thousands of people from both nations died and tens of thousands of lives were left unfinished. Despite all the pain experienced, as we mentioned above, the majority of the women interviewed still say that their neighborly relations with Armenia were very good and that some of the women interviewed after the last war said, "These events were carried out by Armenian terrorists and the people did not want this." Also, saying that she believes that both peoples will probably continue to live with each other, W1 said, *"If I lose my brother, I cannot kill the Armenian next door, because he did not do this to me, he did not fight the war and he did not kill my brother. Only Armenian terrorists made it the leading terrorists of that road. We live with them, there is no problem."*<sup>53</sup> As W1, in fact, it is seen that it is accepted by a certain part of the Azerbaijani people that the Armenian diaspora, which is also included in many scientific studies, is trying to bring the Armenian government to Karabakh. Armenian diaspora; it is a term expressed for Armenians living outside of Armenia.

The majority of the women may not reflect the general view of the Azerbaijani people, but we can state that we encountered behaviors and discourses stating that it is not possible to live with Armenians within the observations and conversations we made during the research. As we have mentioned in the previous topic titles, the majority of women answer this question as "It is the people of Armenia who want things to live like this". In addition, this situation W4; *"I think mothers who lost their children there might think a little differently. But they have Armenian blood in their veins, both the president and the statemen are from the people. They never had and never will have a good opinion of us, because if you ask them from 7 to 70, they will answer, "The Turk is our enemy."*<sup>54</sup> She expressed it in a way that supports the opinion of the majority.

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<sup>53</sup> 53 yearsold, marriedand has 3 children.

<sup>54</sup> 52 yearsold, married.

## Conclusion

Almost all the women who experienced the war in the region before the Karabakh War, especially until the start of the 1988 conflicts, stated that they had very good neighbor relations with the Armenians. In addition, according to the women participating in the research, it has led to the fact that states such as Russia, the USA and France are trying to dominate Karabakh over Armenia, and therefore unavoidable or unwanted atrocities have been experienced. Especially after the Khojaly and Kalbajar massacres, they stated that it would not even be possible for the Azerbaijani people to live with Armenia again. Because no event in the world is as painful as the separation of the child from his mother. It is seen that the women who sacrificed their children, spouses, siblings and fathers in the Karabakh war had difficulty in speaking, and that pain and disrespect were reflected on their faces.

It has been stated that the occupation actions that act as puppets of powerful states or that are carried out in line with the interests of both states are always "actions to protect the citizens living in the region". However, as in the past, today and in the future, it is seen that the invading states always make up a cover for the atrocities they have committed for the sake of individual country interests. All these features are also seen in Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani lands by Russia, directly by states such as the USA, France, Greece, politically and by groups such as the UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, EU, Red Cross and Minsk Group.

And as a result, the people of Azerbaijan are shouting to the whole world; "We, as Azerbaijanis, have never looked at the language, religion and skin color of the people and therefore did not think that Armenia would invade our lands. But once again, we were wrong." In fact, there is a prevailing opinion that the trust of the Azerbaijani people to Armenia is exhausted and it will never be possible to live with them. Especially, the women interviewed after the 44-day war, showed harsh responses and refused the probability to the questions related to living together again.

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