'The waiting and not knowing can be agonizing': Tracing the power of emotions in a prolonged conflict in the South Caucasus

Abstract

Moving beyond the usual strategic and national issues of war in International Relations, feminist theorizing on aspects of war has stressed the pressing need to depict it as something experienced by individuals. This study addresses this need by considering the critical case of the protracted conflict over the Nagorny Karabakh region in the South Caucasus. Despite the 1994 ceasefire, no satisfactory settlement for all the parties involved in the conflict has yet been reached. In fact, since the four-day war in April 2016, the situation has become even more tense, with an increased risk of renewed hostilities. This article uses empirical research with women in Nagorny Karabakh to examine the impact of this protracted conflict through an analysis of emotions in their everyday lives. It argues that fear, grief and trauma not only affect individual women but also create a collective identity amongst them that is defined by compliance with the heightened militarization of society in this region. In this way, this study shows that emotions feed into the persistence of patriarchal relations. By exploring women's emotions, this article contributes to the growing literature in international relations that examines war as lived experience.

Key words: Women, Emotions, War, Feminist International Relations, Nagorny Karabakh

Introduction

In April 2016, fighting broke out at three locations along the Line of Contact (LoC) between Azerbaijan and the self-declared but internationally unrecognized Republic of Nagorny

Karabakh,[1] which has been the subject of a prolonged stand-off between Azerbaijan and Armenia since the ceasefire settlement in 1994. The violent clash ended only on the fourth day by a spoken agreement brokered in Moscow. This four-day war in April was the most serious escalation of fighting in over two decades: the formerly 'frozen' conflict quickly turned into open warfare. Armenian official sources confirmed the deaths of 13 volunteers and four civilians, in addition to 65 combatant fatalities, and said that more than 120 people had been wounded (Sanamyan 2016). On the Azerbaijani side, 31 combatant fatalities were initially reported, but overall the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense has never published a complete list of its casualties. However, according to other media sources, some 100 servicemen may have been killed in combat or are missing (and presumed dead) and six civilians were killed in the shelling.[2] Since then, sporadic clashes on the LoC have continued and the tensions have not lessened; the risk of a further escalation of the conflict is, if anything, higher than before (Sanamyan 2017).

The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorny Karabakh region can be traced further back than the collapse of the Soviet Union and has long stood out as one of the world's more daunting diplomatic challenges (Cornell 2017).[3] Beginning in late 1987, four years before the fall of the Soviet Union, the conflict gradually intensified, escalating rapidly when Armenia and Azerbaijan became independent states in late 1991. The ethnic Armenians of Nagorny Karabakh strongly pursued the principle of self-determination, separated from Azerbaijan and subsequently declared themselves 'independent.' Unlike Armenia, Azerbaijan rejects the

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[1] Following the constitutional referendum in February 2017, the unrecognised Nagorny-Karabakh Republic was renamed the Republic of Artsakh. However, this article uses the more common 'Nagorny Karabakh'.

[2] Since the list was compiled primarily from reports of public funerals, the actual death toll remains unknown, but is likely to be higher (Sanamyan 2016).

[3] The root causes and the trajectory of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorny Karabakh have been the subject of considerable analysis. Thomas de Waal's (2013) book provides a particularly detailed study.

principle of self-determination. Despite losing the war as well as seven of its provinces[4] surrounding Nagorny Karabakh, it accepts only the opposing principle of territorial integrity (Cornell 2017).

The ceasefire in 1994 signified a standstill, but not a solution. In the years that followed, the conflict has not moved any closer to a political solution. In the meantime, however, the economic and political balance between the two countries has shifted considerably. Armenia, the victor in the war, has suffered a decline in its population[5] and struggles economically, whereas the development of Azerbaijan's oil and gas resources has meant that its economy is now over six times larger than Armenia's, and for several years its official defence budget exceeded Armenia's entire state budget (ibid.) The unsettled state of the dispute has been regularly reiterated.[6] In addition, there has been a lack of political dialogue between the main parties to the conflict and little effort to encourage peace talks, essentially resulting in diplomatic deadlock. In short, if both societies continue to prepare for war as they do at present, the best-case scenario is that low intensity conflict along the LoC will persist (Poghosyan 2017).

The article examines the impact of this prolonged conflict on women living in the Nagorny Karabakh region, using a theoretical framework originating from feminist international relations that depicts war in terms of experience. The article argues that the circulation of emotions contributes to strengthening a collective identity of compliance amongst women in Nagorny Karabakh and thus feeds into the perseverance of patriarchal relations. Exploring this

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[4] Five provinces are fully controlled by Armenia (Jabrail, Zangilan, Gubadli, Lachin and Kelbajar) and two in part (Agdam and Fizuli) (International Crisis Group 2017).
[5] According to World Bank data, Armenia's population has decreased from approximately 3.5 million in 1990 to roughly 2.9 million people in 2016, whereas Azerbaijan's population has increased from approximately 7.1 million in 1990 to 9.7 million people in 2016.
[6] For data on fatalities, see Broers (2016, 8).

long-standing conflict as a set of emotional experiences for ordinary women allows us to examine this conflict, like other conflicts, as a social activity of collective violence around which a wide variety of emotional experiences are constructed, altered, and enabled to support war by their very existence. Although emotional and physical experiences are not traditionally part of the debate on war in international relations, as Sylvester (2013, 65) maintains 'war is peopled', meaning war is fought by people, people live through war and suffer from war. Only now, at the turn of the 21st century, have physical and emotional experiences entered the realm of international relations. As such this study, through an exploration of the experiences of women living in prolonged conflict conditions in Nagorny Karabakh contributes to the growing recognition of people's experiences of war in the international relations literature.

In terms of gender relations and war, many scholars have suggested not only that patriarchy and militarism are essential to war and that women appear only as victims of patriarchal structures, but also that patriarchy is exacerbated as a result of conflicts (cf. Cockburn 2010; Enloe 2000; Golan 1997; Segal 2008; Sharoni 1999; Waller and Rycenga 2004). Yet the role of emotions fostering the persistence of patriarchal relations is largely missing. When it comes to the study of women and the socio-political transformations in the Nagorny Karabakh region, apart from the brief treatment by Shahnazarian and Ziemer (2014) of the importance of emotions in their analysis, women's emotional responses in this protracted conflict have received little attention. This study addresses such shortcomings by considering women's experience of war through an analysis of their emotions.

This article proceeds as follows. The first section reviews current research on emotions and war in International Relations. Because the article's core argument is that emotions feed into the persistence of patriarchal relations, the second section reviews Armenian patriarchal gender relations and militarized gender ideologies in the Nagorny Karabakh context. This section is

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followed by a discussion of the fieldwork and data collection. While it is obvious that during war and protracted conflicts, emotions run high and are mostly negative (Åhäll and Gregory 2015; Damousi 1999; Wilcox 2012), the present article scrutinizes the affect that emotions have on women who live in a situation of protracted conflict. The third section explores the specific effects of the emotion of fear on women and the ways in which fear is normalized in women's everyday lives. The final empirical section examines the emotional power of trauma and grief and the impact of this type of emotion not only on the individual but also on women's collective identity that is defined by compliance with the community's militarization discourse.

Emotions and War in International Relations

Substantial works recognize the political importance of emotions in foreign policy decisions (Mintz and DeRouen 2010; Larson and Shevchenko 2014) or in legitimizing state 'security' practices by playing on public insecurities (Mercer 2013; Tsygankov 2016, 2014). Other studies address the political aspects of grief and trauma (Edkins 2003; Fattah and Fierke 2009; Fierke 2004; Hutchison 2010; Solomon 2012); memory (Gustafsson 2013; Mink & Neumayer 2013); and humiliation (Wang 2014); the aesthetic expression of emotions (Siebrecht 2013) and the role of emotions in humanitarian interventions and conflict resolution (Autesserre 2014; Roth et. al. 2016).

Most international relations scholars use the term 'emotions' loosely, as a broad umbrella term to denote a range of different phenomena. In this article, emotions are also defined broadly but with an implied constructivist view. This view is mainly derived from the sociological understanding of identity and norms as always under construction. Identities, like emotions, are not fixed, but rather processual and constantly changing in the process of making sense of experience. Identities are discursively constructed through everyday experiences and as part of

a process of making meaning. As Ross (2013, 198) maintains, the study of emotions carries us into unfamiliar layers of human agency and tenuous dimensions of social life; it stretches the assumptions and frameworks that characterise constructivism. For example, constructivists commonly emphasise the symbolic meanings contained in discourse (Laffey and Weldes 1997; Wendt 1999). Identity formation is part of a meaning-making process, where meanings are the symbolic identification by social actors of the purpose of their actions (Castells 2011, 7). In this way, having an identity requires a process of self-construction that takes place 'within' and 'not outside discourse', consciously and unconsciously at different times (Hall 1996). Yet, in contrast to identity, emotions are for Ross (2013) also too inchoate, unexpected, or inarticulate to bear a fixed meaning and thus emotions often lie outside intentional agency.

Although cognitive scientists and psychologists have been most engaged with making sense of emotions, Ross (2006, 201) contends that emotions can be seen as beliefs which are socially and intersubjectively constituted. Nussbaum (2001, 39-45), for example, has suggested that grief (as discussed below, pp.16-17) is predicated upon a series of distinct beliefs – that an injury or loss has been experienced by someone, and that the person concerned is significant to the grieving individual. Turning to the political aspects of emotions, Mercer (2013, 2014) and Crawford (2000) situate emotions at the very heart of political reasoning (Hutchison and Bleiker 2014, 495), while for Mercer (2014, 515-535) emotions are 'a conscious awareness that one is experiencing an emotion' and Crawford (2000, 125) sees emotions as 'inner states that individuals describe to others as feelings'. Hence, both scholars stress the need to capture the social dimensions of emotions because these emotions are linked to political contexts and thus are as much intersubjective and collective as they are idiosyncratic.

With respect to the political context of this article, the circulation of public emotions significantly increased in Armenia, Azerbaijan and *de facto* Nagorny Karabakh following the

violent escalation in April 2016. The four-day escalation prompted an enormous rise in patriotic feeling on all sides, hardening demands for a 'final solution' to a conflict that has smouldered for two decades and more (International Crisis Group 2017, 8). Azerbaijani society felt uplifted by victory, managing to change its status on the ground. Armenia went through a period of sadness that, at least in part, shaped the outcome of elections that set the country's political direction for years to come. For Nagorny Karabakh society, this four-day war revived painful wartime memories and has reinforced support for military strengthening (ibid.).

As shown below in the case of women in Nagorny Karabakh, collective emotions are also personal emotions which are conditioned by power structures and historical legacies rather than exclusively individual and privatized experiences (Saeidi and Turcotte 2011). Saeidi and Turcotte (2011, 694) maintain that, although feminists assume that the personal is political, this does not necessarily mean that the 'personal is privatized.' If the personal is understood as a privatized political struggle, it can transcend systemic inequalities and appear detached from larger circulations of power. Accordingly, Hutchison (2010, 72), investigating the impact of trauma on Australian identity following the Bali bombings, contends that 'emotions are important sites of not only personal but also political experience'. In other words, examining emotions as interactive and socially constructed, not simply individual, permits us to analyse 'power relations that circulate historically and through contemporary institutions in ways that shape feelings about self and others' (Sylvester 2013, 93).

Mercer (2014, 515-35) speaks of the 'no body, no emotions problem': emotions cannot be fully understood unless they are examined as parts of bodies. Dwelling on the differences between emotions and feelings can help to illuminate the intrinsic link between bodies and the processes through which emotions are communicated to others. Feelings emerge from within the body and in this sense are internal, in that they are felt within bodies; yet they are also in some way

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external, because they bind individuals and even collectives together (Ahmed 2013). To divorce the body from accounts of emotion would be to erase the origin and meaning of feelings (Hutchison and Bleiker 2014, 503). For McDermott (2014, 557), a focus on physicality is essential, since 'emotion must necessarily be grounded in somatic experience in the physical body or it would not exist at all'. In short, the body is where emotions begin (Hutchison and Bleiker 2014, 503).

Particularly in the case of war, emotions cannot be separated from the body. Scarry has described war as 'the most radically embodying event in which human beings ever collectively participate' (Scarry 1985, 71). Emotions play a vital role in any history of war, both as an element in morale and as a component in understanding the experience of civilians as well as soldiers. Few subjects evoke such strong emotional reactions as war, incorporating as it does emotion-laden phenomena including separation, patriotism, danger, hatred and death. As Sylvester's generative work has demonstrated, war is experienced through the body, an entity that has the agency to target and injure others in war and is also a target of war's capabilities (Sylvester 2013, 5). Hence, the body experiences war in terms of two key connections, both the physical and emotional (ibid.).

Finally, and most importantly for this article's framework, it is vital to consider emotions as gendered moments in both everyday life and under the duress of war. As demonstrated by feminist philosophers, the subordination of emotions in everyday life can also work to subordinate the feminine and the body (Jagger 1989). Emotions in ordinary life are predominantly associated with women, who are represented as being 'closer' to nature, ruled by appetite and less able to transcend the body through thought, will and judgement. But in wartime, emotions such as fear, horror and grief visibly affect everyone, females and males, soldiers and civilians alike. For example, people who are physically located at the epicentre of

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war's ferocity also often force themselves, or are forced, to retain emotional control and distance (Ben-Ari 1998; Hinton 1998; McSorley 2014, 114). In this respect, MacLeish (2013, 132) stresses that the broad military effort of *not feeling* is 'the self-conscious mastery of affect, emotion, and physical pain by soldiers and spouses, and the institutionally imposed haze of medication, emotional and bodily discipline, and compelled endurance'. A soldier's hardness does not necessarily mean the absence of emotion, but rather a different emotional orientation towards others. To the extent that we ignore gender, we run the risk of largely missing the meaning that collective identity holds for the participants and of producing an incomplete understanding of the causal relationship between emotions and collective action (de Volo 2006).

Fieldwork and data collection

The article is based upon data from a larger ongoing ethnographic study exploring gender issues and political transformations in the Nagorny Karabakh region and Armenia (cf. Shahnazarian and Ziemer 2012, 2014, 2018). As part of this research project, I made three fieldwork trips to Nagorny Karabakh; one to Martuni in July 2009,[7] one to Stepanakert, the capital of Nagorny Karabakh, and Shushi, in August 2015 and one to Shushi in August 2016.[8] The analysis is based on 30 qualitative interviews with women NGO leaders and members of women's civil society organisations, but also with women from different (non-NGO) walks of life in Nagorny Karabakh.

I collected data from in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. In the highly politicised context of the Nagorny Karabakh region, ethnographic interviews seemed the most appropriate form of gathering information. Ethnographic interviews are in-depth interviews[9] and appear like informal conversations. Yet such informal conversations are in this context instigated as intentional interactions on the part of the researchers. They allow researchers to obtain information on issues of interest to the research participant through the use of simple open-ended questions. Thus, this type of data collection allowed the research participants to raise spontaneously issues of concern to them during the interview process (Bernard and Ryan 2010, 28).

As part of this research, gatekeepers were unquestionably essential in terms of establishing trust and rapport with the research participants (Seidman 1998). As a non-Armenian and outsider to the community in Nagorny Karabakh, I could not have undertaken this research without the help of gatekeepers who provided local knowledge and an initial point of contact with the interviewees. For the trip in 2009 and 2015, my gate keeper was an Armenian colleague who is local to Nagorny Karabakh, but lives now in Yerevan, Armenia. My gatekeeper in 2016, was the director of the Women's Resource Center in Shushi with whom I had already conducted an interview in 2015[10]. In addition, the gatekeepers were needed not only for accessing research participants, but also for translating Armenian to Russian or English when necessary. Although the interviews were conducted in Russian or English, occasionally, the respondents reverted back to Armenian when re-calling particularly emotional details of the conflict. Most interviews were audio-recorded but some research participants preferred not

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[9] Depending on the research participant, some of these interviews lasted up to 4 hours.
[10] I would like to thank for dedicating her valuable time to me.

to be recorded. In these cases, interview 'transcripts' were created by means of detailed, handwritten notes taken by the author and gatekeeper.[11]

Proud Women and Dutiful Mothers: Armenian Patriarchy and Militarized Gender Ideology

> Nagorny Karabakh is in many ways unique, it is small, people know each other and the constant security threats create a condition where every citizen feels responsibility for their country. Homeland is not an imagination …everyone knows that every family has lost someone … therefore everyone is doing their utmost … to contribute to the well-being of society and our republic.

In this interview excerpt, a female NGO worker explains the societal impact of living in a protracted conflict situation. In this sort of situation, the military as an institution assumes a central role and the militarization of society can be seen as the most perpetuating factor impacting on unequal gender relations. Enloe (2000, 3) maintains that militarization requires compliance. The interview excerpt highlights the ways in which feelings of responsibility as well as pride and patriotism for the homeland – since 'the homeland is not an imagination' – create conditions for the citizens' full compliance with the national discourse of protecting the nation. In this respect, the notion of hegemony provides a way of discussing overarching gender ideologies at the level of the everyday, taken-for-granted ideas and practices of gender roles performed 'with consent' and 'without coercion'. Militaries need gendered 'women' to provide men with masculinity – reinforcing the incentive to endure all the hardships of soldiering (Enloe 1993, 212). In this way, compliance actually brings women benefits: for older women

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[11] Each person took notes separately. Immediately after the interview, researcher and gatekeeper compared notes so as to create an integrated text.

in the form of status and power from their position as arbiters of social mores, for young women through being publicly labelled 'good' (Connell 1987, 67).

In the Nagorny Karabakh context specifically, mothers, wives and daughters signify the nation and national belonging (Shahnazarian and Ziemer 2014). Motherhood can be seen as representing for women what soldiering does for men – serving the nation. This is a gender-specific experience for providing social unity and stability during times of prolonged conflict. Noteworthy here is that, with regard to the Armenian nation and its gender traditions as a whole, concepts such as motherhood have always played a substantial role in the construction of Armenian femininity. Motherhood is a notion which is processed through a distinct history of surviving genocide attempts (early independence years in the diaspora), war in Nagorny Karabakh, and the struggle to preserve Armenianness after the forceful eviction from a historical homeland to a strange host country (Beukian 2014, 262-263, Shahnazarian and Ziemer 2018). Women are considered the nurturers of the nation; they have the child-bearing responsibility to keep the nation growing. Particularly, in view of the security threats, Nagorny Karabakh and Armenia necessitate an equally strong discourse of 'us' that underscores Armenianness as exclusive. Thus, Armenian women typically believe the reality of motherhood to be exceptional for Armenianness and consider it their duty to be proud mothers (Shahnazarian and Ziemer 2018, Ziemer 2012).

The core argument of this article is that in the circumstances of prolonged conflict emotions feed into the persistence of patriarchal relations. All social relationships, in particular the relations between men and women, have an emotional dimension (Connell 1987). As Connell (1987) maintains, social relationships are organised around one's person's emotional attachment to another. The structure that organises these attachments is the structure of cathexis. In the pattern of desire that is socially hegemonic, cathexis presupposes sexual

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difference. Therefore, for Connell (1987, 186-187) all forms of femininity in society are constructed in the context of an overall subordination of women to men. Regarding the militarized discourse in Nagorny Karabakh, women's gendered identities are understood as performative practices, which are repetitive imitations of an ideal, imagined gender identity (Butler 1990, 134-141). Although women's identity practices reflect human agency and are capable of negotiation, they are limited and conditioned by the structure of social relations (Connell 1987, 62).

Normalizing fear in everyday life

> Every woman in Karabakh wakes up in the morning and the first thing she does is check the news for casualties on the line (LoC). She does this before she brushes her teeth, has a shower or breakfast or even before she puts on make-up (Ruzan).[12]

Waking up every morning with the thought that someone close to them could have been killed on the LoC highlights how women's everyday lives are dominated by fear. Fear, like grief (discussed below, pp. 16-17), is felt to an unpleasant degree of intensity. Fear is bound up with the threatened loss of the object of love (husband, son, brother, cousin), for 'every woman knows that they can lose their loved ones from one day to another' (Gohar). From this quotation, fear appears as a gendered process where women experience fear while meeting their socially-assigned responsibilities as keepers of the home and family. In this way, the normalization of fear in women's everyday lives reinforces the militarized patriarchal gender relations. As Kaplan (1994, 130) argues, 'women are constituted as weepers, occasions for war, and keepers of the flame of non-warlike values who cannot effectively fight the mortal

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[12] To ensure complete anonymity, the interview participants are referred to by pseudonyms.

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wounding of sons, brothers, husbands, fathers'. In other words, the ideal woman-as-caretaker is invoked by this constant presence of fear at home.

> If she has checked the news and knows everyone is safe and there were no clashes,
> she can move on with her everyday activities, knowing that her family members
> are safe (Ruzan).

However, she knows that this fear has not vanished; tomorrow the day will start with the same fear that the night may have brought clashes and casualties. As Ahmed (2013) notes, this lived experience of fear is a current unpleasantness; nonetheless it relates to the future, for fear involves an anticipation of hurt or injury. In this way, fear is an emotion that pushes Karabakh women into the future 'as an intense bodily experience in the present' (Ahmed 2013, 65). Seda explains that when there is news of casualties on the LoC, 'mothers will find the waiting and the not knowing agonizing'. Similarly, Arevik recalls how her fear drove her to action during the violent escalation in April 2016:

> When I heard the news at home, I couldn't stop crying, I needed to do something
> and be with my son. I started to bake buns (*bulochki*) and my husband and me drove
> to the line (LoC), to bring the soldiers some home-made food and knitted socks.
> They like this and I would be able to kiss and hug my son and see him well.

This quotation shows how fear as a negative intense bodily experience can be transcended by becoming active, planning action and doing something that channels this fear. Bringing a piece of home to the LoC by bringing home-made things is bringing love, care and protection, the most important attributes that a mother is seen as offering. As a caring mother, Arevik cannot sit at home and wait for news, she needs to act and do something to cope with her fear. When, after long hours of travel she finally reaches the LoC and can take her son into her arms, this

moment signifies a protective and safe form of enclosure, as if she was transforming the world of war into home. Such actions make it seem as if fear is normalized through love and care, becoming a preserver of life, but paradoxically only in the everyday shadow of potential death.

While in some instances fear can restrict the mobility of bodies, as Ahmed (2013) demonstrates, when there is a prolonged threat of violent clashes, this persistent emotion of fear has seemingly made many women in Nagorny Karabakh more active. In fact, many women in the region call themselves activists – *my aktivisty* – as I heard in almost every interview.[13] This type of activism, however, is clearly exercised within the boundaries of a militarized patriarchal society, and predominantly relates to male bodies, with particular reference to the women's roles as mothers. While the LoC is considered the province of male soldiers, in the most recent violent clashes, Arevik as a soldier's mother was able to enter a male space to care for and protect her son and others in a symbolically motherly way. Fear works, then, to enable mothers to move into a militarized masculine space, but only in compliance with the order imposed by militarized gender conditions. Like many other women in Nagorny Karabakh, Arevik feels active because she is doing something to support the military actions that protect the homeland, even if it is only in the framework of patriarchal relations where women are the carers, the keepers of home and men are the fighters and soldiers.

While the above account gives some idea of the emotion of fear at an individual level, many classic and contemporary analyses have focused on the processes through which fear works to form collective identities (cf. Ahmed 2013: Edkins 2003; Ross 2013). In *The Prince and the Discourses*, Machiavelli understands fear as a more apt instrument for imposing rules; fear

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[13] Their choice of term is interesting in itself as it shows that they feel fully involved in the political life of Nagorny Karabakh. It also demonstrates that the use of the term itself derives from their participation in women's NGO activities or at least close knowledge of women's activism.

more than love makes a prince's subjects consent to his power. Similarly, Hobbes' realism makes fear essential to the emergence of governments, arguing that it is fear of anarchy that makes subjects consent to being governed (Ahmed 2013, 71). In their analysis of the relationship between emotions and the war on terror, Hutchison and Bleiker (2008) explicitly demonstrate how emotions help to construct a sense of identity and solidarity that can emerge despite – or, rather, in direct response to – the feelings of pain, solitude and fragmentation that are generated by the trauma. These writers maintain that traumatic events and consequent feelings of fear can pull people together, giving them a sense of common purpose. Thus, injury and death – what some commentators call a 'culture of pain' − can therefore become instrumental to the constitution of community and the sense of collective identity that emerges in the aftermath (Hutchison and Bleiker 2008, 59-60). Ross (2013, 98) also demonstrates how more recent fears, combined with an experience of the present and highly memorialised and mythologized images of the past, create collective identities in Rwanda.

Similarly, this everyday fear in Nagorny Karabakh, combined with memories from the war in the 1990s, has created collective identities amongst women who would rather support the militarized discourse than question the government and its military actions. For example, in one interview, Lusine, almost with an air of pride, announced that as soon as she heard the news of a violent attack in April 2016, she ran to her school and prepared a bomb shelter in case of a more serious attack. Thus, she began straightaway to enact from 'home' (the school) the role of carer in support of military action. According to Enloe (1993, 232-233), the process of militarization, which is always gendered, intensifies 'when a community's politicized sense of its own identity becomes threaded through with pressures for its men to take up arms, [and] for its women to loyally support brothers, husbands, sons and lovers to become soldiers.'

Living with the aftermath: the power of trauma and grief

There is no doubt that trauma associated with displacement, violence and war has a profound impact on civilians. In the 2016 April War, for example, civilians from the villages of Talish, Mataghis and Mardakert had to be evacuated following the unexpected outbreak of violence. These villages are located 3-4 kilometres from the LoC. According to some estimates, approximately 5,000 people were evacuated (Titizian 2017), most of whom were presumably women and children. In the context of this most recent escalation, for some women trauma was intensified, since they had already experienced displacement and violence in the 1990s war.

In much of the literature on war and trauma, it is argued that grief is often perceived as something privatized (Evans 2007; Jalland 2010, 2014). Grief is the endurance of something outside one's own control: one feels beside oneself, not at one with oneself (Butler 2006, 28). Yet, while grief can be experienced by an individual in private, Butler also maintains that it can create a sense of political community, of a complex order. In other words, the emotional politics of grief, loss, humiliation or anger, which feature strongly in everyday life under prolonged conflict conditions, can bind a community closer together (Parr 2015). The interviews with women in Nagorny Karabakh clearly showed that grief was not only something that women perceived as a feeling experienced by individual people, but also something that women talked about as a duty and sacrifice to the nation – and therefore inevitable. This politics of grief and loss is accompanied by a focus on pride and victory that their soldiers are the ones who have taken their land back and since then have helped to defend the homeland. Thus, the collective experience of grief and loss may contribute to compliance with the overall militarist discourse in society.

Any moment of trauma and grief can be understood as a gendered moment. The gender of persons experiencing grief is essentially related to the way that they feel the emotion and try to deal with it at an individual as well as a collective level (de Volo 2006). For example, the clinical psychology literature on grief demonstrates that women experience grief differently from men and engage in mourning more than men do (ibid., 463); while men rather take an instrumental approach to grief. Thus, maternal grief in particular can carry a high emotional resonance. The death of a child, for the woman who has carried, given birth to and nurtured this child, is acknowledged to be a singularly dreadful event. Thus, grief can become a powerful weapon which can be used against the state. For example, numerous case studies in different contexts have documented the important role of grief in explaining mothers' mobilization against political violence that has harmed or threatens to harm their children (Manchanda 2001; Noonan 1995 in de Volo 2006: 467). Likewise, some women's groups in Armenia and Azerbaijan, such as the feminist anti-militarist Women in Black International Movement, have been active in terms of peace and anti-violence demonstrations (Tenuta 2016).

In the case of the women in Nagorny Karabakh, their collective responses to grief and trauma are rather limited and small-scale, not so stringently opposed to the state's military action. While some women's organizations from Armenia, such as the Women's Resource Centre in Yerevan, support initiatives in Nagorny Karabakh, the political engagement of women in Nagorny Karabakh can be described as rather more aligned to the militarist discourse in society; in this respect, therefore, women tend to focus their activism on male bodies.[14] The reasons for this compliance are three-fold. First and foremost, these women have never lived in or experienced 'a state of their own'; since 1991, the self-proclaimed Nagorny Karabakh

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[14] For example, there is The Women's Council under the NKR Defence Army (*Sovet zhenshchin pri armii oborony NKR*) which regularly monitors military conditions and supports soldiers in the army.

Republic has sought international recognition, but its status is unsettled even now. Thus, taking action against a government that is looking for international recognition would seem to undermine the purpose of the entire population of Nagorny Karabakh. Second, as indicated above (p.17) this politics of grief and loss is accompanied by a focus on pride and victory. The people living in Nagorny Karabakh, including women, see themselves as having 'liberated their Artsakh homeland' and defended it ever since, as Vartuhi explains:

> We used to live under a different [government], well, we used to live on our soil, but under a foreign (*chuzhoi*) government; this is the worst thing. This is like you are living in your home, but with a different landlord (*drugoi khozyain*), it would have been better living close by and being a servant there than being a servant (*slushanka*) in your own home. For the Armenian people, we were in our home but they (*Azeris*) were our landlords.

The third reason, which can be derived from the second one, is that this insecure status and the way the region faces existential threats, leads most parts of society, including women, to see a strong and modern army as the only viable tool for providing security (Poghosyan 2017).

The performance of a loyal femininity is central to grief in war and to post-war societies (cf. Damousi 2001, 193; Parr 2015; Chambers 2010). In societies shaken by violent conflict, women serve in the nationalist discourse as symbolic boundaries of the nation. For many women in the Nagorny Karabakh region, this means that they feel a responsibility to carry on to honor their husbands and sons and thus strongly support the re-building of *de facto* Nagorny Karabakh and its current heightened military politics. Hasmik, whose husband was killed in the 1990s war, communicated this during our interview:

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'I gave birth to my daughter in a cellar under bombing, my husband was killed

shortly after the birth of our daughter. No matter how poor I am, if I leave Karabakh

this means I leave the cause my husband died for'.

Once again displaying activism relating to male bodies only, for some women grief leads to public activism in honour of the soldiers who have lost their lives. To deal with the grief and loss of her son, Galya Arstamyan decided to found a museum dedicated to the martyrs and heroes of the Karabakh war in the 1990s (Beukian 2014, 258). With the combat possessions of 3,355 soldiers, she gathered the pictures of these men (her son among them), who had died during the war for display in the museum (Voskanyan 2016).

Yet it should not be forgotten that their compliance and support for heightened militarization as a result of grief and trauma does not mean that the women in Nagorny Karabakh are passive and exercise no agency. It is mostly motherhood which offers women their fundamental chance for both agency and service to the nation, since mothers give birth to the future protectors of the Karabakh nation. As part of this militarization, and as discussed above (pp.11-13), motherhood to women in the Nagorny Karabakh region is what soldiering is to men. This is how Vartuhi continues, remembering the war in the 1990s:

> All men fought in the war, maybe one or two women too, but it meant that women
> remained without their husbands, and children without their fathers… there was
> hunger everywhere. But now, so many years later, the children of these women are
> well-educated. These are the women who had no bread, nothing to eat, the
> government couldn't do anything, these women also have experienced trauma, they
> also were ill, but they were Armenian women and they were mothers, we think first
> as mothers, and then as wives or women. Motherhood is the most important thing
> for us.

As I argued above (p.4) (p.4 and passim), women adopt a gender-specific process for providing social unity and stability, not only during times of war, but also times of prolonged conflict. As Enloe (1993, 212) argues: 'The processes of military manpower acquisition are gendered processes. Military forces past and present have not been able to get, keep and reproduce the sort of soldiers they imagine they need without drawing on ideological beliefs concerning the different stratified roles of women and men'. Henceforth, many women see it as their task to support this militarization, there being no alternative; it is a matter of patriotic emotions, as well as grief, that feeds into the support for heightened militarization. Hasmik's previous interview excerpt and the following one endorse this:

> I think our government should erect a memorial (*pamyatnik*), like it is in Yerevan, Mother Armenia. There should be one of these big ones in Karabakh - *Mat Artsakha* (Mother Artsakh). Because our women, when we were a small people and the best men got killed in the war ... and the returning men were mostly injured from the war, with war traumas and all that, the men who were still fit went to Russia. That's why the whole of Karabakh was carried on the backs of women. This is a fact!

Conclusion

This article contributes to the existing literature that foregrounds war as an experience – the lived experiences of women – by addressing the subject of emotions and the way they affect women's lives in the region. The empirical discussion shows that fear, grief and trauma are lived out publicly rather than privately and thus they contribute to a collective identity which is based on compliance with the heightened militarization in society. Emotions shape women's identities by feeding into the persistence of patriarchal relations. The discussion also shows that in this prolonged conflict situation, motherhood offers women their fundamental chance

to offer both agency and service to the nation. Just as in other conflict-ridden parts of the world, so in Nagorny Karabakh women's compliance with the prevalent heightened militarization of society can thus be seen rooted in love of 'the hearth, the husband, and the child' (Grayzel 1999, 26).

With a view to better understanding the impact of emotions on society in a prolonged conflict situation, there are a number of research avenues that present themselves following this analysis. First, this article confirms that such prolonged conflict cannot be fully understood by a top-down approach; it must be 'studied at the level of those who experience it in a myriad of ways' (Sylvester 2013, 484). As scholars such as Crawford (2000) and Sylvester (2013) have shown, people construct war agencies and collective identities that cannot be ignored or sidelined in war. Uncovering the experiences of people caught up in war or prolonged conflict presents war as a 'generative force' (Brighton, 2011) and shows how a prolonged armed conflict over the Nagorny Karabakh region is something that is relevant to International Relations. A second and perhaps more pressing research avenue would be to examine this prolonged conflict as a social institution grounded in people and operating across time, across cultures, and in different political contexts. In this way, investigating emotions and their impact on women's everyday lives, as well as across various other sections of society in Nagorny Karabakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan may provide some new valuable insights into this prolonged conflict.

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