

Before and After 1989: National Ideologies, Survival Strategies and Gender Identity in the Political and Symbolic Contexts of Karabakh Movement

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The aim of this paper is to examine links between ideas about nationalism, nation-building, and gender ideologies among the Armenian communities of the post-Soviet Nagorno-Karabagh Republic, a *de facto* independent state on the former territory of western Azerbaijan. Based on "thick" ethnographic descriptions, in-depth interviews, participant-observation methodology as well as my experience as an insider to this society², I will examine these links through everyday activities, values, narratives and discourses occurring in the context of rapid social-political changes.

The declaration of democratic liberties and values in 1988 has provided the basis for the development of a number of ethnic conflicts on the territory of the USSR. The succession of events in my topic area started with the dispute about the jurisdiction of Nagorny Karabakh, a contested territory between Armenians and Azeris in western Azerbaijan. The conflict grew and developed into a real war by the early 1990s. This event became a tangible breaking point in the people's consciousness and all the informants without an exception marked this event in their speech. The war has divided their life into the periods "before the event" (Soviet period) and "after the event" (post-Soviet period).

Karabakh became multisegmental during the Karabagh movement and war (1988-1994). It swiftly became the axes of concentration of the most heterogeneous groups of "Armenian patriots." This mixture consisted of the following components: autochthons, the locals, with their settled norms and ideas about humanity, honor, masculinity and femininity; Soviet army officers and soldiers (of Armenian and non-Armenian descent) with their own moral code of a warrior, loyal to the Soviet as well as to the Armenian statehood; volunteers from Armenia with distinctly nationalistic, "real", norm-forming Armenian views and behavior; representatives of the foreign Armenian Diaspora, from the USA and European countries with Europe-oriented cultural baggage; from the eastern

¹ This research project was supported by some grants from USA Fulbright program (2006-2007), The Netherlands' NIAS (2008), Carnegie Foundation (2006).

² The study is based on eight-month stay in Karabagh (in the district of Martuni) in 2000-2001 through *participant observation* method, and additional trips in August 2003, September 2004 (as a participant of "Official Discourses research project", Dept. of Sociology, Northwestern University, Illinois The ideas of the research corroborate the thesis of self-sufficiency, self-repairing and self-balancing of societies on the micro-level, especially during "the hard times.") The research was also supported by more recent fieldworks in Karabakh in June 2005, July 2006, June 2007, and June 2008.

countries (Lebanon, Iran), with Mediterranean values. None of these groups is homogeneous either. Such a mixture of cultural values in the process of military confrontation created the possibility of interesting combinations and unions. Meetings, communication and instances of integration/recognition that served as a great source for inspiration and created sense of liberation during the times of the Iron Curtain, did not flow smoothly, without conflicts. In Karabagh, the interests of all these groups, filled with suspicion and mistrust towards one another, collided. Misunderstanding and certain emotional aversion could be found on the daily level, on the level of gender relations, as well as on the level of concepts and world views.

I will analyze new images of femininity through a semantic description of women-warriors' behavior which is an entwisted combination of "pure" traditional and modernized discourses about gender roles in new social conditions. I shall also examine traditional masculine behavior by analyzing boys' behavior. These boys grew up during the war and as a result many of them experienced a post-traumatic stress disorder. All of them were stultified by the traditional code of hegemonic masculinity. All these ideas about the "real", "authentic" woman and man were ruthlessly exploited by the political elite in order to achieve their own interests. At the same time, these manipulations have become the way for the people to cope with the critical situation.

Historical Background: Contested Borderlands

Nagorno (i.e. Mountainous) Karabakh first emerged at the epicenter of nationalist rivalries in 1917-1920 when this strategically and symbolically important province was simultaneously claimed by Armenia and Azerbaijan, two projected nation-states briefly emerging from the rubble of the tsarist Russian Empire³. In the course of civil wars and massacres waged by the nationalist contestants, as much as one fifth of Karabakh's population perished. The bitter and frightening memories of this historical trauma, despite being harshly suppressed by official propaganda during the Soviet period, lingered among the predominantly Armenian inhabitants of Karabakh.

In 1920-1921 the Bolshevik Red Army regained control over the whole territory of *Transcaucasia* (South Caucasus) and ended the independence of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. The issue of control over Karabagh presented a nasty dilemma before the new communist authorities. In July 1921, it was resolved to create an ethnic-territorial unit for the Armenian population, the Mountainous Karabagh Autonomous Province, but to make it stay under the jurisdiction of Soviet Azerbaijan. At the time, it was hoped that this federalist compromise would defuse ethnic hostilities and, in the long run, help to bring progress and enlightenment to Soviet nationalities. In particular, reasoned the Bolshevik state-builders, Karabagh would economically and culturally benefit

³ For the historical background, see the classic historical interpretation by Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Baku Commune: Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution* (Princeton, 1972); and, for a more recent summary and excellent descriptions based on numerous interviews, see Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan at War and Peace*, New York: NYU Press, 2003.

from the association with Azerbaijan because its capital city of Baku, a booming early center of oil industry, could serve as the locomotive of development that could pull the rural Karabagh out of poverty and "medieval backwardness," thus ending for good the irrational prejudices of the Christian-Muslim rivalry⁴.

In reality, despite some improvements delivered by Soviet industrialization, Karabagh remained a fairly underdeveloped rural province in comparison to the wealthy and splendidly cosmopolitan Baku. In 1988, inspired by Gorbachev's slogans of democratization and promises to correct all the wrongs of past Soviet rulers, the Armenian citizens of Karabagh launched a campaign of petitions asking Moscow to transfer their province to the jurisdiction of co-ethnic Armenia — another Soviet republic separated from Karabagh by just a narrow strip of Azerbaijan's territory. This movement, however, provoked a harsh reaction among the Azerbaijanis, who saw their own republic threatened by the Armenian secessionists. While Gorbachev's Moscow had been rapidly losing control, the Armenian-Azeri confrontation escalated from a war of words into a war of combative teenagers armed with sticks and knives, and soon into wholesale ethnic expulsions and pogroms. The tiny, remote Karabagh totally unexpectedly grew into a problem that precipitated the disintegration of the Soviet Union. After 1991, the conflict escalated into real war, with both the Armenian and Azeri sides using heavy weaponry and the regular armies of newly independent states⁵. After several years of ferocious fighting, numerous casualties, and the exodus of refugees, Azerbaijan effectively lost control over the self-declared Republic of Mountainous Karabagh and the adjacent Azerbaijani districts conquered by the better-organized and patriotically inspired Armenian forces. In May 1994, Azerbaijan accepted the armistice that so far has lasted for a decade. But Karabakh, though militarily victorious, emerged from the conflict poorer than ever and, in addition, as an unrecognized enclave accessible only via Armenia, which itself remains blockaded from side Azerbaijan. The common problems of post-Soviet transitions were thus compounded in the rebellious Karabagh by the effects of war, the lasting blockade, and the lack of international recognition.

A Moment of Maximal Unity: Demonstration as “Undoing the Screws”

In February 1988, alongside the demonstrations on Opera Square in Yerevan and in Stepanakert, the people of Martouni and masses of rural population flooded the town's main square demanding unification of the district with Armenia. The people were inspired by General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's democratic slogans that promised freedoms. Crowds of people roared, chanting the words: “Miatsum-Karabagh-Hayastan!” To say the words that used to be

⁴ Georgi Derluguian, *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus*. Pp. 173-175

⁵ This event became a tangible breaking point in the people's consciousness. All the informants, without exception, marked this event in their speech. All their life is divided into the periods “before the event” (Soviet period) and “after the event” (Post-soviet period).

See also: Dudwick N. (2000) Postsocialism and Fieldwork of War. In *Fieldwork Dilemmas*. Ed. by H. G. De Soto and N. Dudwick. The University of Wisconsin Press. p.19.

forbidden was a new, delightful sensation, a celebration of liberated thought. Levon Abrahamian compared the structure of these manifestations with primordial ritual drama, with an archaic feast. It is significant that the self-perception of the population as a unity, a “collective body of the nation”⁶, reached its culmination during the peaceful demonstrations and maintained itself, (although while framing completely different sensations), during the dizzying dynamics of the events. “This gigantic body was not just a mechanical composition of its constituents. It had its sole and indivisible spirit, thought, and sense of ethnic identity”⁷.

The very dialogical nature of communication at the level of “speaker-from-the-tribune to demonstrators” created an atmosphere of mergence, commonness, cosmic unity. A speaker would send out a message in the form of a question and receive back approving scansion from thousands of demonstrators. These ritual verbal games plunged the people into the euphoria of being allowed to finally talk, to express their opinions and aspirations. An unofficial culture, suppressed during the long Soviet years, broke out on its own territory, into the square, which was alienated from people for such a long time. There was collective dancing right there on the square, singing of rapidly composed thematic songs. People would eagerly join in the songs, expressing nation-wide joy and radiant expectations. These songs and dances also imparted to the events a theatrical quality and unexampled emotionally rich and colorful background. The popularity of the idea of the Karabagh movement itself, encouraged ordinary people, who used to be completely foreign to politics or ideology, to donate their possessions, which were earned in hardship, and whatever they had that was short in supply:

“The demonstrators were taking food and clothes from neighboring homes and when it got colder, especially during the night it was very cold, you see, then people wouldn’t go home, they would stay there around the clock, with umbrellas, when it was raining. I had a box of tinned stew in my garage (24 cans in a box); I brought it to the square and handed out to people. Gastik Mkrтчan, director of a bakery, delivered bread by cars and gave it to people for free and then paid himself for it. Women who lived near-by baked bread themselves, gave it to people together with canned vegetables from their store rooms. In short, everybody did whatever they could, just so as to support the people, not to hamper the demonstration. We didn’t know then, what was in store for us...” (Valeri, 2004).

The mood of the demonstrators, apparently, was marked by festive uplifting and even certain exaltation. The Main square feast, which freed man of fear, liberates the word itself – is was an occasion for universal joy. Gluttony and the feasting act as signs of abundance, prosperity, and indicators of the beginning of happy times and a radiant future. The feast is also linked to the theme of victory. “Everything is fine with us”, a feast/celebration signaled. The most important feature of celebration, however, is “the devaluation and total elimination of

⁶ Abramian L. A. Chaos and Cosmos in the Structure of Mass Popular Demonstrations (The Karabakh Movement in the Eyes of an Ethnographer) // Soviet Anthropology and Archeology. Fall 1990. p. 72.

⁷ Ibid., p. 72.

primary and secondary oppositions in the society"⁸. These processes are described by researchers as analogous to a medieval carnival, during which there was switching of roles between the top and the bottom (king and jester), the right and the left, the rational and the irrational. Such inversions, sometimes, did not merely weaken, but eliminated oppositions and their internal hierarchy during these demonstrations/celebrations. Urbanites set aside their condescension for rural dwellers, men - for women, grown-ups - for children. Even social inspectors relaxed their daily scrupulous censorship and tracking of one another. Everybody merged in a universal feeling of unity⁹. Everybody was obsessed by nationalist rhetoric in those days: breaking longstanding taboos which had captivated the people. And only future refugees from non-Karabagh Azerbaijan (their very first groups were already there, organizing their relocation) did not want to participate in that (certainly, not all of them, but only some, mainly women). Later, on a domestic level, the refugees and the locals engaged in heated verbal battles, full of mutual reproaches and accusations.

The position of the authorities, especially the police, was ambiguous:

"February 12, I remember this date, Alik Safaryan, on the square in front of raikom, sprung onto Lenin's monument and said, addressing the people, that what was happening then was Democracy and Freedom. If somebody has anything to say – climb up here and speak. If you don't want our current leader – then say, whom do you want! Cops, who still considered themselves bearing the law, hesitated a little, and then took him off the monument, considering all that was going on hooliganism and outrage [upon the sacred places of ideology]" (Valeri, 2004).

To climb a monument, thus putting oneself on the same level with the leader of the revolution, usurping the sacred place for one's earthly purposes – this was akin to a peasant eating and drinking on a sacred altar. Such action could signify a grotesque lowering of pompous official rituals such as the parades of May 1 and November 7, with the stone faces of party secretaries and the embodiment of the ever powerful policemen. This meeting on the square strikingly differed from those old ones. The excessiveness and hyperbolization of the events intensified their perception.

A Mutual Aid, Status Acquisition, or Civil Exploit.

A disappearance of all kinds of polarization and even more substantial acts of donation took place later during the war as well, but by then they lost the celebratory exalted spirit. During the bombardment of villages from the air and by the artillery, the population voluntarily gave up their stored goods to the *fedai/azatamartik* (translated *freedom fighters*). They took out and donated such well-hidden goods as honey-comb, mulberry vodka, wine, dried fruits, etc. A group of women were baking bread around the clock for soldiers on guard and in the trenches. However, that was already done arduously, under the pressure of

⁸ Abramian L. A. Chaos and Cosmos ... p. 72.

⁹ The first "bitter pill" in the atmosphere of feast became a pogroms of ethnic Armenians in Sumgait (suburb town of Baku), 26-28 February 1988.

cruel necessity, with extreme exertion. “Festive chaos” of the demonstrations with their surreality transformed for these groups into a “cosmos of daily life”¹⁰. Confusion after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops, which strenuously restrained Armenian and Azeris from engaging into overt conflicts, did not last long. Right away, headquarters were formed in Martouni. They submitted to the strong headquarters in Stepanakert, which was also created from the bottom-up. A group of activists immediately put together a list of male inhabitants, aged 15 to 45. Each block of the town elected an authoritative person, whose duties included providing quickly formed positions with their defenders. Men older than 45 were mobilized to dig trenches and entrenchments around the town. Each of the initial four positions were at first equipped with three hunting rifles and one self-made sub-machine gun, which was made at home by local craftsmen and modeled after the UZI. In addition, the defenders had knives and other cold arms. Middle school was urgently reequipped to become barracks; the kindergarten was turned into a military hospital. It was necessary to concentrate the forces at one point, in order to react to calls and to render medical assistance to the wounded in an organized manner. At first, the only victims died of stray bullets. It was necessary to organize self-defense that required material base as well as human resources. Ordinary people did unordinary deeds in unordinary time, demonstrating sharp wit and inventiveness.

There was a shortage of everything soldiers needed: there was nothing to sleep on, catastrophically nothing to eat. The population would bring in food, bedding, and whatever they could. There was an order for everyone to turn in all supplies of gasoline.

Realistically perceived civil duty conceived daily and even routinized exploit of some children and teenagers (aged 10 to 14). Among other things, these children would carry heavy cans with food up the mountain hill under constant fire to a Position. Teenagers strove to defend the positions, in spite of the active, sometimes even repressive, resistance of their relatives. Children of influential officials, taken by their parents into safe places, by fair means or foul fought to return to warfare. Sometimes they would merely run away, towards injury or death. The situation of war created a unique space and opportunity for a quick acquisition of a high social status, simultaneously providing an opportunity to be always in the thick of things, at the peak of emotions, in a unique situation where “children” could realize themselves and stand out of the crowd. Such dare-devil teenagers found special pride in violating the opposition grown-ups versus children. They thoroughly equated themselves with the adults in their status and rights, and sometimes even surpassed them, inverting the previous relationships with reversed precision. After the war these unfortunate children, who grown up during the war (those who survived), became merely uncontrollable (virtually all of them were seriously contused, and some became handicapped). They became those who were used to getting what they wanted at any cost. In the best-case scenario, they simply violated social norms. In the worst case, however, they went to extreme matters, using suitable discourses,

¹⁰ L. A. Abramian Chaos and Cosmos... p. 74.

fists, or manipulating with weapons. During the peaceful time, their behavior in the mode of all-permissiveness in social judgment swiftly made them asocial.

So, the ordinary teenagers' lives had become a part of warfare. The shocking hardships they experience during the war are far from being named youth culture of leisure (youth sub/contra culture as a social phenomenon, rather than biological age scale). It seems these adolescents just have skipped the stages of their lives. Some of them are still traumatized by the consequences of war effect after more than decade. They have some transformations of the identities that affect their present life trajectories¹¹.

Underground: Solidarity of the Desperate and Imagination of the Nation

Another aspect of life in the realities of war conceived the situation of common, communal life in the literal sense of the word. The perception of the commonness of fate reached its peak. At first, it was recurrent escape into the blindages and other underground shelters; later, it developed into permanent living there. In the beginning of the war that were hastily dig out shelters (*khol'*), where frightened to death people of different age and sex shoved (pushed) themselves into in bustle, beating down *like sardines* (Marina). The metaphor of a gigantic body of the nation is exceptionally appropriate here, down to the letter. Of course, this did not cancel personal relations, sympathies and antipathies. While living in the penetrating cold and dampness of dugouts, people entertained each other with conversations. In between the bombardments (reloading of the volley fire system "BM-21" "Grad" took 40 minutes), people tried to resolve the problems there, above; invented different life meanings for themselves, did not allow themselves to become apathetic. Women, managing to cook some kind of food there, above, treated each other. Men helped each other to move, or, rather, to push (since there was absolutely no gasoline) personal cars from spots frequently fired at to safer ones. People in the bunkers (dugouts) with surprising precision calculated bombardment trajectories, and likely spots of hit or miss of artillery shells. The very situation of "saving possessions" inspired them to be optimistic, to believe that soon this nightmare will be over, and they will start living their normal lives again. Nevertheless, it was hardly consoling considering the amount of possessions already lost: some houses were already hit by several shells and destroyed to the ground.

I moved from Azerbaijan into my father's house. I thought, my husband and I were lucky, since we managed to take the most valuable things: our daughters' dowry. I was accumulating it all my life, always bought all the best, went to Yerevan, to Moscow, bought on the black market. In a word, I didn't get to go to resorts much, when my daughters were ready to get married. And what

¹¹ See: Shakhnazaryan N. Young Veterans of the Karabagh War: Life Stories. On-line *Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies* (www.pipss.org) on "The Social and Political Role of War Veterans". Issue 8/9. June 2008.

then – three bombs, one after another, turned everything into ashes. All the money in Russian banks, saved on my daughters' accounts, turned into rubbish. And I, locked down here, couldn't even withdraw that money (Laura, born 1947). These problems seemed shallow, and people stopped talking about them soon, when actual casualties appeared, when people started losing children themselves.

Those were the days of colossal straining of emotional strength. In a situation, when no words of reconciliation could be found, people without special discussions, but as if having agreed on it, started to act together. When Irina (mother of three sons), the widow of one of the activists, lost during a short period of time her husband, then her two sons (the youngest one just turned 10), commanders and soldiers in the battle covered up her remaining son with their own bodies, and tried not to send him on dangerous missions. Each of them understood, without extra words, that he “had to” save the last son for the widow. It was a special kind of duty – duty, saturated with feeling. This and many other examples call for associations with mutual responsibility. These examples are signs of communal values, where all the members do not merely know each other by sight, but also know all the biographical details of each other, all the problems and difficulties the other has. That seems to be a sort of material (substantial) basis of national solidarity, and discourse of nation.

“These are Some Weird Armenians!” – A Clash of World Views

During the war the organization of Martouni's self-defense was unprecedented in the history of the Karabagh confrontation. It was not that easy to overcome the panic among the peaceful population, which abstracted from the very notion of war during the routinely even, monotonous period of Soviet reality. After the withdrawal of the troops, which were acting as a mediator and an embodiment of lawfulness and order, Russia seized to be identified with an image of savior-defender, a fair judge. Panic fear and horror among the population grew as the wealthiest part of the population, mostly the elite, found urgent ways not only to take out their possessions, but also to leave. Those who remained in the stifling blockade describe their situation at that moment using the metaphor of gladiatorial battles. A group of local activists, who were later joined by volunteers from Armenia, from the Soviet army, and from Armenian Diaspora abroad, saved the project of self-defense. Karabagh swiftly became the axes of concentration of the most heterogeneous groups of *Armenian patriots*. This mixture consisted of the following components: *Autochthons/Natives*, the locals, with their settled norms and ideas about humanity, honor, and masculinity/femininity; Soviet army officer and soldiers (of Armenian and non-Armenian descent) with their own moral code of a warrior, loyal to the Soviet as well as to the Armenian; volunteers from Armenia with distinctly nationalistic, “real”, norm-forming Armenian views and behavior; representatives of the foreign Armenian Diaspora: from the USA and European countries with Europe-oriented cultural baggage; from the eastern

countries (Lebanon, Iran), with the Mediterranean behavioral norms¹². Naturally, each of these groups was not homogeneous, either. A mixture of cultural-value fields in the process of war confrontation conceived a possibility of interesting combinations and unions. Wonderful, unbelievable during the times of the Iron Curtain, meetings, communication and integration/recognition did not flow smoothly, without conflicts. In Karabagh, the interests of all these groups, filled with suspicion and mistrust towards one another, coincided. Misunderstanding and certain emotional aversion could be found on the daily level, on the level of gender relations, as well as on the level of concepts and world views. The essence of this distancing was in the characteristics: the locals are “not quite Armenians”, “Armenians upside down” (*shurtvatz hayer*), excessively loyal to everything Russian, speaking Russian better than literary Armenian. At the same time, there existed “spy mania” concerning Russian Armenians (KGB machinations) and American Armenians (FSB). All these relations were projected onto each other, creating layers and turbulent streams of attitudes.

However, there at the same time existed an important and indisputable basis for solidarity of these people, so distant from each other culturally: their co-ethnicity and their idea of national liberation. In spite of the fact that value dominants of the Armenians of Armenia, Karabagh, and multi-segmental Diaspora often differed radically, all of them were united by the same ideologeme. The meaning of the war was clear to everyone; its legitimacy did not raise any doubts. At that point Karabagh became the symbol of social justice, which still might be reestablished, confirming “all Armenian nation” as a subject of history unless the cases of lost Nakhichevan and Western Armenian province. The construction of these ideologies, supported by Grandparents’ narratives about the endless Armenian-Turkic confrontation, was at first the only argument in favor of well-organized, collective action. In addition, the politics of national *membership* were spontaneously changed at that time: requirements have become less rigid and unevenness (crookedness) was leveled because there was need of human resource with “right” identity. At the same time, from the very beginning, it was clear that without the local civil population the project cannot be fulfilled. That is why serious steps were taken to contain the project in the district. Repressive steps, first of all, took place during the attempt of the above-described military groups (which had little to do with governmental structures in the environment of social chaos) to slow down the flow-out, or, rather, the escape of the population from the district. The argument was unarguably strong: soldiers will not fight, if they don’t feel on the napes of their necks the breath of their wives, children, and relatives. This was the reason why those few military helicopters, which came to Martouni with freight, were cordoned off by a circle of the military, which prevented people from getting into

¹² The similar processes, described by Ron Suny, took place in the refugees’ camps after 1915’s Armenian Genocide. See: Suny R. G. (1993) Looking toward Ararat: The Diaspora and the “Homeland” 13. The 1920s – 1940s: Rebuilding Diaspora Communities. p. 217-221. // In: Looking towards Ararat. Armenia in Modern History. Indiana University Press. Bloomington and Indianapolis. p. 217-221.

the helicopter. The situation of blockade did not remain option other than to fight till the end. Everything was at stake, including life itself.

A Man Legend

An indisputable leader and organizer of Martouni's self-defense was a representative of American Diaspora Monte Melkonian (war nickname - Avo).

His life trajectories are surprisingly phantasmagoric: he obtained his education in Berkeley, took part in Lebanese war operations, and organized demolition actions against Turkish Government's representatives. His life trajectories surprise by their phantasmagoric passageway: Berkeley-educated, Lebanese warfare participant, Turkish government demolition expert.

However, video interviews contrary to all expectations show that despite the war ammunition and previous biographical background with affiliation to ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for Liberation of Armenia, which doesn't exist anymore), he didn't discuss the war as the obstinate, inflexible militarist, but he expounded on as an intellectual, who was captivated by the idea of historical justice establishment.

Monte Melkonian is acknowledged as one of the most romantic representative of Armenian liberation movement's. Nevertheless the personality to some extent is problematic for the non-Armenian world as long as they call him terrorist. The point is the attitude of Armenians to the terrorism is dual, and ambiguous. For instance, the film announcement about an Armenian terrorist's group in Europe resume: "Aram (the main character) – is the Armenian terrorist (in good sense of the word) ..." This postscript semantically charged just for the people who knows about the context of Armenian-Turkish relationships. For them, of course, Solomon Teylorian and a couple of daredevils, who got the young Turk's triumvirate members are not murderers and terrorists at all, but they are heroes, national avengers, and "he-men". They are exactly the very terrorists "in good sense of the word". That is why the uncaredful remarks of researchers from outside about how usually Monte's-like people are nominated emerged nothing but hostile suspiciousness to them.

Nevertheless, Monte's Karabaghi epopee and communications with compatriots went not smoothly. Informants tell about a number of instances when careless attitude to work and communal property of Soviet Armenians made Monte and other field commanders angry. For instance, they tell how once he literally burst into tears at the sight of gasoline, spilled because of somebody's negligence. He collected that gasoline by milligrams, spending a long time convincing every old woman to sacrifice the gasoline from their gas lamps for the sake of "our" victory. He also announced severe combat to alcohol-abuse at posts; he would confiscate bottles with moonshine mulberry vodka and pouring it onto the ground in front of the men on point-duty. At first, local youths sabotaged military orders out of trivial slovenliness, in spite of Melkonyan's huge authority. At that, their secret language was Russian (they swore in Russian, if the violation of military subordination was fraught with consequences), although, at first, foreign Armenians could hardly understand anything in dialectal Karabagh

Armenian. At the same time, foreigners-Armenians often seemed eccentric to the local population; they were oddly remote from real life, they were odd even in the scope of their self-sacrifice (*it was clear why we went to face the bullets, we had no option, but they?! To come here from so far away specially to dye...?*) In the daily life, there emerged even more questions. Representatives of Western-Armenian Diaspora were sincerely indignant at the excessive care of women in the families of their stay; they declined the offered care. According to the word of the mouth, Monte Melkonyan at first begged not to clean his footwear, and then simply started to hide his dirty boots. *“My brother was his companion-in-arms, so he bathes at out place. When Avo first got out of the shower, he didn’t find his boots, because he could recognize them. When I showed him polished boots, he started to express his indignation loudly. And this happened every time. Then he started to take them with him into the shower. I explained to him, that this is the custom here: if my guest walks out of the house wearing dirty boots, it’s a shame and disgrace to the hostess. “You don’t want people to think ill of my mother and myself, do you?” Somehow, I managed to convince him. My mother and I, as if on a military post, patched up, mended, washed, ironed his clothes. He didn’t have many – just one chnge. It was very inconvenient in the winter: it wasn’t easy to dry the clothes. He forbad me to wash his padde jacket; he said, I’d spoil my hands. Of course, we didn’t listen to him. I often told him, “I am also a warrior; a person in guard of your clothes” (Es el’ kho shori zinvorn em)” (Flora, born 1951).*

The image of an ideal patriot fighter, nation’s defender and liberator, was constructed also through a dozen of very popular and often retold incidents. One of the most popular ones is a story (possibly, a beautiful legend) about the visit to Karabagh of Monte’s friend and beloved woman, Seda. He saw her from far away; his face expressed delight. A moment later, however, it turned out that the delight was addressed to a trophy tank, which was moved by soldiers in the background. Informants told, in different words, how their emotional condition depended on Monte’s physical closeness: *“there were rumors that Azeries move towards Martuni, and Avo was not in town, he went to Stepanokert, to the headquarters. There fear and diffidence in people’s eyes, even real panic. And as soon as it was told that he was coming back, the mood improved right away, and people found energy to do something. With him, we thought we would overcome anything. I personally felt it” (Samvel).*

M. Melkonyan quickly became an idol, in particular among the local women, who noticed that he was a sweet tooth and baked cakes and cookies for him in the most maladjusted conditions. *“I walked through all the yards, and women gave to me whatever they had: one gave a couple of eggs, another – a handful of sugar, somebody else – some flour. It was enough to say the magical phrase: “Cake for Avo”. People grudged nothing for him”. (Mali, born 1963). “He liked the sweets, everybody knew that. I baked cakes for him. He liked “Keksoviy” and “King’s Cake” with walnuts. I wrote notes and hid them in the cake so that he’s necessarily find them. First time, he didn’t understand the plan, and quietly set the piece of paper aside. The note said, “To eat a cake without Avo is a crime from now on”. Next time, I wrote poems about Mother. While*

listening to them, he put his left hand on his chest over his heart, as a sign of respect". (Flora, born 1951).

Heated discussions were initiated by "excessively simple" clothing style of the foreigners. The locals were completely put out of countenance by this: it was impossible to determine the "status" of the foreigners and model their behavior towards them accordingly. *"At first, we even laughed at him a little. He was so simple; one can't be like that. He would fix his glasses with a piece of cloth, so that they do not slip off during operations. Here, people with status (pashtonavor) don't act like this. Now I think, wear whatever, if only you were alive. And I am not the only one who thinks that..."* (Samvel, born 1974).

Later, cultural differences were smoothed out by the war situation. Battle field is the best place to credit people with trust, and to test this trust soon afterwards. very soon, sooner than people expected, being-at-war sorted things out. People were evaluated according to their deeds, their merits. Many had to pay with that evaluation with their lives, as it happens in any war.

Today Monte Melkonyan is a national hero of Karabagh, awarded posthumous by the highest orders and medals. On the main square of Martuni, the same where people feasted and celebrated, liberating long-suppressed words, on the very spot where Lenin's monument used to be, Melkonyan's bust was placed. In the town's club there are concerts on his Birthday (November 25) and the day of his death (June 12). In town's schools, in each, without exaggeration, classroom, there is Avo's corner with his big portrait and other materials about his life. On formal occasions, children recite simple poems about his heroic deeds. In cabinets of high-rank government officials, along with the portrait of the republic's President, there is always a portrait of Monte Melkonyan. And grateful people do not cease to tell about him. Some unknown admirers established a new road directory in the entrance to town – Monteaberd (the old name Martuni's instead).

Recurrence of the Archaic

It is known that the strongest group solidarity is created by war¹³. However, this solidarity can not maintain itself for long; at some point there happens a drop off. Intensification of degree of emotion during the times of instability focused attention on the most important and the most relevant issues. For instance, various discursive practices, which were appealing to only to love for Motherland and nation, but also to the ideals of masculinity, provoked people to use strategies of risk in dramatic situations. Huperemotionality, accompanying the politic of instability and, in particular, war, breaks down when it reaches its limit. In Karabagh, Samvel Babayan's abuse of power is common knowledge. He was promoted from the bottom, which could have constituted the essence of his numerous complexes and his inadequate behavior. Belonging at the very bottom of social ladder before the war, S. Babayan was burdened by the stigma of a "car washer", Nuevo Riches, and impostor. Nevertheless, his behavior after the

¹³ Collins, R. (2004) "How Kingdoms Dye"//Ekspert, Issue 45.

victory, which, as it is known, forgives everything, was analogous to that of a medieval feudal lord with the right of first matrimonial night. He was stealing beautiful young girls for himself, considering this to be the best outcome for them, since he could provide for them. These deviant actions were deprived of medieval ritualization and sacralization; they were more associated with despotism of a war dictator. People were hiding their daughters from the lusty glance of the tyrant, took their girls out of town. Simultaneously, his origins “at the bottom” surrounded him by the atmosphere of “one of us”, straightforward fellow. S. Babayan enjoyed considerable popularity, especially at the heyday of his glory, at the beginning of the war, when he managed to distinguish himself with bravery and talent for enterprise under the conditions where these exact qualities were in demand.

Abuse of power and manipulations with community resources after the war (for such as, turning his family house in his native village into a luxurious palace, a dozen of foreign cars in that house’s garage, money and jewelry), revival (in its most brutal form) of the clan system of patronage, together with other circumstances, doomed Babayan’s rapid career in the government. He was put to Shoushi Prison, which is interesting in itself. Statehood reveals itself through the fact of existence and functioning of prisons (as a comparison, we can hardly speak of survival of such institutions in Chechnya).

Small-scale deviant violations took place during the course of war, as well. For instance, pillage of bombarded houses by neighbors, house-breakings into the apartments of “deserters” (families that managed to flee from blockaded Karabagh), and after the war - rather legal appropriation of these houses for the benefit of war veterans or the suffered population. Legitimacy of these actions initiated protest from no one except for the robbed ones themselves, who, however, also became convinced in justice and necessity of these acts. Marauding of captured Azeri settlements was almost universal, on private and governmental levels. The name given to these actions was, of course, more agreeable: wartime trophies.

Return to Big Family Traditions (as a Means of Minimizing Needs)

“The moral economy of the village” (Scott, 1976)¹⁴ becomes more tangible as the answer to an unprecedented during the Soviet times challenge, as a magical yet simple survival formula. Despite the urbanization and modernization that occurred during the Soviet era, researchers emphasize a special, respect-driven attitude of the Karabagh population to tradition, to the “ancestors’ customs”, to the way of existence itself.

Immediately, at the first steps taken towards a “society of high culture”, Karabagh population was thrown back to “archaic society” (Luman, 2000)¹⁵ at

¹⁴Scott, J. C. (1976). *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Subsistence and Rebellion in Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press.

¹⁵ Луман Н. Формы помощи в процессе изменения общественных условий// Социологический журнал. 2000. №1/2.

the beginning of the 90s. While the sense of reality was being lost during the wars and social disasters, there emerged an acute need of strict rationalization of life strategies, aimed at the long-term optimal results. Selfish interest of individuals is pushed to the margins in struggle for human groups' survival. A constant conflict between the interests of individual and the ethics of duty was resolved in favor of the latter. The archaic category of kin (which has not become thoroughly archaic here), and the whole system of mystified kin-based relations was revived again. When the town was subjected to bombardment by artillery units in neighboring Azeri villages, by tanks, and from the air, whole families started to escape into mountain semi-abandoned villages, which could not be reached by the bombardment. Urban population, which very recently took pride in its different, urbanized life style, was forced to retrieve to peasant traditions of a mountain village. *"I wasn't really happy with the unsettled daily life in Martuni. But when my husband brought my one-year old child and myself to an abandoned village of a few houses, I realized that we are not doing well at all. We lived with his army friend's parents. His family received us very warmly, but living conditions were unbearable. It was constantly very cold. In order to bring some water, one had to climb down a steep hill to a spring. I managed to go down somehow, got some water, but couldn't climb back up. If not for the hosts' daughter, I would start crying"*. (Karine, born 1968, teacher of music). It was social network that helped to rationalize and normalize the situation during the war as well as afterwards. The most forgotten links and connections were revived and used. *"During the war, my husband sent my children and me to Gishi village, where his patient lived. Those were the most difficult year: 1993-95. I got stomach ulcer there. It's not that we were starving, it was mostly because of the nerves"* (Nelly). The "blood kinship" factor indisputably worked, but at the peak of the national idea it was as if all the Karabagh Armenians became relatives.

At that, the receptive side (rural families) generously invited and accepted acquaintances out of patriotism and ethnic solidarity. Therefore, the network that became the main resource for survival, and the network's stability, are explained not exclusively by functionalistic argument; they are also colored by feeling, by human passions and emotions.

However, it was a mass disaster, and rural dwellers simply did not have the means to host everyone. Then, groups of relatives, consisting of families of several brothers (except for the brothers themselves, who remained in town to defend the positions), moved to their abandoned family houses in villages, uniting into big families, or *Gerdastan*. Thus, they managed to achieve the maximum economy of resources. *"You see, food was cooked in the same oven for everyone, only one room was heated, and everyone was warm. Children could be supervised by some family member, while you could do your own thing"*. Family limits noticeably widen; family/kin category becomes mutually transitory. It is interesting those members of a big family, including those who used to have frequent conflicts, tried to live in agreement, submitting themselves to the cruel necessity of this arrangement. However, in this situation, we seem to deal not simply with functionalization of personal relations, but with a special emotional

condition of living on the edge. “It seemed that the ground is slipping out from under our feet. It was hard to believe that it was happening to us. What quarrels could there be! I personally was overcome by some kind of calm. I just prayed for everyone to remain alive. And after the war, we became even closer to each other, but squabbles started, anyway. Decided to move apart, not to live together” (Sveta, born 1965).

As a result of Karabagh war, family structure changed, which is reflected in the shift from small nuclear family to large patriarchal one, and the opposite tendency. In the situation of war chaos and post-war disorganization, the institute of small family faced difficulties that made it impossible for such a family to reproduce either biologically or socially.

Levirat - Dictate of Duty or Movement of Feeling

Matrimonial strategies in Karabagh were carefully thought through even during the times of stability, especially under the conditions of poverty and constant shortage of resources. These consistent strategies, carried out with account to strict limits of social stratification, were a condition for reproduction of those strata. The strategies were closely connected to the question of family house inheritance and to the rule of *minorat*, according to which the youngest son remains living with the parents and provides for their old years. That is why, in order to select a spouse that would be adequate to this role, both sides use the data from “the total genealogical information in the sphere of matrimonial unions” (Bourdieu, 2001 p.p. 288-289)¹⁶, or, in other words, social value of all the relatives, several generation back (according to the local criteria), in order to minimize the risk of a possible mistake. These strategies “are governed differently each time, depending on the value of material and symbolic wealth that could be included in the deal and on the method of its transfer, which determines the systems of interests of different candidates for the ownership of the wealth...”¹⁷

Postwar chaos and universal economic crisis were among the conditions that brought back the outdated “cultural decisions” – ubiquitous practice of *levirat* forms of marriage as one of the means for survival and family reproduction under extreme circumstances. In such situations, the institution of marriage becomes “one of the participating sides of a complex system of economic and other interactions between two families or two clans”(Kluckhohn, p. 47)¹⁸.

¹⁶ Bourdieu, P. (1977). Outline of a Theory of Practice. Trans. R. Nice. Cambridge University Press. Cited: Бурдьё П. Земля и матримониальные стратегии. Глава 1. Практические логики. Книга II. // Практический смысл. С. 288-289.

Бурдьё П. (2001) Практический смысл Пер. с фр./П. Бурдьё; Общ. ред. пер. и послесл. Н.А. Шматко. СПб.: Алетейя; М.: Ин-т эксперим. социологии. 562 с.

¹⁷ Ibid., С. 288.

¹⁸ Kluckhohn, C. K. M. (1950). Mirror for Life. London. Cited from: *Клакхон К.К.М.* Странные обычаи // Зеркало для человека. Евразия. СПб. 1998. с. 47.

As any war, the war in Karabagh forced the society to face the existence of an entire army of widows. Their chances for a new marriage are usually equal to zero. *Levirat*, on the other hand, provides a legitimate resolution to the problem of widowhood. This practice was used extensively before the revolution, as well as during the restless times of the revolution and the Great Patriotic War. By the beginning of Karabagh war, this practice of the ancestors was almost forgotten. However, the war reanimated the semi-forgotten practices. Levirat marriages, while facing some resistance from those getting marriage, still became a norm in post Karabagh society. However, the practice still has not become compulsory.

A. (born 1976) married the widow of his elder brother S. (born 1973), who died in a car accident, leaving behind two children. "Brother took his wife on vacation; he wanted to show her Russia, to distract her from the heavy war impressions. And here you go... Even at the funeral, my sisters tried to convince me: "Marry her, we feel sorry for the nephews, and mother is already used to her, they got settled with each other". At first, I was refusing. I thought how is it possible, my brother used to love her. I promised my mother that I'll help her all her life long to raise her children, but I couldn't marry her. They managed to convince me, but she herself didn't even want to hear about it. The wound was too fresh. She refused. But where would she go with two children, the times are so difficult. She lived in our house for 3 year, we talked, she was in front of my eyes all the time... She is a good woman, good hostess, skillful... too modest, sensitive, helpless... We got used to each other. Recently, she said, yes. In the evenings, I take her to cafes, entertain her. Let her have some fun, she suffered for too long..." (A., interview of 07.17.2001)

Therefore, "if the first and immediate function of a matrimonial strategy consists in acquiring means for reproduction of the kin...then the strategy has to also provide for the maintenance of inheritance integrity, especially in an economic universe, where money is a rarity" (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 288). According to the special logic of family interactions, a younger son (younger brother) brings super investment into the family, disregarding his feelings (there were consistent rumors in the city that he dated a young woman, but they were forced to break up), thus exposing himself to indirect exploitation. I am not sure that it is appropriate to talk about exploitation here, or about exercising family power, since there was no direct pressure here. Moreover, the protagonist himself does not admit violation of his interests. Sentiments do not seem to be applicable here, and the protagonist himself understands it.

Let us focus on the widow's disposition. In the long run, the practice of levirat, to some extent, functions as protection of the most heavily deprived part of the society: the widows. Through these practices, the widow and her children are provided with certain rights and means of existence. Problems of a woman in a patriarchal society are resolved without a conflict, and the woman has a chance not only to survive, but also to determine her status. Levirat marriage saves the widow from the lot of a "structural victim", i.e. a socially appointed, and, therefore, humble victim of the system (Bourdieu 2001, p. 306). This solution allows the

woman to acquire the much talked about “woman’s happiness”, and along with that, a status of a prosperous person, to become a “full”, “normal” member of the society¹⁹. The described matrimonial strategy acts as one of the basics of stable existence of a social system and the accepted way of life, especially since this strategy is applied under the influence of a “unanimously respected disaster” (Bourdieu, 2001) – national war.

The Transgression of Gender Roles

As a whole (entire) people women also took part in the war events, at that in different (multiple) roles: traditional, new, and combined roles. As it was noted the war has changed the social structure of community toward to its deeper traditionalization, including in the gender relationship sphere. However, some of the women were able (have managed) to realize new, non-traditional role which (that) was legitimized with discourse of nation. According to some data 100 women were involved in direct way in Karabakh war and 17 of them were killed and 16 of them became disabling of first and second degree. The question is why some women have chosen precisely war activity as a life strategy in the neo-traditional community? At this case how national ideas affect on gender identities? What kind of reaction engenders non-stereotypical woman behavior in the society especially among men? Though that to answer the questions we should to turn to a case-study analyses. We will try to represent women through their authentic voice.

The heroine of the case is Shushanik, was born 1961. To the interviewing moment she was divorced and has got two adult daughters and two grandchildren. She has a secondary education. She arrived to Nagorno Karabakh from Armenia in the beginning of the war. She served as director of battalion’s medical service till 2004. She has been Karabakh war participant since 1992. She had fight in ground-attack battalion of L., took active part in the majority of combat operations as a nurse.

The special inquiry evokes her prewar life story, as we will have answered the question what reason provokes her to fight against. The Shushanik announce the patriotic, national idea as a stimulus. Nevertheless interview allows other (different) interpretations too. Shushanik’s character formed in the context of patriarchal society that hardly regulates the individual’s whole life. Despite the hidden protest against the blind to human’s feelings machine she do has absorbed the most of the patriarchal values. To the question what is the most basic in a life she answered without a moment’s hesitation: *Family happiness is the sweetness of a life*. However, the socialization had passed not very smooth in domestic community, following the interviews. Her family relationships had not developed. There were rumors about her parenthood which decrease her status in Karabakh, regardless of her combat merits. She had to leave her daughters for

¹⁹ See: Шахназарян Н. «Похороненная заживо» (вдова в обществе карабахских армян). Бюллетень: антропология, меньшинства, мультикультурализм №6. Краснодар. 2004. с. 83-95. Shakhnazaryan, N. “Buried Alive’: The Widow in the Society of the Karabakh Armenians.” *Byulleten’ antropologiya, menshinstva, mul’tikul’turalizm*, 6, Krasnodar, 2004, 89-96.

her in-laws caring. This is why the only way was to go to war. The Shushanik said in the restrained manner: *In 1992 I left my children (third and fourth grades) to my father and mother in-law. They brought up them and married of to while I've been fighting in Karabakh.* So to 1992 Shushanik was a kind of excluded from her own social group. According to traditional Armenian society's rules, this sort of situation means social death for a woman, a lost of all symbolic capitals, that was gained during the all previous life.

Exactly in this ambiguous situation, when she has lost the most significant things in the life, the radical loyalty to motherhood and nation was proved socially wanted. Shushanik made attempts to restore (re-establish) her lost reputation. She had chosen for that probably the shortest way for rehabilitation herself as an Armenian patriot, citizen and eventually mother. The combat feats (exploit) should had been to expiate her helplessness (bankruptcy) as a mother and wife.

Shushanik's prewar patriotic attitudes came from her childhood with the grandfather's memoirs (recollection) about constant Armenian-Turkish resistance. It is common in Armenian traditions that grandparents tell children about Armenian *Yeghern* (genocide) instead of foretells. The deep intergeneration tie and effective role of kinship network to appear as a recourse drawing contours of social reality and forming significant symbols and value. The national concepts of Shushanik's grandfather (as well as many other grandparent), obviously, included the terrible personal experience in the world where the national identities are connected with pain and suffer. So the important causal factor in woman's struggle was the "common" Armenian historical memory. Possibly the school patriotic education on the Armenian history and literature and cult of annual nationwide procession to the Tzitzernakabert hill (April 24, day of Armenian genocide in Ottoman Turkey) in the aggregate were additional factors. By the national idea was laid in Shushanik from childhood and her patriotic identity was mobilized by circumstances (perestroika, Karabagh war). Her innovative acting was stimulated by deep personal crisis: the open conflict with her local community and complete economic uncertainty. Thus in 1992 Shushanik proved to be in Karabagh warfare in full swing of the events. She introduces herself as a nurse. The situation was aggravated also with her strangeness, she is not local, and first time she was perceived as a sexual object only:

I came up into booth where men only were sitting. It is clear what happened with them – woman in front of them. I sobered them with my hard look.

Her aspiration to fight evoked disdainful attitude like to person who was trying to do not her own work. She was refused to be taken in vehicle with soldiers followed to the relevant route. One of the soldiers teased her jokingly expressing doubts regarding her bravery and combatant skills:

Noted the war uniform the soldiers started questioning on where I have fought what I have done at war. I said: "I am from A. and I am fighting for sake of my Fatherland to help it by every thing what I can but where [in what place] it is not important. You should see it [my fighting] to believe me but you will not so there is no reason even to tell about it." So I did not tell them anything. One of

them suggested me: "If you are just really combative come with us to M. [fiercely combats' location] can you? We will see how you are fighting". I answered: "Without your any remainder I am going to places where is bitter than anywhere. Although I would like no war at all, that we would just now come to destination and we would said that the war is over."

However lifetime and the mutual war experience revealed that she is able to fight as well as is fearless.

According to many of informants the women presence at a war was essential resource of fighting spirit maintenance in the battles and volunteers recruiting:

The N-operation has ended up and we have come back to X. We were announced that everybody who wishes can head for participation in the battle at S. One of the first who wish to make for was me. When I stepped forward males felt uncomfortable that I, female, am not afraid... That's why they can't stay here... Men have had to step forward.

Commanders used this powerful mean with all possible way. General have called to (beckon) subordinates and arranged to deliver me at front line: she is fearless, she will withstand. She do is woman and her presence will shame men. Men [equal to soldiers] will behave different way in female presence.

Here is obvious addressing to traditional masculine Code of value hierarchy and he-man honor rules which are widespread in the entire Caucasus. Shushanik was aware that her very presence at the war challenge to the Code (*just my appearance led to the top point of fortitude (durability)*) and perfectly play her role. Here is one more case described in interview: the matter was during the battles for Aghdam what neighboring villages settled (inhabited) by Armenians were bombarded all previous months from: *the horrendous artillery bombardment had started... Guys had hidden in the tanks and closed the trapdoors. As for me I stayed without moving sitting in the car and doing music louder and louder. Guys had realized that I wasn't running and hiding. Little by little they had become to stick out (jut out, lean out) from trap doors.*

She considered her duty to be next to soldiers giving them the power from her:

As woman, as mother, as sister I combine everything for them always was with them at front line... For that they felt that there wives, there mothers, there children go next to them. By that Shushanik outline (emphasize) her gender identity: mothers, wives, sisters, that are that ones for sake of who the soldiers took guns. She was an embodied symbol of "our woman", according to legitimized national discourse. Doing not-woman front line work exactly because she was "bad" traditional female she nevertheless was describing herself as the symbol of traditional woman support and care.

Apparently, breakthrough (transgression) in relationships between sexes has taken place, including in the public space when women could broke etiquette and on an equal footing with "strange" males.

The soldiers had perceived Shushanik as comrade in arms rather than female: *they hoped at me. I was said so many times: when you are with us we*

are not afraid (scared). We are definite (know) that whatever is happened you won't leave us, run away from our back. The image of limitless strong and independent woman didn't let to perceive her at the same time as an erotic object (this outcome comes from my conversations with Shushanik's comrade in arms). The situation of extreme emotional tension and constant (permanent) risk and danger, ideologyzation of nation as a horizontal community and fighting brotherhood created inversion in the relationship. But the behavior model which was allowed women like Shushanik during the war proved unthinkable in peaceful (routine) time. That was painfully experienced by Shushanik. Self-sacrifice, reckless bravery and complete ignoring of dangers give us an idea (lead us to think) that at some point the life itself have lost its value for her. During the war Shushanik was wounded for four times: to the head, twice to the leg, and to the neck. Nevertheless she admitted in the interview: *everybody was frightened, including surely me, but not to the extent that my teeth were chattering. It seems I was born for war.*

During the time appreciating her role for the "sacrifice" cause, Shushanik have changed attitude to herself, she improving her self-assessment. Like for other women-warriors I interviewed the national mission fulfillment had become for her "romantic" meaning of life. Much less (increasingly, especially since) in personal life sphere in war time Shushanik experienced deep disappointment: she had close relationship with commander D., who later has become "big military shot", and went with him side by side all wartime (*I was wife for him more than mistress*). Seven-year-old affairs (tie) have finished with D. preferring his old family to her: *I have become to love loneliness because of this story. I don't want initiate affairs with males anymore; they want me for pleasure only.*

Post bellum

Upon the end of the war the situation little by little comes back to normal. Pre-war social relations vector are restored that reflects at the women-warriors positions and states. Sometimes their social assessment had changed on radically opposite one. Permissible (conceivable) and even welcomed unconventional behavior in war time has become unacceptable (at least in private discourse) upon the end of the war. Nevertheless partial social recognition was gained by Shushanik. Immediately after war the newspapers' articles devoted to her was published. Later, in 2002 she was awarded by medal "For bravery". Attack group commander, one of the member she was, confess: *I think she deserve higher award. I was expected for "War Cross" that would be a minimum.* Nevertheless, dissatisfaction, discontent and disappointment creep in about every single Shushanik's utterance. Fragment from the letter: *I want leave all of this (everything) and go back to Armenia. The rank is not given, I'm helped absolutely nothing... I have sense that everything what I have done... nobody needs...*

When people were asked what was Shushanik in war period, they answered she was mistress of glorious and famous commander D. In the best case some women uncertainly added that she served as a nurse in the army and

pulled out wounded right from front line. Shushanik told me, that small boy, who met her by the way to kindergarten, asked his mom with delight: *This is Shushanik, mom, isn't she?*

Men react ambiguously to my stories about Shushanik's feats (deeds). One of them, young 23-year-old fellow, had lapsed into the real hysteria in response to. He didn't want to admit any Shushanik's merits, any bravery and heroism, except of that *she was ordinary regimental nurse as well as many other women. She made decisions for nothing, and nothing depended on her.* In the Shushanik's stories he saw as (in) borderless boasting and less-founded ambitions (unsubstantial). He laughed loudly in sarcastic manner extracting the new and new fragments of her stories and asking his friend to confirm his rightness. As for himself he undoubtedly and indefinitely got *into the fiercest messes.*

In postwar rhetoric one finds openly sexist phrases everywhere. I frequently came across traditional arguments according to which the participation of women in war was always controlled by men and had an exclusively auxiliary character. Along with this women who didn't refuse their traditional social role were highly acknowledged and honored. The reality of war is rationalized through a normative gendered perspective. The image of combat and defender of Fatherland is usually described in masculine terms. Even the rare female embodiment of these roles is perceived as a challenge to male dominance. The denying of the merits of women in war men unconsciously protects the foundation of their power. The women with war experience herself demythologizes the function of "defender", demystifies the image of combat, taking the cover off the mystery and nullifying the monopoly of competence, without which a rooted "interpretation" of power does not function. Ethnic wars and national movements in this sense are also a gendered phenomenon, in as much as the "social power" of these movements try to establish or protect (among others functions) gendered power".

In ordinary mass consciousness, women who violate the gender order are considered dangerous "upstarts". The conflict of gendered practices during wartime and post-war normalization is partially permitted by means of marginalizing these women, depriving them of their status as women. They can swear and drink like men (and together with men); they are called by the highest praises *tyghamard-kyneg* (dialectical Arm.), which literally means man-woman; that is, they are partially included in male society. But they are already not considered to be like women, in as much as they don't fit into the system of values of the traditional collective with its assigned social and gender roles.

In these cases the woman pays too heavy a price for the "honor" of being accepted into "male brotherhood"; besides which, according to its rules she's not a full-fledged member. From a privileged erotic object, the object of desire, socially protected and recognized by traditional culture, she turns into a non-systemic component. It's evident that the rejection of Shushanik as a usurper of the active role of a subject (ie; a man) happens not only on the personal level, but also on the cultural and social. Probably there are men, who like her, but they don't take steps to form serious relations with her, avoiding social censure;

in a certain sense this also means they consider her former connection with a “mighty” man, against whom it’s difficult to sustain competition.

The Shushanik under discussion has to emphasize her national-patriotic identity—Armenian, suppressing her feminine identity. In the struggle to find identity, ethnic self-consciousness won out, to the detriment of other factors, but this happened, when Shushanik in the social sense had already nothing for losing was. Her choice permitted her some advantages, but with “costs”, setting the woman in a “cultural” dead-end. Refusing the dominant “maternal thinking”, even thanks to national ideas, for women becomes a marginalizing strategy.

Shushanik contextualizes her behavior in relation to the concrete situation of social mutual interdependence, appealing to the status of traditional women, mothers, or, in other circumstances—to the status of the patriotic soldier, heroine of the war and so on. This is especially important against the background of her negative experience, connected with breaking the laws and conditions of social interdependence, leading to divorce and the loss of maternal rights. Shushanik is obliged to her in-laws for raising and marrying off her daughter. Having turned away from traditional norms, under pressure, she understands that this was the best way for her daughter, who is unlikely to be an “attractive” party for marriage if she is raised by a “good-for-nothing” mother. In this way, articulations of ethnic identity at this level are not simply located in conflict with “maternal thinking”, but on the contrary are directly dictated according to the [perceived] interests of the children, their prestige and position in society. Events of Shushanik’s pre-war life with severity bring her to the boundary, where marginal people and pariahs are found. Not having counted on this fate, Shushanik decisively chose a dangerous military path, managing again to find self-respect and inspiration for life.

In the final analysis, service to the national idea led to receiving certain capital – symbolic, just as, with the end of the war, economic. Eight years of service in the ranks of the Karabagh army returned the recognition of her children to her (she renewed relations with her daughters and their families and started to help them materially) and granted her limited social recognition, which, nevertheless, added to the crisis of her gender identity against the background of narrow-minded critics of the behavior of women-fighters.

Conclusions

In post-war Karabakh the discourse of independence—is the most vital, pointed and ideologically charged. The “not correct” interpretation of this discourse, from the point of view of society, has already cost some politicians their high positions. Popular logic maintains: national independence was obtained through “blood and suffering”, so that to turn away from it is unthinkable. Such sentiments are so strong that local politicians are not free not to consider them, and this brings all efforts of peace-makers and different attempts at conciliation to a dead-end.

The combination of the extreme interests of the local population and the high-minded motivations of volunteers formed the prerequisite for survival, resistance and, in the final analysis, war victories in Karabakh. Powerful national ideology, the short term erasing for social differences, and the hopelessness of the situation became the very factors which provided for the success of

organized collective action. At the same time, analysis of the different segments of folk's narratives demonstrates that wartime formation of an egalitarian, horizontally organized unity doesn't survive the experience of post-war normalization. The ideological technologies of the elite, discursive manipulations have their final goal as confirmation or re-declaration of hierarchical power relations. The beautiful idea-dream of a free and happy nation serves only as the instrument of these manipulations. As a result elite soldiers of Karabagh and Armenia solved two critical problems: they found freedom from Azerbaijani and Russian structures of space in realizing their own power interests and they were saved from potential competitors in this walk of life in the course of military activities. Class skirmishes inside Karabagh society continued through the end of the 1980s. Its manifestations were events such as the unprecedented shooting in the Armenian Parliament (1999), where many Karabagh politicians moved after the war to be at the head with President R. Kocharyan; the attempt to assassinate the newly-made president of the NKR Arkady Gukasyan in 2000 and etc. In most cases discussion was of preserving or redistribution of powers and access to resources.

As in any postwar society, in Karabakh the tendency to de-modernization in local economies was clearly evident. In such circumstances the renewal of older, patriarchal models—was an optimal strategy for resistance. The ideology of the “moral economy of the village” is the primary formula for survival, revealing the accomplishment of the project of all-social egalitarianism in its harshest variant [with the moral economy, a most basic kind of social egalitarianism is fulfilled, at a very low standard of living]. Local knowledge took on all the power, popular narratives about laws and habits of grandfathers, which were silenced in Soviet public discourse, received a second breath. In the wartime and postwar social context, traditional discourse attained official and dominant status. The ethics of survival dictate adaptive (timeserving) techniques, which saves individuals from hunger and other hardships. It implies that “everyone has a right to life”, and provides minimal guarantees for existence by means of mechanisms of redistribution. Thus, despite the romanticization of solidarity in everyday discourse, the moral economy of survival is characteristic for poor and stagnating societies. In them, space for women's activity (household economies) and passivity is clearly outlined. Women's passivity in a system of traditional values among Armenians, as much as among Azerbaijanis — on both sides of the Karabakh conflict—is a valuable quality. It is cultivated, nurtured and normalized as a “natural” feature of women's character from generation to generation.

Conclusions drawn from Shushanik's history only support this rule, in as much as her choice of nontraditional behavior (in the singularly legitimate form of participation in the war for national liberation) is connected to a crisis in traditional roles and with the necessity to find new bases for social existence. In extreme war conditions this strategy is warranted, but in peacetime the woman-soldier, patriot and hero of the national war, becomes marginal in society.

Thus, the history of Shushanik is important as a manifestation of the weak tendencies of revision of the accepted gender order, accompanying postwar communities. The number of women who violated prescribed roles is not great,

but this group gradually grows, including from the insufficiency of resources. The necessity for women to take on more active economic roles creates the conditions for transgressing the ideal of “patriarchal”, passive femininity, latent in the weakening of the institutions of family and kinship. Exactly in this sphere it’s possible to note the serious break of modernist discourse with neo-traditional, although the traditional-patriarchal narrative continues to remain virulent.

As a whole, despite the fact that woman moved significantly ahead in the arenas of war and economics, ideology, including the ideology of national construction, at all significant levels continues to serve masculine power, filling all the semantic spaces of Karabagh culture. As in the past, the domination of man is accepted as is, while the independence of woman—on the contrary is seen as un-natural, extreme, accidental. Viewing the work of women through the prism of masculine values greatly impedes the organization of a serious woman’s movement. The need for women’s equality in situations when it’s strategically important for self-defense, and the avoidance of new escalations of military action, when “the nation feels itself in danger”, seem to be not only inappropriate, but are considered to be a “schism of the united national front”. In this sense, nation-building—a process which has returned in Karabagh—is accompanied by conflict at the intersection of “ethnicity-gender”. This idea is reflected very clearly and actively by a statement of Zhanna Galstyan, assistant to the President of NKR on cultural issues. In response to my question about what she thinks of women’s solidarity in the region, Galstyan with poorly concealed indignation replied with another question: *Why divide the nation into men and women?*

Krasnodar, Russia.
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