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DEALING WITH THE PAST, AND
PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT
Community-Driven Conflict Transformation
in the South Caucasus

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CHALLENGING GENDER NORMS, DEALING WITH THE PAST, AND PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT Community-Driven Conflict Transformation in the South Caucasus

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In This Issue

From the Editorial Team 6

A Communitarian Peace Agenda for the South Caucasus: Supporting Everyday Peace Practices 8

Vadim Romashov, Nuriyya Guliyeva, Tatia Kalatozishvili, Lana Kokaia

Women Challenging Gender Norms and Patriarchal Values in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation across the South Caucasus 46

Milena Abrahamyan, Paroana Mammadova, Sophio Tskhvarelishvili

Working Through the Past in the Shadow of the Present: The Cases of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey 72

Nisan Alici, Arpi Grigoryan, Elchin Karimov

The Environment, Human Rights, and Conflicts in the South Caucasus and Turkey: Transboundary Water Cooperation as a Mean to Conflict Transformation 107

Jeyhun Veliyev, Tsira Gvasalia, Sofya Manukyan

Meet the New Normal: Community-Driven Clean Energy Partnership and Regional Cooperation Between Turkey and Armenia 141

Yaprak Aydın, Suren Sargsyan

Beyond NGOs: Decolonizing Peacebuilding and Human Rights 157

Sona Dilanyan, Aia Beraia, Hilal Yavuz

Acronyms and Abbreviations 174

Authors 176

From the Editorial Team

The analysis of conflicts in the South Caucasus and strategies for their transformation have traditionally been conducted from political and economic prisms. This issue of the Caucasus Edition: Journal of Conflict Transformation defies that approach. Leaving aside the recent political development in the South Caucasus, which are discussed in the Journal's second issue of 2018, the co-authors here take a proactive approach and put the spotlight on feminist, communitarian, and environmental approaches to conflict and peace.

The issue is produced in the framework of the project "Joint Platform for Realistic Peace in the South Caucasus" of the Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation in partnership with the Center for Independent Social Research – Berlin. The issue is co-authored by 18 journalists, analysts, and social scientists from the South Caucasus, as well as Turkey and Russia that have jointly engaged in dialogue and visioning, analysis and reflection for the development and advocacy of a common vision, strategy, and action for regional peace and conflict transformation.

The paper "A Communitarian Peace Agenda for the South Caucasus: Supporting Everyday Peace Practices " by Vadim Romashov, Nuriyya Guliyeva, Lana Kokaia, and Tatia Kalatozishvili opens the issue and critiques the (neo-)liberal approaches to peace and proposes communitarian peace as an alternative – a shift from *building* peace to *supporting* peace, where peace and conflict are understood not as linear opposites but as concomitant processes.

In "Women Challenging Gender Norms and Patriarchal Values in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation across the South Caucasus", the co-authors Milena Abrahamyan, Parvana Mammadova, and Sophio Tskhvariashvili look at the ways in which women's peacebuilding and conflict focused organizations and groups in the South Caucasus challenge and/or reproduce gender roles and patriarchal values in their work within peacebuilding.

The paper "Working Through the Past in the Shadow of the Present: The Cases of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey" by Nisan Alici, Arpi Grigoryan, and Elchin Karimov examines how the civil society actors in Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan understand and instrumentalize transitional justice for dealing with the past in conflict contexts internally and externally.

In "The Environment, Human Rights, and Conflicts in the South Caucasus and Turkey: Transboundary Water Cooperation as a Mean to Conflict Transformation", Jeyhun Veliyev, Tsira Gvasalia, and Sofya Manukyan focus on environmental issues in the context of conflicts as a human rights concern. They conclude that environmental cooperation can become a tool for dialogue and conflict

transformation in the South Caucasus, even in the absence of political resolutions to conflicts.

Building on the topic of environmental cooperation, in "Meet the New *Normal*: Community-Driven Clean Energy Partnership and Regional Cooperation Between Turkey and Armenia", Yaprak Aydın and Suren Sargsyan discuss the success story of solar energy bringing together citizens of Armenia and Turkey.

The issue concludes with the paper "Beyond NGOs: Decolonizing Peacebuilding and Human Rights" by Sona Dilanyan, Aia Beraia, and Hilal Yavuz who return to the topic of the critical assessment of colonization of peacebuilding and women's rights raised by the opening two papers and propose strategies for advancing the voice and leadership by those directly impacted by violent structures of nationalism and patriarchy.

The editorial team and all the co-authors express their deepest gratitude to ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen) and the German Federal Foreign Office for making this collaboration and publication possible through their support of the project "Joint Platform for Realistic Peace in the South Caucasus".

Editorial Team of the issue: Philip Gamaghelyan, Sevil Huseynova, Maria Karapetyan, Pinar Sayan.

A Communitarian Peace Agenda for the South Caucasus: Supporting Everyday Peace Practices

Vadim Romashov¹, Nuriyya Guliyeva, Tatia Kalatozishvili, Lana Kokaia

This paper critiques the (neo-)liberal approaches to peace and proposes communitarian peace as an alternative. The paper problematizes how the recent shift of international peacebuilding to the local and the grassroots has in reality turned into an obsession with civil society understood strictly in terms of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), ultimately reproducing hierarchies and depriving communities of their voice and agency. Following this critique, the paper presents an alternative approach – a shift from *building* peace to *supporting* peace, where peace and conflict are understood not as linear opposites but as concomitant processes. By ethnographic interpretations of three cases of multicultural coexistence in the South Caucasus region, namely the Armenian-Azerbaijani coexistence in the Marneuli district, Muslims of Azerbaijani and Iranian origins with Georgian Christians in the village of Gombori, and Georgians of the Gal/i region with Abkhazians, the paper exemplifies the communitarian approach in practice. These cases demonstrate that peace happens as a process of negotiations and a search for situated consensuses on the differences and hierarchies among community members. Finally, the paper advocates for the inclusion of non-linear and interdisciplinary methods of dealing with conflicts. In order to catch up with the evolving area of critical peace and conflict research, peace-supporting activities also should incorporate ideas and perspectives from other fields such as anthropology, ethnography, political geography, psychology, etc., and that might introduce fresh insights on how to support peace.

¹ The author would like to thank Angel Iglesias Ortiz for his valuable comments on the conceptual part of this paper.

Introduction

Beyond its rims, the South Caucasus is often viewed as a zone of conflicts rather than peace. Various international organizations and particular Western² governments have initiated peacebuilding enterprises in this region. Their active involvement is usually welcomed by local NGOs that reassure international donors to continue their investments in regional peace initiatives. However, the remaining high tensions between various social, political, ethnic, and religious groups in the South Caucasus may indicate that these initiatives have not proved to be enough effective. At the same time, the international peacebuilding interveners continue to overlook the existing local peace practices that can inform about peace (already effective albeit concomitant to conflict) better than the 'blueprints' of peace projects brought from outside.

The fundamental ontological limitation of the self-styled peacebuilding initiatives is that they are aimed at achieving a peace in a global community with a consent among political elites on (neo-liberal) norms. At best, they employ the concept of positive peace in striving to reach peace as a just state of social relations. A more promising approach, however, would be to support the *process* of peace: rather than a utopian endpoint of social processes, peace should be viewed instead as a practice of merely escaping from the dystopian culmination of such processes, the total collapse of social relations. Peace as practice implies constant efforts to avoid conflict in everyday life, though this also means accepting that conflict will always remain present. Having this in mind, the main question for peace activists should be how international organizations, governments, businesses, and NGOs can *support* rather than *build* peace in local communities. Their peace initiatives must be de-colonized and move from teaching the 'objects' of intervention what peace is towards learning from the 'subjects' how peace is already practiced and what, in their local understanding, can enhance the peace process. At the same time, peace must not be romanticized as an ideal manifestation of social relations, but rather viewed as a process closely linked to the political (i.e. power) relations between people, communities, economic subjects, state actors, global agencies, and other players.

Peace, as any process involving making socio-political decisions, is something that is continuously negotiated by the subjects and hence represents an endless search for compromises about the organization of power relationships. Being in line with

² With reference to such political constructs as the "West", the authors of this paper do not seek to reproduce orientalist categories, but only refer to the vocabulary predominantly used to describe some European and North American states.

post-foundational epistemology, this paper questions the liberal rationalism that maintains the belief in a consensus which would banish antagonism forever.³ Such understanding, thus, contests the universalist views on peace and suggests that peace is very much contextualized and therefore multiple. The proposed communitarian view on peace acknowledges the existence of multiple states of peace in different contexts and environments across cultural and societal identity-based strata including genders, sexualities, ethnicities, religions, beliefs, etc., but it denies the belief in an ideal absolute peace that transcends all various forms of social stratification. This paper consequently urges peace-concerned organizations and activists focused on the South Caucasus to study local varieties of peace that are experienced in everyday life and locates this approach within the context of ethnic and religious divides of local communities.

The paper demonstrates that liberal peace remains to be an imperative approach in the contemporary peacebuilding activities. Therefore, the paper analyzes the discourse of texts published on the websites of the two noticeable peacebuilding organizations operating in the South Caucasus – International Alert (IA) and Conciliation Resources (CR) – that have been present in the region longer than many other peace-concerned international NGOs (INGOs). At the same time, we acknowledge that such practices should not be reduced to only these two organizations. It must also be admitted that the critique of liberal peace, which has been gradually spreading from late 1990s, has had a certain impact on the language and practices of such organizations. The political and ideological dimension of their activities has become more effectively concealed from 'untrained eyes' and has been adjusted to meet the criticisms. Our observations of their ideological stance on peacebuilding should not indicate that we urge the organizations to cease their activities but reflect critically on the disciplinary essence of the version of peace they have adopted and search for new methods of peace activities. Moreover, we acknowledge that 'liberal peace' is a discursive reference for us, and the ideology behind the analyzed texts can be more multifaceted. On the ground, there is also a possibility that the practical results of these organizations' projects differ from the discourses in the analyzed texts. However, testing this discrepancy (or continuity) requires additional research based on direct communication with local NGOs that are being patronized by their international 'partners' and with local people involved in their joint projects. The scope of this paper allows us to problematize only the conceptual phase and the design of the interventions.

³ For a discussion about the limits of the liberal rational consensus, see (Mouffe 1994).

We believe that the 'civilizational' responses to conflict have not proved to be sufficient in bringing a long-desired sustainable peace as they unavoidably search for the 'uncivil other', the one who still has not realized the virtue of the proposed liberal model. However, the paper does not intend to contest the role of the respect for human rights and accountable government in preventing violence but to criticize the didactic methods of the present peacebuilding practices in the region. The communitarian understanding of peace challenges the hierarchies of the peacebuilding sector of liberal policies and opens up new prospects beyond these peacebuilding practices that perhaps better embody the long-discussed concepts of decentralization, local ownership, and 'celebration of diversity'. For this end, the paper analyses several cases of inter-group contacts in the South Caucasus, including Armenian-Azerbaijani co-living in the rural settings of southern Georgia, inter-religious relations in Georgia's village of Gombori, and interaction of Georgians of the Gal/i region with Abkhazians.

Peacebuilding from Ground Up? The Exclusiveness of Civil Society, Experts, and Journalists

The Shift to Localism and the Obsession with Civil Society

Since the late 1990s, there has been a growing belief among liberal peace promoters that the actions of local elites hinder the implementation of the Western-drafted peace project (Chandler 2017). As the elites of the targeted societies could not be completely tamed by external actors with sticks and carrots, the importance of the nurtured from abroad civil society⁴ increased. International institutions try to support and engage with civil society organizations out of disappointment with local elites (Richmond and Mitchell 2011, 265). The civil society, herein, has been perceived as an essential source for the Western organizations and governments to exert pressure on 'illiberal' elites to comply with the offered template for peace. In a technocratic approach of exporting Western-style institutions and norms of 'good governance', the civil society building has been promoted as an organic element of developing democracy. At the same time, the agenda-setting power of

⁴ Since in the analyzed texts of the international peacebuilding organizations operating in the South Caucasus, the civil society is primarily associated with registered local NGOs and their activists, we will also maintain this narrow understanding of civil society that disregards other definitions of civil society including the grassroots or networks. In addition, there is the view that civil society is not a Western invention, and there are other traditions of civil society, such as the Vakif tradition in Turkey (and earlier in the Ottoman Empire). For Islamic conceptions of civil society, see (Hashmi 2002).

international organizations and Western states has been tasked to eradicate or limit blocking elites to free the local agency of civil society, a believed real provider of the people's interests in supporting international peacebuilding aspirations for institutional reforms and large social transformations (Chandler 2017).

However, already by the late 2000s and early 2010s these approaches aimed at constraining local elites were criticized by peace researchers for a hubristic belief in a genius of external actors' liberal policies and methods.⁵ The criticism further developed in line with post-colonial theories to argue that the local societal processes are ignored in this approach while its main purpose is to enable loyal elites to govern and establish Western-resembling institutions and structures of power. There have emerged various conceptualizations of the ways for making local voices be heard in peace processes. This turn to local is connected with the conflict transformation discourse ascended in 1990s and largely associated with John Paul Lederach who advanced a much less disciplining approach in conflict resolution theory based on "the principle of indigenous empowerment". He offered a non-linear long-term approach to transform the system behind conflict based on the capacities of the people and resources located in the conflict setting itself (Lederach 1995, 212). By this, Lederach paved the way for the shift from the elite-level to local-level peace processes (Chandler 2017, 150-52). This 'search for local' revived the debates on legitimacy, sovereignty, ethics of intervention, but also introduced new thoughts to study peacebuilding beyond the liberal peacebuilding projects. As currently "local has its moment" among theorists and practitioners (Hughes, Öjendal and Schierenbeck 2015, 817), peace researchers and peace practitioners have turned towards conceptualizing, promoting, and implementing the ideas of local ownership and participation, and the international peacebuilding organizations have had to accommodate the corresponding discourses in their vocabulary.

Following the trend, International Alert also employed the discourse of local ownership of peace. The organization's 2014 Annual Report starts: "Peace cannot be imposed from the top or imported from outside. It is built from the ground up. And peace begins with all of us" (2015, 1). This phrasing, however, should not mean that the patronizing approach of the international peacebuilding organization has faded away. Numerous texts describing IA's activities in the South Caucasus still use a modernist corporate vocabulary of 'human resources development' such as "strengthen the ability", "develop their skills", "offering them opportunities to fulfill their potential", "build their experience", "training seminar/module", "capacity

⁵ For an overview of such critics, see (Richmond 2008) and (Chandler 2017).

enhancement/building", "provide opportunities for 'learning through doing'", "equip participants with tools", "training for trainers", etc. At the same time, IA promotes contradictory ideas among young people regarding the role of elites in conflict transformation. For instance, in 2013 IA started working with South Ossetian students to develop an understanding among them "that it is not just officials who can find the solutions to social and even political problems in society; it is also in the hands of people" (Building Peace from the Ground Up 2013). However, this aim somehow contradicts IA's hope for the same project that by working with young people it prepares "the future elites of these divided societies to find compromise solutions and understand the importance of dialogue in conflict", expecting that "these future leaders can bring about positive change" (Building Peace from the Ground Up 2013).

Conciliation Resources has also spoken the language of local participation and attempted to frame accordingly its practices by accentuating the importance of local perspectives. In 2010-2012, CR jointly with Saferworld conducted the project "The People's Peacemaking Perspectives", funded by the European Commission, using such catchphrases as "Making the opinions of ordinary people count", "Strengthening local capacity and informing international policy" and "Amplifying people's voices now and in the future" (People's Peacemaking Perspectives n.d.). However, the actual project's aim sounded rather prosaic: "to provide opportunities for civil society to influence the European Union's [EU] conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives through published analysis and advocacy activities in Brussels and the countries covered by the project" (People's Peacemaking Perspectives n.d.). The summary of this work reveals that it was designed "to put forward concrete suggestions for EU policy and engagement on conflict and peacebuilding in the region" and argues that the EU "is better placed than ever to have consolidated and strategic engagement in the region" (People's Peacemaking Perspectives n.d.). The example of this project indicates a narrow understanding of participatory processes and, particularly, demonstrates how the local participation discourse can be (ab)used by international organizations in order to advocate external governance engagement in the region rather than practically empower the peacemaking of 'ordinary' people.

The civil society was portrayed in this project as speaking the voice of local people. However, the emphasis on this important node of the liberal discourse is also often substituted by the reference to "local" and "most directly affected by conflict" people:

"In a region dominated by geopolitics, we emphasise the role that local people can play in transforming their societies and (re-)building relations.

Without taking a position on the final outcome of either conflict, we help those most directly affected to have a voice in resolving them and in shaping their own futures" (Caucasus n.d.).

This statement, even though still denoting a patronizing approach typical for liberal peacebuilding, is apparently an answer to the critique of the liberal policy discourse for its overemphasis on the role of an abstract 'civil society' as a counterweight to the 'illiberal state' and the 'uncivil other'. However, since the text does not define who these local people are, there is a possibility that they are meant to be the same exclusive 'civil society' but only framed as 'local people'. The calls for active local participation, local ownership, and increasing local capacity create an impression of acknowledgment of local, yet this local is within the 'Western understanding' and does not correspond to the authentic local contexts.

The main uneasiness with the view on civil society as a provider of the interests of 'ordinary' people is about the independence and self-sufficiency of this societal stratum. The question herein is to which extent the civil society actually represents the local communities they claim to speak for. The NGOs in the South Caucasus are usually in constant need of material resources that are essential for their operation and being. Thus, they are enthusiastic about receiving material support offered from outside by grant-making/distributing organizations, but the dependence on external funding places local NGOs in a predatory environment of market competition and brings along ethical issues. Richmond, in this regard, notes that the neoliberal models applied to aid dispersal in conflict zones create "a market situation where NGOs have to compete for funds and must respect the conditionalities imposed upon them by donors intent on constructing the liberal peace" (Richmond 2010, 28). Roger Mac Ginty adds that with the material resources at their disposal "international liberal peace agents" are able to "create a civil society political economy that incentivises certain activities and discourages others" which results in "a disciplining of social activism and an extension of conformity" (Mac Ginty 2011, 63). Overall, the job market created by donor and aid organizations to implement peace projects invigorated civil society organizations to adapt actively to the needs of their funders (İşleyen 2015).

As described above, the civil society in the South Caucasus is often viewed by donors as weak or underdeveloped that needs strengthening of its capacities. Therefore, international organizations have launched a number of civil society capacity-building programs including funding and mentorship that engage local NGOs in liberal peace building. Mac Ginty points out that "this civil society engineering by governments from the global north" has been commonly criticized as "these actors promote a version of civil society that chimes with their preferred

notion of civil society", while "indigenous expressions of civil society may be overlooked, or acknowledged but ignored, as being 'non-liberal'" (Mac Ginty 2011, 16).

Despite stated adherence of many civil society actors to tolerance and diversity, in practice they often view the rest of the society in a condescending or patronizing manner, and by applying analogous civilizing and disciplining approaches of their patrons from international NGOs and donors, they strive to seed liberal 'progressive' ideas into the public. The understatement of a wider population's ratio may also be a way to sell civil society services to their donors and contribute to the belief about civil society to be a conductor of liberal values to local people and a telamon supporting externally enacted structures of liberal peace. Local NGOs delegate themselves to speak of the voice of 'ordinary' people and to identify local 'real' needs but, in practice, they have gained an ability to silence indigenous voices from the ground. This allows the civil society to dictate the agenda of local needs, formulate (ease) their own tasks, and fit their activity into the external prescription of peacebuilding. For the same reasons, though at the level of relations between grant-distributors and donor governments, this approach is beneficial also for international NGOs. Additionally, the international NGOs make use of the represented 'ordinary' peoples' voices of the civil society to meet donor requirements of localism by demonstrating that their activities have led to growing numbers of organizations and people that aspire for liberal values. In the end, this intact pretentiousness creates a situation when, as Jevgenia Viktorova Milne put it, "local needs are assumed rather than seriously researched, and local mechanisms of representation supplanted (for example, by habitual 'civil society' frameworks) rather than nurtured" (Viktorova Milne 2010, 75). Moreover, the declared recognition, endorsement, and/or empowerment of local in peacebuilding activities ultimately change the responsibility dimension of the process, removing this huge burden from the shoulders of external or international actors, and holding accountable the local for the outcomes (ineffectiveness and failures) of liberal peacebuilding activities (Chandler 2017, 343).

The enlarging understanding among local people of such activities often disconnected from their own perceptions of primary social needs damages the trust towards civil society representatives and international NGOs that now often appear to be viewed as corrupt (Mac Ginty 2011, 63). Moreover, some civil society representatives have polished their skills to attract funds from international donors and become 'professional' consultants for their colleagues in getting their initiatives funded and doing corresponding paper work. Some young activists despite having the opportunity to work in NGOs on hired positions and focus on concrete forms of social work prefer to regularly go through foreign-sponsored trainings,

occasionally take part in some civil society initiatives, and get rewards for such activity. These and many other similar instances have contributed to growing popular views on civil society activism as an opportunist enterprise that brings no effective outcomes for local communities. The overemphasis on the NGO sector in peacebuilding and in other spheres of engagement with 'ordinary' people eventually constructs a local elite that enjoys the benevolent attitude of international organizations. This group of people has a better access to material resources from international donors than 'ordinary' people do; they are in a better position to influence decision- and policy-making in their communities and countries; they have better chances to pursue a political career, and renowned international organizations and Western governments usually back their positions and protect them from the oppressive actions of the state. The exclusiveness of this group of individuals and organizations undermines the very concept of civil society as non-elite people caring about their communities and, furthermore, (re)produces hierarchies and power relations inside local communities.

Instrumentalization of 'Ordinary' People Through Work with Local Experts and Journalists

As the work with local NGOs helps to create a simulacrum of local participation, bringing experts and journalists, and a limited number of civil society activists from societies in conflict to discussions and joint research contributes to maintaining a simulacrum of dialogue across conflict divides, represented as an important indicator of success of peacebuilding initiatives. Both International Alert and Conciliation Resources facilitate dialogues between Armenian and Azerbaijani and between Georgian and Abkhazian experts. These efforts are aimed at "stimulating critical thinking and debate in society" (Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict n.d.), and "building trust, identifying areas of common interest and creating an environment more conducive to peace" (Dialogue Improves Prospects for Peace in the South Caucasus 2017). The idea behind these initiatives is that the knowledge gained from such collaboration between regional experts facilitated by international experts should be shared with a wider audience. For example, in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, IA provides "opportunities for expert analysts and civil society leaders from across the conflict divide to research how other societies have addressed conflict-related issues", and that "[t]hey then share these insights and ideas with their local communities, to encourage wider debate" around the conflict context (European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno Karabakh n.d.). IA and CR have similar approaches for expert selection in order to set a strong resonance within the targeted societies. CR invites participants to meetings on "the basis of their expertise and their ability to influence

others in their society" (The Karabakh Contact Group n.d.). For IA, the experts must be "prominent public figures who play a role in shaping public debate in their respective societies" (The North Caucasus Factor in the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict Context 2012). Thus, the dialogue between experts from societies 'at odds' serves as a channel for a discursive intervention into narratives *assumingly* prevalent on the ground. As in the case of civil society, the exclusiveness of the selected expert pool does not provide for the agency of local people in peacebuilding projects, though this approach is not as disciplining as the institutionalist peacebuilding dominant in 1990s that disregarded the local expertise and relied on the solutions imposed by external experts (Chandler 2017, 12). Nevertheless, in the present approaches, 'ordinary' people again appear to be an object of peacebuilding rather than its subject. Moreover, due to the inertia of these organizations to work with already 'tested' persons, there exists a typical situation when the same experts participate in various peacebuilding dialogues and projects across the region.

The international peacebuilding organizations operationalize their work with regional journalists in a similar way. IA is, perhaps, the most active international peacebuilding organization to work towards establishing pro-peace media in the South Caucasus. Journalists, civil society activists, teachers, academics, cultural figures, and business people are the core local people with whom IA works "to promote shared identities, social change and economic cooperation across the region" (South Caucasus n.d.) and "to establish the relationships and structures necessary for peace to take root" (Regional Dialogue n.d.). This work is a part of the discursive peacebuilding intervention targeted at 'ordinary' people. For example, IA describes one of its tasks as a member of the European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorny Karabakh in the following way:

"We also provide training to journalists and editors to increase their capacity to provide more balanced and nuanced coverage of conflict-related issues. This also enables them to build peer relationships across the conflict divide. The journalists we worked with are now sharing their experiences with local communities via TV, radio, print and online media. Through their eyes, ordinary people are able to see how victims of other conflicts have found the personal courage to rebuild trust and live beside former enemies in peace" (European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorny Karabakh n.d.).

IA must be credited for launching an outstanding project in the region that attempted to hear local people. The project called "Unheard Voices" "gives journalists from leading media outlets in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorny Karabakh the opportunity to share articles and video reports about the lives of

those affected by the conflict on a joint platform" (Unheard Voices 2014). The platform in practice represents a network of the journalists who post their articles in Russian on a joint Facebook page and in Armenian and Azerbaijani through mainstream online media agencies. The idea is to give a voice to "ordinary people suffering from the direct results of the ongoing conflict" and show "the human side of the conflict – in the journalists' own societies as well as on the other side of the divide" (Unheard Voices 2014). "By exposing the public to the human cost of the conflict" the project "hopes to encourage support for greater tolerance and a peaceful resolution to the conflict" (Unheard Voices 2014). In addition, by publishing the journalists' reports focusing "on the everyday lives of communities living near the frontline", it aims "to provoke greater public discussion on all sides of the conflict and encourage audience members to share their own experiences and identify common challenges" (Unheard Voices 2014).

Individual stories of local people filled by personal feelings about presence and past – existing concerns about security and socio-economic situations, sadness at the absence of trust between once-friendly neighbors, and nostalgia about the days before the war when Armenians and Azerbaijanis lived side by side – certainly produce an alternative narrative on the conflict. Indeed, the local voices are now broadcasting, but the question is to whom. The description on the project's Facebook page gives an answer about the target audience: "The purpose is to ensure their [of ordinary people whose everyday lives are affected by the ongoing conflict] voices are heard both at home in their own societies and on the other side of the conflict divide" (Our Story 2018). Thus, it remains vague whether this project is actually supposed to empower local people to promote their own version of peace. Apparently, these voices are not meant to be heard outside of the region and so to be taken into account when the 'blueprint' for peace is externally drafted. In addition, it is important to stress that the project "Unheard Voices" is part of IA's ongoing work to strengthen conflict-reporting skills through training and mentorship and improve links among journalists across the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict divide (Unheard Voices 2014, Unheard Voices: Media Professionals as Actors for Peace in the Nagorny Karabakh Conflict Context n.d.). To put it simply, it aims to improve "under-developed" journalism standards in the region. Hence, in the end, it is media professionals, another exclusive group that is supposed to become "actors for peace in the Nagorny Karabakh conflict context" (Unheard Voices: Media Professionals as Actors for Peace in the Nagorny Karabakh Conflict Context n.d.) and not those 'ordinary' people, whose life stories are shared, as they in practice turn to be the instruments for this objective.

The discussed international peacebuilding organizations in the South Caucasus have certainly played their role in promoting peace in the region, though their own

version of it. The promoted peace has been re-framed in different forms in order to meet the mounting criticism of liberal peace. Hence, there have been attempts to incorporate the concept of local participation in their practices, but the ontological foundations of liberal peace have considerably limited the space for this effort. The practices remain essentially didactic, and support to peace and conflict transformation is carried out primarily in the form of a discursive intervention with the aim to challenge belligerent narratives and hope to induce social transformations but without addressing the materiality of local peace. The ultimate power to decide about peace is still delegated to regional and, primarily, external elites and official policymakers. The remaining problem is that people who advocate for hearing the voices of local or their empowerment or simply try to understand why it is important to study these issues are not local (Bojicic-Dzelilovic and Martin 2018). Since someone else is still speaking on behalf of local people, and their agency has been taken away, the misrepresentation of local has become a common practice of peacebuilding interventions.

From Building to Supporting Peace

The Hybridity of Local

The turn to local in peace research and in peacebuilding has taken different shapes. Peacebuilding has lacked anthropological sensitivity of 'the post-liberal peace' research that emphasizes the ideas of localism. Peacebuilding practices at least in the South Caucasus context have reduced these ideas merely to capacity-building of local civil society and media professionals and to creating discussion platforms for regional experts, whereas everyday peace practices were not studied but at best recorded and mediatized for the purpose of 'peace propaganda' to challenge belligerent narratives. For many years civil society but not grassroots were promoted, and selectivity in the representation of local did not result in the emergence of genuine peacebuilding practices.

The main ontological limitation of present peacebuilding is its conviction in the existence of 'universal' liberal constituents of peace that range from democracy, good governance, respect for human rights to the presence of vibrant civil society. This view, however, does not allow for understanding how local communities conceptualize and practice peace in their everydayness. Anthropological literature could be particularly helpful in addressing this question as it provides many insights from communal everyday life on the notion and praxis of peace. The emerging research field focusing on everyday peace could also inform peacebuilding activities of international organizations that peace is contextual and takes its form through the mundane practices and narratives of a community in its

full diversity. From this perspective, peace is not singular but plural, and hence there exist legitimate alternatives for liberal peace. At the same time, there is no single peace with a universally accepted formula that can be easily transposed identically to different contexts (Richmond and Mitchell 2011, 1). If a 'peacebuilding' initiative succeeded in one context, it should not be automatically assumed to be applicable to any other conflict context.

The acceptance of the existence of *peaces* with their unique locally produced attributes and concurrently internalized 'universal' versions of peace brought some scholars to argue for the possibility of the concomitance of local and external (liberal) practices in hybridized forms (Mac Ginty 2011, Richmond 2009, Richmond 2010, Richmond 2015). Hybrid peace scholars suggest not declaring the international intervention as a scapegoat of the failures of peacebuilding activities around the world, yet they refuse to see it as the only available option. Hybrid peace is formulated as an attempt to give a space for local responses to the internationally sponsored peace (Mac Ginty 2010).

The hybrid peace theory enables researchers to attain a deep attachment to both local and international aspects of peacebuilding practices, not excluding one from the other in its declared attempt to provide for genuine emancipation of local from external hegemony. The theory particularly challenges the ethic of international intervention and calls into question the universality and hegemony of such practices. Richmond and Mitchell opine that almost in every international intervention hybridization has become a main tendency instead of liberalization (Richmond and Mitchell 2011). However, beneficial (positive) forms of hybridization have not occurred in most cases because of the lack of knowledge about the everyday. Drawing from this observation of the hybrid peace concept, one could argue that if international actors were aware of everyday practices and had a broader knowledge about local, the success of peacebuilding projects would be guaranteed. Thus, the hybrid peace approach maintains that the intervention is not the problem per se, but the process of implementation is.

From a postcolonial perspective, Richmond and Mitchell argue that liberal peacebuilding projects are implemented in a manner, where peacebuilding interventions are imposed upon 'ordinary' people without taking into account customs, cultural and social norms, or in general their everyday power dynamics (Richmond and Mitchell 2011, 14). Therefore, the hybrid peace concept advocates for an interdisciplinary approach and sees the benefits of drawing on knowledge from critical anthropology and critical sociology in order to grasp better multiple alternations and interrelationships of peacebuilding projects. Bringing the everyday into the center of attention is not to erode or undermine state sovereignty,

in other words not anarchical, but to underscore the state's lost contact with local (Richmond and Mitchell 2011, 16). The hybrid peace concept moved beyond the discussions whether engaging with local is necessary or adequate and is interested in how these interactions occur and what consequences they have (Richmond and Mitchell 2011). Mac Ginty suggests hybrid peace is to highlight and study the interaction between bottom-up and top-down, local and international peace (Mac Ginty 2010).

The proponents of this perspective believe that the "local-liberal hybrid peace" is able to serve as a solution to the dilemma of the liberal peacebuilding due to its sensitivity to local sociocultural norms and values and, in general, the contextual aspects of peace. Other scholars, such as Nadarajah and Rampton, accept hybrid peace only as a problem-solving tool (Nadarajah and Rampton 2015). Although hybrid peace aims to emancipate local, it shares some key features with liberal peace (Nadarajah and Rampton 2015). Nadarajah and Rampton argue that hybridity still serves liberal ideology and it is trapped within the dilemma of liberal peace because despite seeing liberal peace as oppressive it makes an impression that it is the only source of emancipation (Nadarajah and Rampton 2015). The hybrid peace approach disregards the social and economic patterns of the liberal peace package, mainly neo-liberalism and capitalism that cannot be separated from everyday practices. Chandler also notes that despite the non-linearity of this perspective and its critical view on top-down peacebuilding, the idea of a 'hybrid' form of peace stays problematic because it still attempts to find a way for (less) liberal institutional frameworks to be developed in 'non-liberal' societies (Chandler 2017, 145-50; 171-72). Indeed, even though Richmond has made a great effort to conceptualize an emancipatory version of peace, to which he refers as "the post-liberal peace", this approach – regardless of its empathy to local communities – remains driven by local-international and liberal-illiberal binary views. That is why this approach to peacebuilding has actually contributed to a further maintenance of the hubristic belief in the genius of liberal ideology. The latter continues to appear in the essentialist "critical perspectives" on peace and conflict, which are trapped in dualistic thinking along 'the liberal-illiberal peace dichotomy'.⁶ Despite the effectiveness of the hybrid peace approach as a tool to analyze complicated relations of the local-international opposition, it is still trying to accommodate liberal peacebuilding, and local in this context is presented largely as responsive

⁶ For an example of such essentialist but pretended to be "critical" perspectives, see (Owen, et al. 2018).

and reactive to international, not really self-sufficient to produce its own version of peace.

Perhaps, the idea of "local-liberal hybrid peace" can be better considered within the postmodern concept of glocalization emerged in the field of cultural studies and sociology in the early 1990s, according to which *seemingly* opposing universalizing and particularizing tendencies are simultaneous, complementary and interpenetrative, even though they can and do collide in concrete situations (Robertson 1995). It is also important to bear in mind that the notion of local itself has become a highly contested and debatable issue. Hughes et al. refer to local as "problematic" because it is relational and flexible (Hughes, Öjendal and Schierenbeck 2015). Drawing from Arjun Appadurai's conception of culture as a series of cross-border 'flows', they challenge the concept of local by describing local "as not being local at all, but transnational and global" due to multiple relations inherited in cultural globalism (Hughes, Öjendal and Schierenbeck 2015). Local is never truly local, because it is always in contact with "other" locals. Local is not an isolated phenomenon but one in a constant interaction with the outside environment. These constant social interactions form and reform local identities and thus local peace processes. The 'post-liberal' perspective, in its turn, tends to reason that peace is possible only if the local (particular) hybridizes with the liberal (universal) values. In our judgement, the local is *per se* hybridized with the universal; the homegrown peace is intrinsically hybridized within the local cosmology in which 'liberal values' together with or separately from any other universalist ideas of the past and present – starting from communist ideology and ending by religious dogmas – can and do constitute the foundations of local peace.

A De-Romanticized View on Peace

Peace should be viewed not as a field of eternal harmony but of both accord and contest. Political geographers (Ross 2011, Darling 2014, Williams 2015) have made an exceptional contribution to understanding peace as something more than simply 'a good thing' through highlighting power relations accompanying the everydayness of peace. Philippa Williams notes, "to understand peace is to also expose the conflicts and injustices" (Williams 2015, 11). In her view, "peace is not contingent on purely peaceful interactions and the successful resolution of tensions, but may also be constituted through suspension of tensions and/or the articulation of relations that are less than peaceful" (Williams 2015, 13). Thus, peace does not necessarily involve "the potential for transformation" but "[t]o the contrary, the reproduction of peace may depend on maintaining uneven balances of power characteristic of the status quo" (Williams 2015, 13). The observation of antagonistic relationships as a part of peace is a significant contribution to de-

romanticizing of peace and further advances the non-linear post-structuralist perspectives in peace and conflict research.⁷

The research focusing on the everydayness of peace has been enriched also by the process metaphysics: peace is not anymore understood as a state of Being but as a process of Becoming. Lederach described peace "not merely as a stage in time or a condition" but "a dynamic social construct" (Lederach 1997). Political geographers, particularly, have contributed to the development of the view on peace as a process rather than a steady state (Koopman 2011, Koopman 2017). For example, Williams notes, "peace is a process that is always being worked out through interactions within society and the state" (Williams 2015, 32). She suggests, "peace demands ongoing labor and work rather than standing as an endpoint or as something which can be concluded" (Williams 2015, 6). In anthropology as well, it is common to refer to mundane peace as everyday practice and not as static end point. Such an understanding is important because it further highlights the contingency of peace in both its spatial and temporal dimensions.

Yet, we do not suggest that the idea of peace as a state or end-result is irrelevant for analysis. Although the meanings around peace are not fixed across time and space, at ideational level of thinking, peace as an end result remains a goal in itself that guides the shaping of 'peacebuilding' policies as well as communal everyday practices of peace. Thus, peace in its everyday manifestation, being ideationally reproduced within individual and communal narratives, is both an idealistic state of social relations and a practice driven by the idea-enabled strategies to maintain the imagined (and never completely articulated) peace. The locally formulated concept of peace is routinized through certain everyday rituals to which the majority of the community adhere regardless of its possible incomplete compliance with the way this concept is represented in the 'shared' communal narrative, while the minority that disagrees with it has to obey with the rules of conduct for pragmatic reasons of conflict avoidance. Importantly, these practices of peace can and do inscribe patterns of marginality along the suppositional divide between 'peaceful' and 'vicious' members of the community. However, while the liberal international peacebuilding approaches are aimed at imposing the idea of peace as a 'recipe of the perfect state', at the communal level, the idea of peace is particularly flexible and negotiable. In everydayness of local peace, differences and connections are continuously assembled and negotiated (Williams 2015). The efforts of a community's members aim to maintain, through everyday implicit and explicit negotiations, an imagined balance of power relations, inequalities, differences,

⁷ For an overview of the post-structuralist reading of peace, see (Richmond 2008, 134-148).

prejudices and stereotypes but this balance remains fragile (or at least unstable) and requires constant re-negotiations.

The everyday practice of peace is about the everyday practice of co-living in diverse communities, in which individuals and groups jointly restrain conflict potential that may result in the collapse of their relationships. The drivers for preventing the critical polarization of communal relationships include, among many other factors, fear and anticipation of violence, traumas of the past, shared experience, collective memory, pragmatic considerations of survival, economic reasons, and personal affections. A 'de-romanticized' view on local peace would argue that the everyday practice of peace entails a perpetual containment of endless conflict. Even during violent escalations of antagonistic relations, this practice may continue by inertia – there are numerous instances of hiding or helping neighbors of the 'other' ethnic origin when ethnic cleansing was perpetrated against them – and this is the final hope of community members and a reason why the rituals of peace are sustained during the 'non-violent' time. Koopman in this regard notes, "peace also happens inside war, not only in peace zone enclaves, but in everyday peace building by all sorts of actors" (Koopman 2017). The de-romanticized view on local peace likewise maintains that the entire inclusivity of social and cultural dissimilarities is non-achievable, though the practice of peace, as a universalist common aspiration of humankind, strives to this end. Such a view provides for a further drift away from the idea of peace as a universal norm to the understanding of peace as context-dependent and altering process.

The presented perspective on co-living in diverse communities differs from what we may call 'propaganda of peace', journalistic and academic accounts of "peaceful co-existence" informed by the understanding that peace exists *despite* conflict. The belief in peaceful co-existence despite conflict is by no means a simplistic linear approach, in which peace is the antonym to conflict, merely 'not-war', a much-criticized negative definition of peace. To the contrary, this viewpoint disrupts the linear perspective on peace and conflict. It suggests that peace occurs not as the end to conflict but separately from conflict and so, implies the existence of two 'parallel realities'; peace can be *built* within a particular context while conflict stays in another 'reality'. However, the linear clear-cut border between 'the realities' – a utopian metanarrative to which peace belongs and a dystopian metanarrative to which conflict makes a part – remains.

This paper deconstructs the view on peace and conflict, according to which the meta-narratives of utopia and dystopia are divided and argues that they are interconnected. The mental border between the two should be viewed as blurred and floating. Hence, the hybridity between various versions of peace occurs. It may

appear that from the perspective of one version of peace another version looks 'less peaceful' and vice versa. Thus, the latter version may seem to occupy the discursive field that from the former's perspective belongs to the dystopian metanarrative. This can be an underlying reason of the collision between 'indigenous' understandings of a peaceful society and 'liberal' norms of peace. However, although these visions often do not fit into each other's hegemonic utopian narratives and peace-related discourses, the discursive fields still can and do intersect at one or another node. Various discourses of peace also compete at the local-local level between different community members and groups. Therefore, the comprehension of the contextuality of everyday peace practices and a fluctuating mental border between peace and conflict discourses, utopia and dystopia metanarratives, is important for creating ways to support peace by enlarging the room for these two metanarratives to intersect.

The enlargement of this room happens in practice through day-to-day negotiations between the members of culturally mixed communities that construct collective narratives shaping the 'rules' of their interaction, aimed at preventing the potential polarization of the communal relations. Such everyday negotiations help a community member to accept a perceived antagonist by recognizing the "other's" differences and similarities and estimating possible consequences in case of the escalation of a potential conflict. Though this paper does not intend to discuss agonistic peace⁸, it does acknowledge that the mutual recognition of differences and potential of conflict may be conducive for sustaining connections across cultural and/or ethnic boundaries. The recognition is a result of routine daily encounters between the community members that occur in shared and private places.

The existence of particular public places that bring people together to communicate across their differences matter more than the external indoctrination of local people in the importance of tolerance by international organizations. After all, a culture of inclusion is not something created in the offices of international organizations and has been practiced in various forms all over the world. Sites of everyday cultural exchange such as workplaces, schools and other educational venues, centers for exercising hobbies, sport facilities, shops, squares, and other public spaces all create their own "microcultures of place" characterized by "achievements of prosaic negotiation and transgression in dealing with racism and ethnic diversity" (Amin 2002). Multicultural communities that have experienced violent conflicts often lack

⁸ For these discussions see, for example, (Shinko 2008, Aggestam, Cristiano and Strömbom 2015).

material resources to restore or maintain their habitual spaces of interaction and construct new ones. We believe that the resources of international NGOs and their donors could be more effectively expended if invested in the restoration and construction of such sites for everyday (re-)negotiation and practicing of local peace(s) than in the creation of abstract 'platforms for expert discussions' and other discursive interventions repeatedly introducing universalist and elitist ideas of peace.

The spatial dimension of the reproduction of peace through narrative and practice is of particular importance for our conceptualization of the communitarian peace aimed to challenge further the ignorance of the crucial role of local communities in the conceptualization of peace. Although the contextuality, and thus plurality, of peace is shaped by both time and space, peace also serves as a context in which space is taking its shape across time (Koopman 2011, Koopman 2017, Williams 2015). This interconnection makes *every* peace and space to be unique and rules out the singularity of peace promoted by universalist approaches. As long as a community exists through its shared social practices, traditions and mutual recognition of differences and similarities, peace also takes its *place*. Therefore, the peace-concerned organizations should go beyond peace *building* approaches; any attempt to build peace eventually requires building also a new community based on the exclusive universalist idea of justice detached from the contextuality of a concrete place, time, and communal tradition.⁹ Peace building inherently equates itself with interventions to 'civilize' the lives of local people. Alternatively, peace-concerned organizations must transform their peace building to peace *supporting* approaches. Communities should be supported in maintaining their effective versions of peace through enlarging space(s) for everyday peace practices. Importantly, this peace support should be voluntarily accepted by local people and should not be reduced to consultancy (teaching) by external experts but provided in form of material resources for the restoration and creation of 'infrastructure' of local peace in a way defined by community members themselves. A peace supporting approach also means that external experts learn how peace is differentially (re)produced, materialized, and interpreted through space and time. This knowledge about grounded contextual definitions of peace acquired from various locations would widen the horizons of the international peace expertise and make it sensitive to local people's needs and aspirations.

⁹ Compare with Sandel's critics (Sandel 1998) of liberal theories of justice.

Everyday Peace and Conflict: Communal Coexistence in the South Caucasus

Everyday practices of people or communities that are torn between conflict and peace commonly differ from the external assumptions about them. Even the 'altruistic' aspirations of international organizations to meet the need of local cannot be capable of addressing the realities on the ground. The exportation of liberal values gained a new form that can be described as interventions via local, though local forms of collective unities have remained largely disregarded. As long as unique 'indigenous' forms of civil unity differ from civil society that the World Bank, the United Nations, the EU, and other institutions acknowledge, promote, and support, the 'non-liberal others' are presented by the international as a barrier to the peace process.

Since the formation of unities and forms of governance in communities are consequences of long historic and spatial factors, the recognition of local society by the outsiders as self-sufficient is crucial to study local dynamics. Thinking of local society beyond the standard or Western understanding leaves a broad space for indigenous practices of communal activity. For example, peace negotiations between Azerbaijani and Armenian communities living in Kyzyl-Shafag and Kerkenj respectively, which resulted in a village exchange across the conflict divide, demonstrate a strong example for the potential of local communities to come up with effective solutions during escalating conflict. The profound analysis of the story demonstrates different dynamics of decision making and problem solving that exist within local communities (Huseynova, Hakobyan and Rumyantsev 2012). The village exchange that happened without outside intervention or coercion reveals the internal processes of collective decision making led by a state farm (commonly referred to with the term "*kolkhoz*" in Russian) director from Kyzyl-Shafag and inherent patterns of both Soviet communalism and Caucasus patriarchy. The organization of self-defense, the search for a new place to live, reaching a verbal agreement on respect for graveyards on both sides made local people mediators, implementers, and beneficiaries of the whole peace process.

Our paper complements such rare research accounts of local peace in the South Caucasus by ethnographic interpretations of three cases of multicultural coexistence in the region: Armenians with Azerbaijanis in the Marneuli district, Muslims of Azerbaijani and Iranian origins with Georgian Christians in the village of Gombori, and Georgians of the Gal/i region with Abkhazians. We stress that our employment of the term 'coexistence' conveys both peace and (latent) conflict. 'Coexistence' can also refer to 'toleration' of some differences between the groups,

though it should not signify a conflict-free space as it implies a constant attempt to avoid clashes (Barkan and Barkey 2015). Applying tools of interpretive anthropology, the section below analyzes local imaginations and practices of everyday peace/s.

Armenian-Azerbaijani Rural Communities in Georgia¹⁰

The Marneuli district of Georgia is an outstanding region for those who have been engaged in peace research in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In the after-war period, there exist, perhaps, no other such area where Armenians and Azerbaijanis have managed to preserve their mixed rural communities following all the turbulence of the last three decades in the wider surrounding of the Armenian-Azerbaijani relationships. The conflict that is profoundly ingrained in these communities, however, well coexists with local peace that also has its deep roots in time and space. Particularly, two Armenian-Azerbaijani villages – Tsopi and Khojorni – have attracted attention of some media activists, albeit seemingly not of academics (the only encountered ethnographic account of communal life in Tsopi is written by Huseynova (Huseynova 2009)). Both villages are located near the Georgian-Armenian border, around 80-85 km from Tbilisi. The General Population Census of 2014 has shown that approximately 600 people live in each of these villages. Khojorni is a predominantly Armenian-populated village (76 percent), and the Azerbaijani inhabitants (73 percent) outnumber the other residents of Tsopi. In both villages, there are also a few Greeks (or, to be precise, mostly descendants of Armenian-Greek mixed families) and a very small number of Russians. The inhabitants of the two villages have close friendship and family relationships among each other, though the everyday peace in each community has acquired its own particularities.

The everyday peace of these communities is sustained largely due to the joint construction of collective narratives that enable the communities' members to shape their practices of interaction in order to prevent a possible polarization of the communal relationships. Nevertheless, the narratives are often penetrated by nationalistic conflict-fueling discourses. The ethnographic immersion in the communal lives also reveals implicit power relations related to the proportion of populations in every village as well as strong prejudices and fears of the communities' members towards each other. Expectedly, assumptions and beliefs about the causes of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the history of the Armenian-Azerbaijani relationships coincide more often within the same ethnic

¹⁰ The author gathered the ethnographic data used for this section during his fieldwork conducted in the Marneuli district in 2016-2018 for a forthcoming doctoral dissertation.

group. History and its material heritage represent a noticeable issue of contestation among the local people that one way or another is related to the wider context of the "Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict".¹¹ In the villages, there are ruins of several historical buildings (the oldest are dated most likely to the 5th century) such as churches and fortresses. The local Armenians usually refer to these constructions as Christian, made by Armenians (their primary version), Georgians, or Greeks. However, Azerbaijanis are convinced that the Caucasus Albanians, whom they consider as the ancestors of Azerbaijanis, and not necessarily Christians, had erected these buildings. The contested views on this issue often lead to confronting conclusions such as "the Armenian state is artificially created by the Russian Empire to divide the Muslims in the region" or "the Azerbaijani nation has no historical grounds to exist". Eventually, the question of belonging of Nagorno-Karabakh and even territories beyond this area is often raised.

However, the community members have found exits out of these deadlocked debates thanks to their largely agreed upon values and the immediate experience of the shared past. The unifying values are formulated in various ways such as "God is one but only has different names" or "the most important is that we're all humans". The locals also accentuate specific characteristics of their villages that construct their communal identities upon which the everyday peace rests. Through the articulation of these local identities, the villagers differentiate their communities from the societies in Armenia and/or Azerbaijan. Common unifying discourses related to the local relationships are formulated as the following: "We're here like brothers and sisters" or "We don't care who's of what nation, who has what religion". The locals deny in their narrations the presence of conflict in their communities, and some villagers try to assure that they make no difference between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Discursive practices of everyday interaction sometimes even include calling the community "one nation". Another story of the shared narrative is that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has not happened because of "ordinary people" or "peasants", who are actually presented as the foremost victims of such developments, but it has been the result of political games of the countries' elites and global actors. The local people often tell that they are not interested in the conflict because there is no such issue in their communities; Nagorno-Karabakh is "far way"; and it is just "a piece of land"; and thus, they should not be preoccupied with the issue.

¹¹ The authors would prefer not to ethnize the conflict, but from the dominating perspectives among local people, the context of the conflict is wider than the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The most articulated communal value in the local narratives is "respect" that guides people's everyday practices in relation towards each other. The value of respect, as locally explained, implies not saying anything that can insult a representative of another ethnic group, particularly heightened care for *him* and especially for *her* and protection of him/her from possible offensive actions of someone else. Respect, care, and protection of each other underpin neighborly relations between individuals associated with the two ethnic groups. These modalities are deeply rooted in the collective memory, and the elderly particularly underline how they were practiced in the past. Thus, a shared experience is a source to maintain the modalities that eventually have become communal traditions transferred from one generation to another.

Overall, people positively describe the time prior to the war in Nagorno-Karabakh and generally the Soviet period when it comes to the organization of communal life. The older generation stresses that the unity of their villages was stronger and associates this with much more intensive everyday contacts across ethnic and cultural boundaries. People spent more time together at both work and leisure. The collective labor is particularly stressed as a unifying factor for the local communities. The majority of the Khojorni residents were involved in developing collective farming, working at the *kolkhoz*, while the majority of the Tsopi population worked at a large marble and limestone quarry that has been active since the 1950s and became the forming enterprise that even brought a status of an urban-type settlement to Tsopi during the Soviet time. The large industry attracted to Tsopi many workers from all over the Soviet Union, and hence Tsopi residents often refer to their village of that time as "the center of the world". Many Tsopi residents also worked in nearby *kolkhozes*. The work conjointly conducted by different ethnic groups has been complemented by spending together also off-work time. In the villages, there were functioning cultural centers (commonly referred to with the term "*dom kultury*" in Russian), public bathhouses (commonly referred to as "*banya*" in Russian), several stores, a park, and sport fields. The developed transport infrastructure also facilitated the communication between people. The villages had their own kindergartens attended by kids of every ethnic and cultural background. All these places of routine encounters of local people have been wrecked following the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Schools are the only public spaces that continue to play a vital role in community building and the maintenance of communal peace. The school is the most mentioned place among the local people of any age when the origins of the communal peace are discussed. The Armenians and Azerbaijanis underline that their friendly communal relations stem from their very childhood spent together on the streets and in the school of their villages. The schools are divided into

Armenian and Azerbaijani sectors, but some classes are conducted jointly. A decade ago, the Russian sector in the Tsopi school, which had been popular among both Armenians and Azerbaijanis, was closed. Currently, both schools are in dire conditions, especially, the school in Tsopi. Built in the 1930s, it has been partly destroyed, and there are no obvious prospects that it will be soon reconstructed. The amount of school students has dropped dramatically since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, as there has been a big migration outflow from these villages.

The local people practice certain communal rituals that support the everyday peace between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Living side by side they regularly invite each other for family and religious feasts or at least share food from the table. It has been observed that Armenians often participate in the preparation and celebration of Azerbaijani weddings.¹² As locals say, the participation in funerals of a person they knew well is virtually an obligation for them regardless of the deceased's ethnicity, and it does not require any special invitation from his/her family. If a certain activity of one group potentially hurts the feelings of the other, it is normally kept at low profile. For instance, the Armenians of Khojorni regularly commemorate the Armenian Genocide on April 24, but the activities are organized in a way that would minimize visibility for the Azerbaijani neighbors. The Armenian school teachers organize a public activity only for Armenian schoolchildren. When classes are over, Armenian teachers and pupils gather in a schoolyard and walk together to a small stone cross, erected on the margins of the village, where they lay flowers, light candles, give speeches, and sing songs. The route to this place bypasses the areas where Azerbaijanis live. The Armenian adults visit the place individually. As several Armenian teachers told, the local Armenians keep the commemoration as a silent event because they try to be sensitive to the feelings of their Azerbaijani neighbors and colleagues. As said by the locals, there is also an instruction from the educational authorities of Georgia that such commemorative public events should not be organized on the territory of intercultural schools. Some public holidays, such as the Victory Day on May 9, are celebrated by Armenians and Azerbaijanis together.

The joint construction and maintenance of the communal narrative about the shared space (past and present) with a continuous reference to the collective memory helps the Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Tsopi and Khojorni to alleviate or embrace cultural differences, suppress or deal with inter-group tensions, and sustain or transform the balance in power relations through a simultaneous

¹² During his fieldwork, the author has not observed Armenian weddings in the respective villages.

recognition and denial of differences. The presence of differences underscores the imperative to build and sustain the negotiated compromises and connections between the groups that hold the diverse population of a village together as a community. Nationalistic discourses are suppressed or put aside during the inter-group encounters to prevent a possible polarization of the relationships, while connections are reinforced through these encounters. The situated consensus and/or compromise is produced through the joint construction of the communal narrative and its discursive practices. Discursive practices of everyday interaction include, for example, the aforementioned references to each other as "brothers", "sisters", or "one nation". Such expressions of 'peace talks' as "the culture of our village" and "brotherhood" denote the attempts to create or sustain both inclusive intra-communal connectedness and exclusive communal identity. In the end, the narrative that includes all these elements shapes a common strategy of interaction and mundane practices of peace. The guiding value of this interaction strategy, narrated by the research participants themselves, is "respect", and it is nurtured in and through the collective memory of the community.

Muslims of Azerbaijani and Iranian Origin Coexisting with Georgian Christians in the Village of Gombori¹³

The village of Gombori, which is located in the Kakheti region of eastern Georgia, around 55 km away from Tbilisi, is a remarkable place for ethnic and religious diversity. At present, three major groups – Lahijs¹⁴, Azerbaijanis, and Georgian eco-migrants, who came from the high-mountainous settlements of the Pshavi and Khevsureti regions – have been jointly residing in Gombori for more than 50 years. Apart from these numerically dominant groups, there are a few Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, Armenian, and Ossetian families.¹⁵

In the 19th century, the Russian Empire had founded a military base in Gombori (Hundadze 2017), which greatly influenced the village life and architecture until

¹³ The author gathered the ethnographic data for this section during her fieldwork conducted in Gombori in February-June of 2016 for a master thesis (Kalatozishvili 2016).

¹⁴ This is the self-given name of the group of people of Iranian origin descending from the village of Lahij, Azerbaijan (Sordia 2016).

¹⁵ According to the General Population Census of 2014, 681 inhabitants live in Gombori. Among them, 304 people are registered as Azerbaijani, though more than half of them are "Lahijs" of Iranian origin, who are not registered in the Census so but as Azerbaijanis. There are 344 Georgians, and the rest of the population are registered with the other mentioned above nationalities (cf. (Sordia 2016)). Polish and Ukrainian people are not registered, though, as observed, they do live in Gombori.

the dissolution of the Soviet Union. At the beginning of the 20th century, some Lahij and Azerbaijani men moved from Azerbaijan to Georgia in search of better economic conditions (Sordia 2016). They started living in the huts of the forest surrounding the village. They produced charcoal and sold it to earn money. Gradually, the families of these men from Azerbaijan re-joined on this territory. In 1956, due to a great flood, all the simple houses in the forests were destroyed, so the Lahijs and Azerbaijanis moved into the village of Gombori for permanent living (Sordia 2016). In 1960, Georgian eco-migrants from the Pshavi and Khevsureti regions joined the settlement (Hundadze 2017). In 1964, the number of Georgians exceeded the number of Lahijs and Azerbaijanis (Hundadze 2017). Until the collapse of the Soviet Union, the life of the village was largely organized around the activities of the military base.¹⁶

The Lahijs and Azerbaijanis adhere to Shia Islam, while almost all Georgians and the other groups confess Orthodox Christianity. The majority of Georgians also firmly maintain the old mountainous cults, and a few Georgians represent Jehovah's Witnesses, which make the village life even more religiously diverse. At first glance, the environment of coexistence in Gombori seems peaceful, but it also may appear to be strained. Local peace in Gombori turns unique and could be expressed in various patterns. Young Lahijs, Azerbaijanis, Georgians, and representatives of other nationalities attend the one and only school in the village, so classes there are intercultural. More than a hundred students attend the school that employs around 20 teachers (Edu.aris.ge 2016). The school is the only public place in the whole settlement that gathers young people. On the main road of the village, there are a few permanently serving small shops, an irregularly operating ambulatory, and the representation office of the local government. In addition, there is a kindergarten, which unites around 30 kids and 7 employees. A number of small marketplaces on the main road, where people of all ethnic backgrounds sell dairy, agricultural products, mushrooms and other things, are very important and represent the most active places in which people meet each other and spend a lot of time together discussing their daily experiences.

There are no geographical districts in Gombori that are solely populated by one group. However, the holy places and cemeteries of the followers of the two major religions are rigidly separated. The Georgians attend the Russian Orthodox Christian church on the small central hill of the village. Since most of the Georgians of the village firmly maintain strict mountainous traditions, they keep their shrines and sacred places faraway in the nearby forest, protected and isolated. The

¹⁶ For the history of the Gombori village, see (Hundadze 2017).

Muslims have re-organized one of their houses into a mosque and celebrate religious holidays there. Apart from this, everyday communication between the Christian and Muslim families is frequent and intensive as they exchange food and sell products together at the marketplaces.

During the Soviet period, in Gombori there was a military base staffed with Russian-speaking personnel. The abandonment of the base has left several, now deserted, multi-storey buildings, uncommon for a village setting. People often recall the military base that played an essential role in the village life during the Soviet times. By that time, many Lahij, Azerbaijani, and Georgian men had a permanent military service job at the base. Women were busy with different technical or administrative duties there and worked in the hospital that served the military base. In addition, the village had a developed Soviet collective farming (Hundadze 2017). The fairly good economic situation of the locals attracted more Lahijs whose population increased to more than 400 people by 1989 (Hundadze 2017). There was also a bigger number of pupils attending the school. At the same time, the religious life was suppressed during the Soviet period. For example, the 19th-century Christian church was converted into a cinema (Hundadze 2017). After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the military personnel left the village and the base, and the collective farming and hospital collapsed. The religious life of all groups gradually gained more importance, and the religious practices intensified.

Individual references to the shared communal history reveal the presence of (latent) conflict: some local Georgians think that the Lahijs and Azerbaijanis should be grateful that they were allowed to live in the village after the flood. These Georgians tell that only because of the natural disaster, the Lahijs and Azerbaijanis were permitted to permanently stay in the village. In general, Georgians consider themselves as a privileged group due to their belief that they live in their own homeland, and therefore other ethnic groups should compromise more and adopt the Georgian culture. The Christian Georgians sometimes refer to the Lahijs and Azerbaijanis in the category of "other" – the one who appears different and the one who needs to be tolerated (Barkan and Barkey 2015). Georgians might use the terms "Tats" and "unbelievers" while speaking about Azerbaijanis and Lahijs, and both terms denote discrimination expressed through the assumed superiority of Christianity in relation to Islam. Through using the above-mentioned references, Christians may regard Azerbaijanis and Lahijs as "faithless" (Kvachadze 2011), thus not an entirely equal part of their community.

However, the prevalent narrative of the inhabitants of Gombori is still that they very much respect each other's religion, tradition, culture, way of life, and equality. There sometimes occur intermarriages between all these groups. Some Georgians,

especially among teachers, say that they welcome everyone's culture and find this co-living comfortable. Some Lahijs and Azerbaijanis say that they consider Georgia their homeland since they have spent their whole life there, while some of them are also interested in the lives of their ancestors in Azerbaijan. The villagers tell that both religious groups often take part in each other's main holidays. Through this representation, peace among these major religious and ethnic groups of the village seems effective, though long and deep observation detects disagreements, conflict of interests, and hierarchy between and among the groups. Working on the field reveals that the Azerbaijanis and Lahijs actually do not participate in the main celebrations of Christian Georgians such as Easter, Ascension, and St. Giorgi's Day, though they may help the Christians to organize the feasts without being invited to the actual ceremonial table, the *Supra*. The 'acquirement' of invitation seems to be an implicit barrier for the Muslims to participate in the Christian holidays. On Novruz, the Azerbaijanis and Lahijs traditionally invite the Georgians to join their celebration. However, even without invitation, the Georgians can freely join Novruz celebrations. Thus, the Georgians' narratives sometimes differ from their actual actions. The Azerbaijanis and Lahijs appear more open towards the Georgians' involvement into their religious rituals.

There are also some cases when the Georgians want to strengthen their neighborly and friendly relations with the Azerbaijanis and Lahijs. For instance, some Christian parents choose a Muslim godmother or godfather for their child despite being aware of the strict ban of Christianity against having someone who practices a different religion as a godparent. They provide different motives why they "had to" ask Muslims to be godparents. The following is one of the explanations offered: if a child is sick, a Christian mother and father invoke god to recover him/her, and in turn, they give a promise of letting Muslims baptize the baby. In another case, a Christian childless woman makes a wish, that if she gets pregnant and has a healthy baby, she will give the "unbeliever's" name to the newborn. These examples show that the Christians sometimes adapt and rethink their traditions and ways of life in order to establish closer relations with their neighbors. Interestingly, the priests also agree to hold baptisms, where Muslims become the Christians' godparents. As told, the Christians or Muslim godparents may negotiate this issue by paying some contributions to the church. In their turn, the Muslims also believe that through this practice of baptism, their friendship with the Christians can be strengthened. However, *allowing* a Muslim to be a godparent also demonstrates the power and domination of the Georgian Christian culture and religion in the communal relationships.

The way the Azerbaijanis and Lahijs see themselves in relation to the Georgian neighbors also demonstrates the domination of the Christian culture in the village.

The Muslims in Gombori believe that they should be busy with agricultural and stockbreeding work at their households. This belief encourages young Muslims to quit school, marry at an early age, and engage primarily in household activities. They say that those who graduate from school and acquire higher education are mostly the Georgians, while the Azerbaijanis physically help their families starting from childhood. One of the interviewed Azerbaijanis exclaimed, "Still, we are workers!" Another Azerbaijani resident of Gombori told that being Christian might facilitate life in Georgia, bringing as an example that getting a job in this case can be easier. Therefore, he converted into Christianity in his adulthood. This considerable subjugation of the Muslim culture and religion to the Georgian Christian one prevents the escalation of conflict between these major groups of the village. The Azerbaijanis and Lahijs are adjusting themselves to the rituals established by the Georgian Christians. The flexibility of the locally practiced tradition of Islam dominated by Christianity has formed a distinct peace process in Gombori that is based on the dominance of the Georgian Christian culture, which gradually makes Azerbaijanis' and Lahijs' Islamic tradition conform. The Georgians represent the dominant 'tolerating' ethnic group in Gombori that delineates the way Azerbaijanis and Lahijs live in the community.

Relations Between the Georgians of the Gal/i Region and the Abkhazians¹⁷

Since the 1992-1993 war in Abkhazia, the unresolved conflict has had a severe impact on people living in Abkhazia, but it has not completely disrupted coexistence between ethnic Abkhazians and Georgians. After the end of military actions, most of the ethnic Georgians/Mingrelians¹⁸ returned to their homes in Abkhazia's Gal/i district, while some people, especially the elderly, had not even left their places during the war. According to statistical data, the population of the Gal/i district ranges from 30,000 to 40,000 inhabitants. Ethnic Georgians constitute 99 percent of this population; the others are ethnic Abkhazians, Russians, and Armenians.¹⁹

¹⁷ The author conducted interviews for this section during her fieldwork in the Gal/i district in August-September of 2018.

¹⁸ The Mingrelians are an ethnic subgroup of Georgians, who speak the Mingrelian language and are mostly bilingual, speaking also Georgian. They mostly live in the Samegrelo region of Georgia, and a considerable number of Mingrelians live in Abkhazia's Gal/i District and Tbilisi.

¹⁹ The statistical data was received through a telephone conversation with a representative of the Government of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia (based in Tbilisi). The data

After the war, the integration of Gal/i's Georgians into the Abkhazian society has been difficult and still not fully achieved. Local residents recall that they used to stay all the time in Gal/i, as they were afraid to travel to the other districts of Abkhazia. However, in recent years, the situation has changed, and people have started communicating with each other. According to the local Georgians, the attitudes and relationships between ethnic Georgians and Abkhazians nowadays are still not equal, but they also mention that, if compared, the situation of ten years ago was much more complicated and unfair. They say that personal relationships are normal if both sides do not touch upon politics, though the discrimination along ethnic lines makes them feel powerless and unwelcome in their homeland.

The older generation from the Gal/i district recalls that they were living in peace with Abkhazians and could not have imagined that there would be so many problems between the two peoples. A resident of Gal/i, Ia Gogokhia, 59, reminisces of those happy times when she with her colleagues could go to the town of Ochamchire just for a coffee. This was until the early 1990s. After that time, she visited the Black Sea coast and other districts of Abkhazia for the first time only in 2015. Notably, it takes only 20-30 minutes to drive from Gal/i to Ochamchire.

"I remember when I was a child, and we had Abkhazian guests, we did not know how to please them, because they are also known for their great hospitality. During the feast, I was standing and pouring wine into glasses. This was an Abkhazian hosting tradition. Then the feast continued on the following day, too. There was no such differentiation: I am Georgian, and you're Abkhazian. I do not know what happened to us after all of this", says Ia.

Even though ethnic Georgians predominantly populate Gal/i, some Abkhazians also live in the district. An Abkhazian teacher of the Abkhazian language from one of the schools in Gal/i, who preferred to stay anonymous, says that despite her ethnicity, the living conditions for her are also hard. She has lived in a Georgian populated village for 34 years, since she is married to an ethnic Georgian. According to the teacher, she feels integrated into the local Georgian society. Her daughter is married to an Abkhazian, and her son has an ethnic Georgian wife.

"I had an Abkhazian passport which was abolished in 2013. With my family members, neighbors, with former and present pupils, we often have crossed

published by the State Statistics Agency of the de-facto Republic of Abkhazia (based in Sukhum/i) is similar to the provided statistics, though there are separate registers for Georgians and Mingrelians (Управление Государственной Статистики Республики Абхазия [The State Statistics Agency of the Republic of Abkhazia] 2017).

the border clandestinely, because of the absence of Abkhazian documents. I even had to swim across the Enguri with them", tells the Abkhazian teacher from Gal/i.

Ethnic Georgian returnees face a number of problems. One of them is obtaining Abkhazian documents. The local government started issuing residence permits to them, which are explicitly meant for "foreign citizens". Although Abkhazian passports are not recognized worldwide, the returnees need them to cross the conflict divide. At the same time the Abkhazians and Georgians in Abkhazia have common problems such as rife unemployment, corruption, economic stagnation, and many others. Proper medical care is one of them, as there is reportedly a lack of medical equipment and qualified doctors in Gal/i's hospital, which, as locals complain, is in a dreadful condition. For these reasons, many Abkhazians from different districts of Abkhazia go for medical care to Georgian hospitals, as the treatment for them is fully funded by the government of Georgia and various international humanitarian organizations. One of the organizations that help Abkhazians to receive free medical care is the association "Peaceful and Business Caucasus", and its director Alu Gamakharia said in an interview that the number of Abkhazians using services at Georgian hospitals grows year by year.

Although Gal/i is predominantly Georgian-populated, the local law enforcement agencies are staffed with ethnic Abkhazians who are brought to the region from different districts of Abkhazia. Only those Georgians who have strong connections or who identify themselves as Abkhazians hold upper-level public sector positions. Before the 1992-1993 war, as local people evoke, Georgians also worked, for example, in Gal/i's police station, but now they have had to change their occupation, and Abkhazians took up the higher positions. Locals recall that before 2008, ethnic Georgians also served in the Abkhazian army. Ethnic Georgians, nevertheless, operate schools, kindergartens, banks, and hospitals in Gal/i, as it was before the war. In Gal/i's bank offices, some ethnic Abkhazians work together with ethnic Georgians. An ethnic Georgian employee of an organization with a mixed staff says that they have a very friendly working environment, and their ethnic diversity does not prevent colleagues from having friendly relationships with each other. However, nowadays, the non-recognition of Georgian diplomas makes the hiring process problematic. Public sector jobs in Abkhazia require a degree from an Abkhazian university, but many ethnic Georgians from Abkhazia study at Georgian universities. However, the situation is changing. In the past, ethnic Georgian parents prevented their children from going to study at a university in Sukhum/i; today this practice is declining. With the exception of some isolated cases, the ethnic Georgian students say that they manage to live and study together

with their ethnic Abkhazian fellows. The Georgians of Gal/i also go for work, mainly on construction sites, in Sukhum/i.

Ethnic Georgians and Abkhazians also actively engage in trade in the Gal/i district. Ethnic Georgians sell their goods such as beef, hazelnuts, or tangerines to Abkhazians. In summer time, the market in the town of Gal/i is especially active, since more people from Gal/i's villages come to sell their agricultural products in town. At the same time, the market has formed a certain hierarchical relationship between ethnic Georgians and Abkhazians, as the vendors are Georgians, and the owners of their counters are Abkhazians. Nevertheless, the locals also say that ethnic Georgians and Abkhazians who have established trade relations often organize small celebrations together. In addition, Gal/i's Georgians conduct an everyday communication with Abkhazians on the road. It is often said that car drivers bribe traffic patrollers, but according to locals, the problem vanishes if the driver appears to be acquainted with some of the patrollers, and they have been to a celebration together. Another road story was told by a Georgian from Gal/i, Shota, 65, who in order to arrive from the Engur/i Bridge to his house in the village of Saberio often thumbs a lift. He recalls that once, when he was hitchhiking, his Georgian acquaintance did not stop, whereas an unfamiliar Abkhazian from the Tkuarchel/i district did. He concluded that good and bad persons exist in every nation, and ethnicity should not divide people.

Despite such mundane peculiar practices of local peace, Gal/i's Georgians do not feel protected by or even from the Abkhazian authorities, and in case of conflict escalation or incidents, they register that their rights are often violated. They are also frustrated, as they feel powerless in the current dynamics of inter-group relations. In turn, there is a lack of trust on behalf of the Abkhazian side towards Gal/i's Georgians, because most of the numerous ethnic Georgians who have returned to Gal/i maintain close ties with Georgia, and almost all of them are Georgian citizens. The awareness about the pro-Georgian or pro-Georgia positions of the Gal/i's Georgians makes many Abkhazians suspicious towards them.

Conclusion: The Communitarian Perspective on Peace

The above presented ethnographic interpretations of communal lives attest that the local peace is certainly not an ideal process of social relations if one tries to describe it by employing the 'commonsense' binary system of competing utopian and dystopian metanarratives. To the contrary, the case studies demonstrate that there is no definite dividing line between peace and conflict in the discourses and practices of these communities, and the compromised co-presence of both is embedded in the everyday life of community members. Thus, peace is never

disrupted from conflict, and the relation between the two is not linear so that one could be understood as an antonym to the other. Peace happens as a process of negotiations and a search for situated consensuses on the differences and hierarchies among community members.

The communitarian vision on peace would suggest that the compromises should not be judged through the lenses of external 'evaluators' based on their own perceptions of justice. The peace-concerned activists should not present the 'universal' norms as prevailing over the lived experience of local people. At the same time, this approach does not argue for keeping the particular-universal dichotomy. The communitarian peace concept implies the existence of various peaces occurring in various contexts but not in isolation from each other as well as from the presumed 'universal' values and norms. From this perspective, the universal peace would not mean an ideal state of justice but a network of communal peaces that are interconnected and concurrently self-sufficient as long as community members are able to find situated consensuses that allow recognizing their differences and similarities. The problem-solving aspect of the communitarian peace approach stems from the belief that peace as a process must be reinforced and not imposed as a state through normative power.

The conceptualization of communitarian peace is based on the criticisms towards contemporary peacebuilding activities of international organizations and donors. The existing peace building practices are essentially aimed at building a community according to the externally drafted templates. Thus, the peacebuilding discourses, including the related discourses adjusted to the critics of liberal peace, such as of conflict transformation and local ownership, serve as another smokescreen for promoting and imposing a model of (neo-)liberal society loyal to sponsoring governments and organizations. Yet, the paper admits that the implementation of peacebuilding projects on the ground may differ from the initial plan of intervention as they are implemented by concrete individuals who can be either sincerely devoted to the liberal values and/or can practically amend the project templates to meet actual local needs. The paper does also acknowledge the humanitarian dimension of the work of peacebuilding organizations such as the mediation between disputing parties regarding distribution of aid and financial support.

Since traditional approaches to conflict and peace do not generate sustainable 'positive' outcomes, researchers and practitioners should come up with alternative ways to study and support peace activities. In order to catch up with the evolving area of critical peace and conflict research, the peace activities also should incorporate ideas and perspectives from other fields such as anthropology,

ethnography, political geography, psychology, etc., and that might introduce fresh insights on how to support peace. In light of these discussions, the paper advocates for the inclusion of non-linear and interdisciplinary methods of dealing with conflicts. Along with the developments in peace research, the peacebuilding practice should also be radically reformed to meet the needs and expectations of locals while designing and implementing projects. One of the suggestions could be to address the materiality of peace, and so reinforce the peace practices of the communities' members interacting in concrete places. This approach would imply relocating resources from discursive interventions to (re)constructing the spaces of peace in strict accordance to the local needs openly expressed by community members. While funding and supporting everyday practices of peace, caution should be exercised not to create another hierarchy of participation and organization but to equality, as it is understood by local people. Instead of applying ready-made one-size-fits-all packages of peace, donors and foreign institutions should invest efforts to ethnography-like investigations of the situation on the ground in order to provide a fair redistribution of resources.

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Women Challenging Gender Norms and Patriarchal Values in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation across the South Caucasus

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This paper looks at the ways in which women's peacebuilding and conflict transformation or resolution focused organizations and groups in the South Caucasus challenge and/or reproduce gender roles and patriarchal values in their work. The authors aim to capture the challenges faced by women's organizations and groups when carrying out the work of resisting against these norms. In addition, the authors aim to draw out success stories where women's organizations and groups have incorporated creative approaches to peace and conflict work that do not reproduce patriarchal values and traditional gender roles.

Introduction

Since the 1990s, women in the South Caucasus have stood at a crossroads of nation building on the one hand, which has often depended on the reproduction of traditional gender roles and patriarchal values, and a global movement for women's emancipation on the other hand, which has encompassed demands for equality, rights, and respect. The break-up of the Soviet Union not only introduced open market economies, but also opportunities for the international donor community to promote democratic values through support to already established groups and organizations, in addition to helping develop new organizations with the goal of fostering an open and democratic civil society in Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia (Walsh 2015). As a result, in the South Caucasus three republics alone, there are now thousands of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Although not many of these registered NGOs are active, a good percentage of them are actively pursuing social justice goals in a number of different spheres. Of those, a small number of NGOs focus on women's issues and women's rights, and another small number of NGOs focus on peacebuilding and conflict resolution or transformation²⁰. The number of organizations that combine the two – women and peace/conflict – are even fewer and crucial for both the women's movement as well as the establishment of sustainable peace in the region. In addition to women organizing through institutional support, there are even fewer independent grassroots movements and activist groups combining women and peace across the region. In an increasingly globalized and neoliberal context, these groups are often even more crucial for a critical reflection and the praxis of conflict transformation, anti-militarism, and feminist resistance to violence dominating across all public and private domains of life in the wider South Caucasus region.

This paper looks at the ways in which South Caucasus women's peacebuilding and conflict transformation or resolution focused organizations and groups challenge and/or reproduce gender roles and patriarchal values in their work within peacebuilding. Given the ongoing prevalence of patriarchal, misogynist, and militarized norms with regards to how people in these contexts relate to themselves, to one another, to institutions such as the state, education, family and

²⁰ Conflict resolution and conflict transformation stem from two different schools of thought where conflict resolution aims to achieve negative peace often by facilitating for an agreement among conflicting parties through third party mediation, whereas conflict transformation aims to tackle root causes of conflict in order to achieve positive peace. In this regard, the conflict transformation approach to conflict is more of a feminist approach to achieving peace than conflict resolution.

vice versa, we aim to capture the challenges faced by women's organizations and groups when carrying out the work of resisting against these norms. In addition, we aim to draw out success stories where women's organizations and groups have incorporated creative approaches to peace and conflict work that do not reproduce patriarchal values and traditional gender roles. Through in-depth interviews conducted between August 2018 and November 2018 with 15 women's organizations and groups, we have drawn out the values that these organizations and groups hold and operate from, and the agendas that are shaped by those values. We center a feminist, anti-militarist, and decolonial perspective in looking at the question at hand. Thereby we ask: To what extent are the values and agendas of women's organizations and groups serving processes that challenge and/or reproduce gender norms, roles, and stereotypes as well as patriarchal values? What are some obstacles to doing peace work as a women's organization and groups in the region? What are some of the ways, if any, that these obstacles are met with creative solutions?

Looking at these questions and the answers generated from women working within and outside the NGO sphere for the ultimate goal of social transformation, it has become clear that challenging gender norms and deeply ingrained patriarchal values is often more nuanced than theory might suggest. Understanding the complex histories, struggles, and geo-political contexts of the South Caucasus, as well as the importance of deconstructing ways in which patriarchy and militarism work together to maintain the subjugation of women and men who deviate from the norms set up by hegemonic masculinity is a crucial first and continuous step in approaching the question we delve into through this paper. As such, the findings and analysis here can provide deep insight for practitioners, academics, activists, state actors, regional and international stakeholders and donors who work with or wish to work with women who combine the struggle for women's emancipation with questions of peace and conflict in their organizations, groups, and in their activism.

Theory

This paper employs an intersectional and critical analysis of gender, patriarchy, and systems/structures of violence that permeate ordinary life. As such, the gender system, which is utilized for the benefit (or profit) of patriarchy necessarily connects to war and militarization. We start by positing that it is not enough to perceive gender as the interpretation or social attributes of one's biological sex, which is the way that gender is often defined in women's rights circles especially within the South Caucasus but also elsewhere. To understand the way in which

gender relates to war, gender must be conceived of not as a noun, but rather as a "doing" incontinently connected to "the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained" (Butler 1990). In contexts of violent conflict, gender is necessarily produced and maintained through war as an extension of violence manifested within society, politics, economy, culture, family, etc. To arrive at a deeper analysis regarding the ways in which gender is produced and maintained through perpetual war, the binary perception of war and peace must be deconstructed from a decolonial lens. We understand that coloniality is a system of dominance justified by classifications of race "encompassing all control of sexual access, collective authority, labor, subjectivity/inter-subjectivity and the production of knowledge from within these inter-subjective relations" (Lugones 2008). Framed through a decolonial lens, war connects to systems of dominance where violence is utilized for control of populations, including all social relations, based on Eurocentric modes of being and knowing. According to decolonial academic Tarak Barkawi "force and war together make and sustain social orders" (Barkawi 2016) such as class, race, gender, heteronormativity, which function as norm setting categories for and within the nation-state.

Patriarchy is one such order where the set of beliefs and values regarding gender roles and relations are defined by enforcing "'proper' relations between *men and women*, between *women and women* and between *men and men*" (Elster, 1981 as quoted in Reardon). Often "war deepens already deep sexual divisions, emphasizing the male as perpetrator of violence, women as victims" (Cockburn 2010). These relations do not simply come into being through "tradition" or mere "cultural norms", but rather are contingent on systems shaped for the benefit of a select few with authority to shape and maintain those same systems, which make it possible for power to go unquestioned and unshared. One mechanism through which authority maintains itself is through repression, which entails "the threat of force, the knowledge that surveilled and repressed subjects apprehend if they step out of line, they will suffer violent fates" (Barkawi 2016). This does not only refer to citizen subjects within states, but also to bodies in relation to the gender order, which when "stepping out of line", or rather – stepping out of expected gender norms and roles– become subject to violence.

It is clear that patriarchy and war are mutually reinforcing systems of dominance where deviation from the established gender order is punished through violence. Within both systems hegemonic masculinity serves as the norm and all other forms of gender expression and relations are suspect, other, foreign, abnormal and subject to elimination. For the purposes of this paper, we have employed a feminist conceptualization and approach to peace, which entails a deep analysis of violence

as a construct in all spheres of life. In line with feminist peace ideology and praxis, connections between "domestic violence and war, between economic oppression and militarism, between women's rights and environmental concerns" are made (Gnanadason, Kanyoro and McSpadden 1996). Further connections are made between the war system and nationalism with all of its repercussions on deepening gender norms and roles within society. Gender norms in this sense comprise of the burden to conform to categories of expected masculine and feminine representation and roles, which are often based on misogynist relations to oneself and to others. According to Brock-Utne, "misogyny is not only an expected condition but in fact a form of self-hatred in which both men and women are conditioned to despise the feminine and thereby, to some degree, women" (Brock-Utne, 1981 as quoted in Reardon). As such, complying with gender norms within patriarchal and militaristic contexts often means that the feminine and anything that can "effeminize", especially men, must be rejected from public and political grounds. This rejection often takes place through violence, whether emotional, mental, physical, or structural. As a result, war, violence, and weapons become "both a significant factor in masculine identity and a crucial factor in the functioning of patriarchy" (Reardon 1985).

We acknowledge that in actual practice, women's organizations and groups cannot be expected to adhere to mere theoretical ideology when it comes to their different approaches in relating to gender norms and patriarchal values within peacebuilding and conflict transformation or resolution. At the same time, we hold firmly the conviction that when working to build peace and transform conflict, the question of patriarchy and its intersection with gender, violence, and militarization cannot be overlooked by any organization, group, and/or movement. Although we pursue a feminist analysis throughout this paper, we do not rely on women identifying themselves as feminist in order to measure how well gender norms and patriarchal values are challenged within different organizations and groups. Rather, we look for an in-depth analysis and recognition of particular structures and institutions as violent, including war. We look for an in-depth analysis and understanding of power relations, hierarchy, and the ways in which these factors contribute to deepening divides within conflicted societies. We expect that women's organizations and groups working with peacebuilding and conflict transformation or resolution will first and foremost have a value-based approach where violence is necessarily rejected in all its forms. In addition, we expect an approach that is based on the rejection of war as inevitable and that is anti-militaristic, anti-nationalistic, and anti-discriminatory.

Methodology

The methodology for this paper comprised of three processes agreed upon by the researchers – desk research, in-depth interviews, and collective work. Desk research looked into both context and theory of the question we wanted to delve into. Mainly we looked at critical thinkers' works around feminist understandings of gender, patriarchy, war, peace, and militarization. These texts provide the basis for the theoretical background of this paper, which is outlined in the section above. The in-depth interviews provided the necessary information regarding women's organizations and groups working within peacebuilding and conflict transformation or resolution in the South Caucasus. The organizations and groups in each country were chosen based on two criteria: that they worked with issues pertaining to women and peace and that they were actively implementing projects and programs in their respective contexts. The aim of the interviews we held with each organization or group was to draw out conceptualizations about gender norms and patriarchal values from women practitioners themselves, in addition to understanding how peace is perceived and envisioned. Furthermore, we wanted to understand how – if at all – patriarchal and militarized realities are being challenged and/or reproduced within the work that these women's organizations and/or groups do. And finally, we wanted to understand the challenges these organizations and/or groups face when challenging gender norms and patriarchal values within the work they do, in addition to the ways in which they overcome those challenges.

To guide the interview process we created a set of open-ended questions so as not to direct answers in any particular direction. The questions could be divided into four categories, one being to understand better what the organizations and groups do (activities); the second being to understand the methods with which these organizations and groups address women's issues in conflict, primarily drawing out agendas and visions for peace; the third being to understand the values that these organizations and groups hold with regards to working with women and peace, and the ways in which they practice them; and finally, the fourth being to understand how each organization and group conceptualizes gender norms and patriarchal values as well as the ways in which they challenge those in their work. One limitation of not asking more direct questions to understand whether or not these organizations/groups do indeed link patriarchal structures with the war system is that we do not obtain direct and clear-cut answers to the opening questions of this conversation. At the same time, the in-depth analysis of these interviews provided important insight into this question when looking at the

values that organizations and groups hold and the ways in which they practice them.

Lastly, the collective work method of the group was a unique one given the strictly bordered geography we live within the South Caucasus. Our process was mainly a collaborative one where we held Skype meetings to familiarize ourselves with each other and the three contexts we come from, brainstorm ideas with regards to the question we wanted to delve into, and agree on the methods and theoretical backing of this paper. All of us have worked and/or continue to work within the NGO field in our respective contexts and have experience with the intersection of women, peace, and security. To ensure that we were all on the same page, after each of us held their first interview, we reconvened via Skype to discuss the questions we had come up with previously and whether or not they needed rethinking. This method provided the space for us to adjust our questions and tactics to fit the common context we share, while taking into account differences, which needed to be addressed based on the needs of each context. Once all of the interviews were completed, we each summarized our findings and made an analysis. All three summarized and analyzed findings were combined to look at the regional context as a whole, drawing out similarities and differences across the work that women's organizations and groups do within the South Caucasus to challenge gender norms and patriarchal values within peace work.

Context

A thorough understanding of the context/s within which women's organizations and groups function in the South Caucasus can provide significant insight into the challenges that these organizations and groups must contend with, as well as give due appreciation and value to the ways, however small, that these challenges are overcome. To understand the question at hand with regards to challenging gender norms and patriarchal values within the work of peacebuilding and conflict transformation or resolution, three factors are taken into account. War, violence, and militarization as a conglomeration is one factor, which has a strong influence on all segments of society and politics in the region. Notions of gender and patriarchy, as well as the ways in which these structures influence attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors is another factor, which is necessarily interlinked with war, violence, and militarization. Finally, the institutionalization and professionalization of organizing, mobilizing, and activist work with regards to the women's movement and any movement for social justice in the region is a crucial factor for understanding how change occurs and/or is stifled in the region as a whole.

Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, the violent conflicts over break-away regions Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh and the development of the Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Georgian nation-states have worked in tandem to maintain a sense of insecurity, which has been utilized to make populations complacent toward nationalism. On the one hand, each South Caucasus nation, similar to former Yugoslav states, has become established in some way or another through the discourse of war, which "demanded there to be a fear of people with other ethnicities or religions, a fear of 'the Others', grounded in a feeling that one's own group was under threat" (Hamrud and Wassholm 2014). On the other hand, it can be said that Russia's influence over the region has had and continues to have "the capacity to subdue or escalate tensions as needed to maximize its political influence over the relevant country" (Puddington 2017). Of course, Russia's influence over the region is not divorced from the influence that Eurocentric ex-colonial states have within the binary construct of neocolonial geo-political power struggles over the South Caucasus. While in Russia's case the South Caucasus states are kept under tight militarized control, in the case of Eurocentric ex-colonial states, South Caucasus states have to contend with neoliberal economic and political policies that keep their populations indebted to national and international financial institutions as a result of structural adjustment policies.

Within the Georgian context the "Other", which is perceived to constitute a threat to the Georgian nation is the Russian "other". Nationalist narratives are widespread throughout Georgia and these narratives include not only Russians as "other" but any other minority groups that live within the borders of Georgia. Similarly, nationalist narratives are present in both the Armenian and Azerbaijani contexts and in both nation-states the "other" not only constitutes the "enemy" across the conflict divide, but also the "enemy" or perceived threat from within own borders. Within the militarized contexts of these nations, nationalism becomes not only about defining and preserving identity along ethnic lines, but also along gender, sexuality, religious beliefs, and class lines. Any deviation from the hegemonic national identity of each context threatens the "security" of said nation and casts all non-conforming people as "enemies" or "traitors" of that nation. Among these groups are women, LGBTQI persons, religious minorities, poor people, and those with a lower status within society such as sex workers, homeless people, the displaced, people with disabilities, and so on.

To be a woman in such a context is to carry the double burden of motherhood and victimization as can be seen through the nation-army concept adopted by the Armenian government in 2017, which promotes "closer integration of Armenia's military and society" (Abrahamyan 2017). Within this context, women are cast as

weak and victims in need of protection from men. Thereby, women are expected to birth male soldiers, who will be able to "protect" them, while those same men serve the patriarchal system, which encourages domination over "others", especially women. Women in Georgia and Azerbaijan are also expected to take on similar gender roles of all-sacrificing mothers, submissive wives, and victims in need of protection from so-called external forces. In the past decade of increased liberalization in Georgia and to a significant degree in Armenia and Azerbaijan, "European values" get cast as the "external forces" which threaten the "traditional values" of the South Caucasus societies. Traditional values here imply heteronormative, patriarchal, and nationalistic norms, which often rely on women taking on and maintaining acceptable feminine gender roles in relation to men, family structures, and the state apparatus. In many ways, the gender roles expected of women living in the South Caucasus are similar across the board. Nayereh Tohidi writes of the characteristics attributed to an ideal Azerbaijani woman, which include "'honor (namoos)'; feminine shame (haya); chastity and modesty/prudery (ismat); virginity before marriage; beauty and tact; high education (especially in urban areas); self-sacrificing motherhood; docility and subservience towards her husband; home-making skills; endurance; ethnic loyalty; and endogamy" (Tohidi 1996). Most of these attributes are also relevant for women living in Armenia and Georgia today, especially those living in the regions and peripheries to the capital. These gender norms manifest through limitations on women's lives, which escalate to violence against women if any attempt to break free from those limitations is made.

Since the early 1990s with the advent of violent conflicts that swept the South Caucasus, women have often been at the forefront of peacebuilding. Some of the roles they have taken on include "organizing protests such as the Women's Peace Train in Georgia, to negotiating prisoner-of-war exchanges on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border, [through which] they demonstrated that the politics of war and peace was not an exclusively masculine domain" (Walsh 2015). Since then, women have also been involved within a number of peacebuilding efforts mainly through civil society efforts with a clear barrier, however, to any meaningful participation at the political level of negotiations. As a strategy to break through this barrier, women's organizations in the region have utilized international agreements around the Women, Peace and Security agenda and rallied for the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women's participation in peace processes. Despite the importance of this resolution to balance the heavily male-dominated elite level of political decision making with regards to the conflicts in the South Caucasus, criticism over how the resolution is

being militarized is important to consider. Anna Nikoghosyan argues that the resolution associates "gender with 'women in need of protection'" for which the military is a necessary institution to uphold, perpetuating gender stereotypes based on patriarchal notions of gender (Nikoghosyan 2017). Furthermore, the focus for implementing the resolution has centered primarily on "the increase of women's inclusion into the security sector and armed forces in the name of women's 'participation' in post-conflict reconstruction", which merely adds women to an already militarized, masculinist, and patriarchal institution that reproduces violence against women and other sectors within society (Nikoghosyan 2017).

The notion that simply adding women to heavily masculinized institutions will somehow alter those institutions to become more women-friendly or even feminist is based on sexist beliefs about women as a singular category capable of softening the edges of harsh masculine structures. Referring to the Georgian context, Eka Agdgomelashvili states that when she "analyzed the pre-election rhetoric of female politicians [...she] concluded that none of these women were interested in representing women as a social group" (Heinrich Böll Foundation 2011). Indeed, it is not surprising that "when a woman is let in by the men who control the political elite it is usually precisely because that woman has learned the lessons of masculinized political behavior well enough not to threaten male political privilege" (Enloe 1989). To challenge such masculinized political behavior, if not the patriarchal systems as a whole, is to open oneself up for a set of obstacles and challenges that can potentially threaten one's livelihood and/or ability to continue living safely in the South Caucasus. As mentioned by Gohar Shahnazaryan from a well-known women's NGOs in Armenia, obstacles arise "in large part because we are always positioning ourselves as feminists, which automatically makes us 'radical' and 'women who are challenging the traditional patriarchal family'" (Shahnazaryan 2011). Indeed, the organization and women human rights defenders from this particular organization actively challenging gender norms and patriarchal structures in Armenia have been subject to smear campaigns, threats to their lives and loved ones, and general violent backlash. In Azerbaijan, the well-known case of female journalist Khadija Ismayilova is a case in point with regards to how challenging corrupt patriarchal states can lead to public shaming and imprisonment.

Faced with the challenge of increased militarization in Armenia and Azerbaijan, a growing nationalist movement in Georgia and the region as a whole, as well as violent backlash when challenging gender norms and patriarchal values, women's organizations, groups, and activists keep resisting and continue advocating for gender democracy, peace, and feminist justice in the South Caucasus. The next and

last section highlights some of the ways this is done, including the challenges faced, and the ways in which these challenges are overcome.

Key Findings and Analysis of In-Depth Interviews

Overview of the Work Focus, Visions, and Methods

In total 16 organizations and groups in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan have been interviewed, all of which work through NGO structures. Only one group working outside of the NGO structure was interviewed in Armenia, which is indicative of the predominance of professionalization and NGO-ization in the field of women's rights and peacebuilding in the region. Due to the limited number of organizations that combine women and peace in their work, most of the organizations that have been interviewed are based in the capital city of the respective country. One organization interviewed in Armenia is based in Gyumri while the rest work with women all over Armenia, including regions close to conflict divides. All of the interviewed organizations in Georgia have branches in the different regions of Georgia where their work is mainly concentrated, although their headquarters are in Tbilisi. All of the organizations interviewed in Azerbaijan are also based in the capital with some focusing on working with women in the regions.

In Georgia, the interviewed organizations work towards lobbying for peace on the political level, supporting the implementation of the UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan, economic and social empowerment of displaced women living near the conflict divides, providing different social services and aid, collecting and publishing the stories of women affected by conflicts, providing small grants for women's initiatives. In Armenia, the activities of the interviewed organizations and groups range from raising awareness about women's situation in conflict regions (particularly villages close to conflict divides and women living in Nagorno-Karabakh), to non-formal educational activities focused on building capacity for conflict transformation or resolution, conflict management, protection of human rights, women's empowerment, gender equality and self-care, to conferences, public events, women's support groups, collection of oral histories, research and making films. In Azerbaijan, the interviewed organizations focus on human rights, sexual and reproductive health, women's participation in political decision making, advocating for the UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan, civic and peace education, trust building and dialogue, empowerment of young women, culture of peace, improving the lives of displaced women, democracy building, and conflict transformation or resolution.

The common thread that runs through the visions of all interviewed organizations and groups is the social, economic, and political empowerment of women and marginalized groups from the grassroots to the level of government. On the grassroots level, several organizations in all three contexts use non-formal education, economic empowerment programs, and service provision for the attainment of the abovementioned vision. The theory of change here is that through raising the awareness of women about their human rights, gender equality, and harmful stereotypes, in addition to providing them with opportunities and access to resources for their lives to become more livable, women on the margins will rise up to levels of decision making for the benefit of their own and their community members' lives. On the civil society level, several organizations in all three contexts employ people to people methods and confidence building for preparing young people, women, and conflict-affected groups for dialogue meetings across conflict divides. This is also a way to build capacity for the women that learn confidence building skills and practice them with women across the conflict divide to advocate for the inclusion of these women in peace processes at higher levels. Several organizations based in all three contexts also have a direct focus on advocacy at the higher level to push for women's participation in peace processes.

Key Values in Theory and in Practice

In order to draw out the values that the interviewed organizations hold with regards to their work with women and peace, we first focused on the values that the organizations claim to have and the ways in which they practice them within their work. There were many values that were repeated by organizations both within country contexts as well as across contexts. Here we underline the main values that were expressed along all three contexts.

Inclusion, especially of marginalized groups, for the purpose of attaining sustainable peace was mentioned by several organizations in all contexts. This value encompasses broad processes of inclusion at all levels, including advocating for bringing more women and groups directly affected by the issues at hand to decision-making processes. Here a connection can be made with representation and participation. In this sense, inclusion is not only about adding marginalized groups to the mix but ensuring that they are given the space to actively take part and represent themselves as was mentioned by one Georgian organization with regards to rural women. The conviction that someone with more institutional privilege and access cannot speak for those whom she claims to represent was quite strong for this particular interviewee. Meaningful participation through inclusion as a value was mentioned by several other organizations across the three contexts,

yet the reality of structures such as NGOs, which plan and implement projects on behalf of beneficiaries creates a dilemma for truly practicing inclusion in non-hierarchical ways. After all, simply by saying "inclusion", a power relation is created where certain people in positions of power "include" those who seem to have been left out. Of course, in many cases the organizations that value inclusion understand the limitations of this concept in practice and choose to find the best ways to ensure that the voices of those who do not have institutional power can reach higher levels. As mentioned by one Georgian organization: "We take the ideas which our colleagues from the regions have, and we help them with advocating these ideas on the central governmental level or in local government".

A connection with inclusivity and tolerance is also made in our analysis. Many of the organizations mentioned the tolerance for people's differences as a key value for the shaping of democratic and inclusive processes. Tolerance also ties in to the value of anti-discrimination, which holds gender balance and equality at high regard. Although this value is meaningful and useful in the South Caucasus context, tolerance can also come at a cost for those whom society generally regards as in need of tolerating at best and intolerable at worst. A case in point was made by one of the interviewed Armenian organizations. By including diverse groups of people, the organization creates opportunities for others to learn more, interact with the "other" and better understand and acknowledge the other's presence in the common context, and thereby creates more tolerance for difference. The issue with this approach is evident in the way it was framed – in a sense giving a chance to the dominant group to become exposed to the marginalized group (for example, meeting a minority group, such as LGBTQI people helps the dominant group (perceived to be the majority) to tolerate the minority group). This is problematic from a power perspective: Who is tolerating who? Who has the power to tolerate who? There is a fine line here of "including" the "other" for the sake of the "dominant group" to learn, but it does not center those at the margins. This is an important dilemma to ponder for organizations and groups that wish to be inclusive in a truly empowering way. If the marginalized group is in the room to shift the dialogue from business as usual, especially when it comes to peace processes, to a transformative engagement, then their inclusion must be based on a transparent understanding of power relations and actions for collective power and resource sharing.

Feminist values were mentioned by several organizations, but not all organizations identified as feminist and/or approached the term in a welcoming manner. We link this mainly to two things: first, the term "feminist" is often misunderstood and holds stigmas of "man-hating" or "lesbianism", and as such, feminism can be

perceived as too "Western" or too "radical" for the context of the South Caucasus. To identify oneself as feminist is to challenge these stigmas, which can be difficult to do if you are invested in gaining institutional power in a patriarchal society. Secondly, there is a general lack of information and/or spread of misinformation surrounding this term, and more awareness is necessary for those people who certainly practice feminist values to feel empowered in claiming the term for themselves. Of those organizations in all three contexts that identified with feminist values, the key points mentioned were rejection of violence, non-violence, as well as anti-militarism. Rejection of violence includes rejection of hate speech, discrimination, and harmful stereotypes. Several organizations mentioned that by non-violence they mean a non-violent resolution of the conflicts in the region, particularly the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. At least two organizations mentioned the principle or value of "Do No Harm", which falls under the category of non-violence as a method of relating to others as well as a value in the process of planning, implementing, following up, and carrying out all activities, projects, and programs.

The one key value, which had contradictory responses was the value of anti-militarism. In all three contexts, strong beliefs about the rejection of militarization were mentioned by several organizations. However, it was the perspectives of those interviewees who struggled with anti-militarism that give the most insight into the weight of the context on women's imaginaries regarding war and peace. Some organizations tie in human security with anti-militarization as in the case of one Georgian organization with the following analysis: "Conflict brings threat to a person's well-being and mental health and creates risks for each generation of the family – disadaptation, dysfunction risks, on all levels". A strong conviction that in an ideal world, we would not need armies was expressed by another Georgian interviewee who perceived the "involvement of women in the army as ridiculous". Yet another Georgian interviewee who expressed a similar opinion regarding opposition to the army and to war, went on to state that the option should be available to enter the armed forces if someone has the wish to do so. Here the value of anti-discrimination is relevant to mention, because from the perspective of gender equality, of course, women should have equal access to any and all institutions as do men. But if we go along this line of thought, we get tricked into accepting militaries as a given and as the norm, thereby conveniently failing to criticize the military institution from a feminist perspective as one that functions to—quite frankly—produce violence in the world. As one of the Armenian interviewees with a more critical position on the matter states: "The question is

about the whole chaotic cycle of violence, which is the reality we live in – and that cycle of violence is where women always suffer as a result".

It is also interesting to see similar patterns of speaking about war and anti-militarism that women's organizations across the Armenian and Azerbaijani context have. In two interviews – one with an Azerbaijani interviewee and another with an Armenian interviewee – both speakers used a similar method of speaking out against war and militarism, while at the same time ensuring that their political positions regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which reflected the accepted state positions of each country, was made known. As such their positions accepted war as the norm, while their speech expressed a desire for an end to the war. Given the contexts of the two countries, these contradictions can be understood as tactics for surviving as civil society organizations in militarized and patriarchal societies. This is not to say that interviewees responding in this way have not been affected by socialization in contexts of nationalist, militarist, and patriarchal reality and also do, in fact, hold these beliefs that normalize war and militarism. At the same time, however, given the increasingly shrinking space for civil society to act in more critical ways within the Azerbaijani context and given the increasing militarization and nationalism developing in Armenia, especially since 2016, the space for critical action, much less critical reflection is often evaded for the sake of security. This is alarming given the urgency of how the unresolved conflicts in the region continue to affect people's lives in general, but especially people living in regions close to conflict divides, the displaced, civilians living in the conflict zones, women, and other marginalized groups. And when considering the cost of war, the political and economic implications, as well as the deepening hatred across ethnically-framed lines, the last thing any civil society and/or group working toward social justice should do is contribute to maintaining the violent systems that profit from keeping populations living in fear and scarcity.

Understanding of Patriarchal Values and Traditional Gender Roles

For the most part, the organizations interviewed acknowledged and had a critical analysis with regards to gender norms and patriarchal values within their contexts. A general agreement can be made among these organizations that gender norms are composed of stereotypes that require of women to be mothers, wives, caregivers, and the "weaker sex", so to speak. For men, the requirements are different and link to expectations of men to be breadwinners, protectors, decision makers, and the "stronger sex". When tying these expectations to the realities, which arise in conflict and/or post-conflict contexts, we see that women often take

on traditionally "male" roles such as becoming the breadwinners in the family due to either the men serving in the military, having died in combat, and/or going abroad in search of economic opportunities. In all three contexts, this is spoken of as a negative development, because it puts an extra burden on women to not only continue with their traditional gender roles, but to uphold male gender roles as well. In Azerbaijan, the context with regards to men leaving their families to migrate abroad for work is the same as in Armenia. And the burden is the same for women to take on a double role, with "the most disadvantaged groups ... [being] rural women, second²¹ wives and displaced women" (Tohidi 1996).

Tying this to the question of patriarchy, one of the organizations interviewed in Armenia asked a question when reflecting on patriarchal norms in her context: "How to understand patriarchy in our society if most men don't have jobs? What traditional Armenian family or relation are we speaking about if the household's fathers are outside of the country for 11 months for work?" For this particular interviewee, the question of gender roles and patriarchal values translated to a kind of reality which prevails for many women in smaller cities, towns, and villages where women have to deal with the burden of additional work by taking on men's expected roles. This, in turn, adds an additional burden for women who stray from the expected gender role ascribed to them as women and thereby, are looked down on by society as losing their feminine status. So, in a sense, they lose their "womanliness" in the absence of men to practice their "manliness", but without gaining any of the privileges that men have in their societies. Although this interviewee had reservations with regards to the term "gender" and whether or not it should be something to focus on, her perspective on patriarchal values and realities reflect a tension between a feminist narrative and an internalized patriarchal narrative of women's lived realities. This tension exists in several of the women interviewed across all three contexts who were weary of speaking about women's issues through a gender perspective or reflecting on patriarchy in a deeper way. Given the context of patriarchy and militarization, it comes as no surprise that women become instrumentalized in the continuation of their own oppression through denial of their experiences as women as being different from those of men. In a militarized context, it also becomes a project of upholding nationalism in the face of outside forces such as Russia and/or the West, which requires that women be in unity with their men, perhaps before (if ever) they

²¹ This does not refer to a legal phenomenon, but the informal practice of starting second families (Tohidi 1996).

should be in unity with other women, whether within their national borders or across conflict divides.

Yet, some of the thoughts expressed by these few interviewees in Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia resonated with one of the more critical positions held by another Armenian interviewee who expressed that "to separate into women and men or any division does not make sense". While many of the interviewees focused on a more liberal position by stating the importance of gender equality, the more critical perspectives made connections to gender, patriarchy, and the war system in a more holistic way. Referring to the war system, the critical Armenian interviewee expressed the view that women and children are always suffering as a result of the violence, but the lines of victim and violator are not always so clearly defined along gender divisions. And in fact, men who are kidnapped during conflict are also subject to rape. In a sense "everyone becomes a woman" during war, according to this interviewee. Of course, the interviewees who did not have such a deep reflection of this system merely defended the position that it is not about women or men, but about humans. Unfortunately, such a position denies the fact that women are disproportionately affected by violence and men have certain privileges that women do not have, which often makes it necessary to speak of women separately.

Deeper reflections were offered by some of the organizations interviewed regarding the connection to war and gender. Links were made between the expected gender roles of women and how women are often excluded from participating in peace processes. Differences in perspective with regards to causes and solutions were mainly along two frameworks – one being an essentialist view of gender and the other being a constructivist view. Some of the interviewed organizations strongly held the belief that women were either by their nature or socialization more peaceful and able to ameliorate conflict situations. Others held strongly to the belief that women could not be placed in a simple, clear-cut singular category and that women should not be expected to only be peaceful. As part of this conviction that women cannot be limited by traditional gender roles, one of the Azerbaijani interviewees expressed a strong view that women should not have to prove that they are good enough, skilled enough, and/or knowledgeable enough to be part of peace negotiations. Yet, the patriarchal context in which women work often reinforces underappreciation and doubt of women's capacities to be part of political processes by using lack of women's skills and expertise in negotiation and mediation as justification for their exclusion. This was reflected by one of the Georgian organizations interviewed who mentioned how the perception that a woman's place is not in peacebuilding is one of the ways in which patriarchal

structures attempt to limit women's entry and meaningful participation in peace processes. Interestingly enough, another organization working in Azerbaijan held a different perspective stating that "The Azerbaijani society has an ambiguous attitude to women, but there are definitely areas, where women's role is accepted, and peace activities is one of them". It is very likely that both the stereotype that women's place is not in peacebuilding and the opposing idea that women's place is, in fact in peacebuilding are informed by gender norms and traditional patriarchal values. In the one case, it is not acceptable for women to be part of peace processes because they are expected to be at home and uninvolved in politics. In the other case, it is acceptable for women to be part of peace processes because they are perceived as peaceful by virtue of their sex. In either case, women's roles are defined by limited and limiting beliefs with regards to women as a singular category and leave no room for the full potential of women with all their diversity to be expressed and taken into account.

To conceive of the complexity of gender and patriarchal values in conflict contexts is not an easy feat for many organizations working with women's rights. Yet across the board, all organizations had done their own thinking around these concepts, albeit the levels of their critical consciousness varied. Although in some of the interviews, the positions seemed not to dive deeply enough into the roots of violence, which define and produce both the gender system and the war system. All of the interviewed organizations more often than not were able to articulate in meaningful ways the issues that women faced in their contexts and connect those issues to at least one oppressive system. For some, it was the gender system, patriarchy, militarism; for others, it was the economic system, authoritarian governments, and/or the traditional family/community prevailing over women's lives. And many still connected a number of those systems in order to explain the intersecting oppressions women face in militarized contexts. Regardless of whether they named the pressures and limitations ruling over women's lives in their respective contexts as gender norms or patriarchal values, none of the organizations interviewed denied that women deal with specific issues that make life difficult in specific ways that are different from male realities. Unfortunately, the deeper links between patriarchy and militarism were made by a select few organizations interviewed.

Challenging Gender Norms and Patriarchal Values

There are two formats through which organizations challenge patriarchal values and gender norms in the work that they do. First of all, it is through the projects that they implement. And secondly, it is within the projects that they implement.

The first part refers to the kind of projects that organizations implement. For example, where non-formal educational projects are concerned, women and young people gain the language, knowledge, and tools with which to reflect, analyze, and act upon their own lives, their families, friends, and decision makers. With oral history projects, women's stories of difficulties in their lives due to limiting patriarchal structures gain visibility and voice in society, thereby both attracting others with similar stories and influencing those with the power to change narratives, realities, and actions that continue to perpetuate violence against women and other marginalized groups. Some of the work that organizations do, where they bring women from across conflict divides, aim to challenge the isolation of women from other women based on differences in ethnicity or religion. Through projects focused on advocacy, for example with UNSCR 1325, organizations challenge the local, national, and international structures to accommodate women affected by conflict at all levels where decisions are being made for the resolution of conflicts and the future of peace. Yet, the question of how exactly this will challenge the actual structures, spaces, and formats where and through which decisions are made is not clear. In fact, there seems to be an underlying assumption that women, by virtue of being women, will bring something different to the table. Some of the ways that organizations, especially in Georgia have worked with this is to focus on the human security element, which encompasses daily concerns for basic needs and rights of people, especially women affected by conflict. In dialogue meetings with Armenian and Azerbaijani organizations, the need for agreeing on common issues and a common agenda is also acknowledged if or when the space opens up for women to sit around the negotiating table where they would be able to speak in a unified voice.

Although there is a lot of work being done with UNSCR 1325, which focuses primarily on the inclusion and meaningful participation of women in negotiation processes, some, although very few, of the organizations interviewed expressed the view that women should also be able to enter the military according to UNSCR 1325 demands. In this sense, certain patriarchal values are being reproduced, which view military structures and the war system as inevitable and ascribe masculine notions of strength to processes for achieving peace. Yet as was mentioned in the theory section of this paper, war, violence, and weapons are a significant factor in masculine identity and crucial for the continued functioning of patriarchy, a system under which women are devalued at best and eliminated at worst. If women are to enter military institutions and contribute to the perpetuation of war, their role will be merely supporting masculine ways of being for the benefit of patriarchy, which will continue to oppress women as well as men.

The way in which projects are implemented is equally important, if not more important to challenging patriarchal values and gender norms in the work that women's organizations do. This brings us to our second point regarding the methods that women's organizations employ to challenge gender norms and patriarchal values when implementing projects and furthering the work they do for women and peace in the South Caucasus. Many of the organizations in all three contexts that work with young women in regions, in areas close to conflict divides, and with displaced communities must contend with the prevalence of both the patriarchy of the home or village/community and/or the internalization of patriarchy within the young women themselves. One of the Armenian interviewees spoke of the difficulty with which she gets young women to attend seminars, workshops, and trainings: "They will think thousands of times whether to go somewhere or not. They question themselves on whether a good girl would do that or not. This is the question they have to consider with every choice they make". The way this particular organization deals with this difficulty is by reassuring the young women, for example by giving all details about the hotel, venue, and transportation, so they can feel safe to attend events. Once they actually come, the organization has a tactic of slowly exposing them to critical thought regarding human rights, women's rights, peace and conflict in order to draw them out of their comfort zones, so they can begin to question norms in their own lives.

In many cases, organizations working with particular themes of peace, women, security, etc. will not be able to speak about women's issues and peace right away when they go into a community. This is the case with all three contexts, especially with regards to rural areas. In these cases, organizations will start off by speaking about human rights as a starting point. In one case, an Azerbaijani organization states: "We use different strategies to make our target group understand their inner side – helping them to start with their personal transformation process first instead of blaming the 'other side'". As such, the core concept of conflict and its transformation or resolution are provided using non-formal education methods based on a human rights approach. Organizations create safe and supportive spaces for young women especially to reflect and think critically around the issues prevalent in their own lives. The conversations that get facilitated by organizations with a feminist approach will be geared toward questioning gender norms, femininity, masculinity, and the ways in which patriarchal values have become internalized. If the organization has made the connections to war and militarism, these will also be slowly presented as additional systems of oppression in addition to gender and patriarchy.

One of the other ways through which organizations challenge gender norms and patriarchal values is through setting examples of how the world can be approached and therefore organized differently. For several organizations, sharing of personal experiences whether of those organizing discussions, oral history projects, trainings or various other events or of those attending those events was an important way to set an example. Particularly when challenging militarism, one Armenian organization mentioned that they encouraged concrete actions in daily life, for example not using militaristic language, paying attention to ways in which people act, participate, or dress in militaristic modes of expression, and questioning media that promotes militarism. Organizations that work with personal stories of women also work with setting agreed upon ground rules and through this create safe spaces of confidentiality, which in turn builds and strengthens trust. In such an environment, women feel freer to open up, share their experiences, and exchange struggles, which directly impacts their sense of empowerment in a patriarchal society.

Although there are many ways through which the women's organizations that we interviewed challenge gender norms and patriarchal values, there are also ways in which these are being reproduced. We could not draw on concrete actions through which these organizations reproduce gender norms and patriarchal values, and we can only rely on assumptions regarding the conceptualization of gender, patriarchy, and militarism that some of these organizations hold. As such, we can say that through the act of not placing significance on gender, patriarchy and militarism as systems of oppression for women, the few organizations with these views both cannot notice or criticize and cannot act upon oppressive behaviors that are of a patriarchal and militaristic nature in the work that they do. Furthermore, some, albeit few of the organizations hold on to the belief that war is inevitable, militarism is necessary, and women must be involved in the war system as a whole. This way of thinking and thereby working within the sphere of women's rights and peacebuilding can only benefit the patriarchal and militaristic systems, which keep women in fear, oppressed, and violated in their own homes, workplaces, and streets, in political, economic, and various other fields.

Challenges to Challenging Gender Norms and Patriarchal Values

The different challenges and limitations that women's organizations face in their work kept coming up throughout the interviews and were often connected to the difficult contexts that these organizations work in. Often limitations to funding and restrictive donor criteria, as well as the wider limitations that states place on civil

society organizations, especially in Azerbaijan, merely exacerbate the challenges that organizations have when working to challenge gender norms and patriarchal values in their societies. In Georgia, for example where there is a national action plan for UNSCR 1325, the challenge often is that the implementation process is flawed and incomplete. To add another layer to this challenge, it is generally the case that connections, which were made within civil society across conflict divides, have been difficult to reestablish after the August 2008 war. And due to decreased funding, there are less and less opportunities to talk to one another across the conflict divide. Furthermore, on the civil society level there is no concrete strategy for peacebuilding, which is mainly due to having little access to these processes. Access to the peace processes, especially on the political level, is limited for women across all three South Caucasus contexts mainly due to the continued mentality about women's role in such processes, which perceives women's voices as insignificant and insufficient, keeping the process a rather male-dominated one. In cases when women do take up positions in politics and spaces of decision making, they are a minority and therefore unable to influence political processes for the benefit of the women's agenda of human security, peace, and justice. Not surprisingly, in these cases, women are "pushed to play the men's game", as was mentioned by one Georgian interviewee, and, as a result, they lose the values that are aligned with peace and feminism. In the case of Azerbaijan, as stated by one interviewee, "because of lack of democracy [there is an even] weaker influence of civil actors on official politics".

Another challenge faced by women's organizations in the South Caucasus regards the insecurity and low confidence of women to partake in any processes outside of the home and their expected gender roles. Here there is both the issue of actual security as well as generations of being told women are not good enough, not knowledgeable enough, not experienced or skilled enough to be part of any decision-making processes that can affect their lives. This is a typical patriarchal mechanism, which when brought to the family level translates to the parents, often the father as the dominant figure, deciding on behalf of the children, often the daughter, what she should say or do in her life. For organizations that work to bring young women outside of their usual environments into spaces where they can discuss issues pertaining to their lives, the challenge is not only the external limitations placed by families and society, not allowing these young women to attend, but also the internal processes taking place within the young women themselves that make them question their value, worth, and importance in being part of alternative learning environments. Often this can translate to women not even getting to the part of filling out applications for different programs that

organizations aim to carry out. But even when women do come to workshops, trainings, and other kinds of events, when it comes to the part of taking initiative, many women hesitate by thinking that they either cannot do something or that it is not their place to act. This was a challenge mentioned by organizations that work with small grants, especially with economic development programs where women have fears around getting it wrong, making mistakes, and failing to live up to expectations. Often, these organizations encourage women to take initiative regardless of their fears, and by actually taking initiative, women become empowered to see the achievements they reach and the impact they have in their communities.

Conclusion

Critical feminist theory posits the existence of multiple feminisms, often by pointing to the fact that the category of woman itself is non-homogenous, thereby feminism is as diverse as women themselves. Referring to identity, Judith Butler argues that categories "are never merely descriptive, but always normative, and as such, exclusionary" (Butler 1992). Throughout this paper, we acknowledge the existence of multiple perspectives regarding gender and patriarchy held by the different women's organizations and groups working toward peace, conflict transformation or resolution, and women's rights in the South Caucasus. All perspectives were important in getting a clear picture of the ways in which women's organizations working for women's rights, peace, and conflict transformation or resolution conceptualize gender norms and patriarchal values, in addition to the ways in which they face these. We saw that a critical few organizations interviewed held firm values with regards to rejection of violence and patriarchy. These were the organizations that also held critical views with regards to UNSCR 1325 and inclusion of women in the security apparatus as mere pawns for the continued functioning of war and patriarchy as business as usual. Yet, even those organizations that did not have this critical approach had some level of analysis of and worked with violence as it pertains to various structures affecting women negatively. For these organizations, it was interesting to see that while they challenged some facets of the manifestations of patriarchal and gendered violence, they still held somewhat nationalistic views, which in turn justified militarism and war as a means of defense. In this sense, some components of patriarchy are reproduced in the thinking of these organizations and can pose a challenge to other organizations working to challenge patriarchal structures within a number of spheres.

For one, given the limited number of women's NGOs in the region, this poses a challenge to collaborating for the women, peace, and security agenda in a unified manner. Perhaps ultimately, some common causes can be identified, while areas of disagreement can be dealt with separately. But additionally, this can mean that more women's voices become co-opted by the patriarchal, nationalistic, and militaristic systems currently operating and growing in the region. And given that in order to have any legitimacy even as a civil society organization in these three contexts is dependent on the institutional capital and the connections to donors, government officials, and international actors that organizations have, voices of women with unpopular demands for the eradication of war, weapons provisions, feminist peace and justice, and so on become even more marginalized, if not completely silenced. If structures such as patriarchy, the war system and gender are built in such a way so as to keep reproducing themselves within the state, society, politics, economy, and institutions, how can a transformation take place through the work that NGOs do? Perhaps one suggestion offered by an interviewee can get us to think in a more radical feminist direction: we must continue to problematize, question, and think critically. Let us also consider rejecting all authority.

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Democracy Today

Women's Association for Rational Development

Women in Black Armenia

Women's Information Center

Women in Development

Women's Resource Center

Azerbaijan National Committee of Helsinki Citizen's Assembly

Charity Humanitarian Centre "Abkhazeti"

Advice Centre for Women "Sakhli"

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TASO Foundation

De Collective

Women Problems Research Union – Women's Institute

Center for National and International Studies

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Working Through the Past in the Shadow of the Present: The Cases of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey

Nisan Alici, Arpi Grigoryan, Elchin Karimov²²

Drawing upon the increasing influence and importance of civil society in a country's approach to Transitional Justice (TJ), this paper explores the possibilities, challenges, and limits that civil society might face in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey with regards to TJ for dealing with the past in conflict contexts internally and externally. The authors of the paper believe that as a powerful actor of human rights advocacy and support to victims and survivors of conflict, the civil societies' competence and readiness for TJ is a key factor for determining the efficiency of TJ. From this point of view, the authors are analyzing whether the civil society in these three countries has the competence and willingness to lead TJ that can push the state to take actions and eventually lead to a more comprehensive and meaningful TJ framework and process to be designed.

²² While as co-authors of this paper, we have worked with a shared conceptual framework and methodology and have developed recommendations together, Nisan Alici is the author of the section on Turkey, Arpi Grigoryan is the author of the section on Armenia, and Elchin Karimov is the author of the section on Azerbaijan.

Introduction

This paper analyzes the stances and perceptions of civil society actors which work on peace in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey regarding possible TJ processes for dealing with the violent past both internally as well as for the conflicts in the region. The objective of the paper is to do a mapping study on the views and approaches of the civil society in the region, with regards to their perceptions, knowledge, competence, experience, as well as visions, strategies, and recommendations on TJ processes. This will help us to see the opportunities, challenges, and limits for dealing with the past in the region and develop recommendations. This paper also sheds light on to what extent civil society can contribute to dealing with the past when there are not enough official attempts for justice, accountability, or peace.

Conceptual Framework

Transitional Justice, as a set of measures and mechanisms applied to deal with the abuses in a country's past, is usually employed during a clear and official transition period. This might either be a transition from dictatorship to democracy as it was in the Latin American countries or from conflict to peace as was the case in the post-Yugoslav space and South Africa. While state-led initiatives (such as trials and truth commissions) were initially the main TJ activities, a wide range of efforts (such as memory activism and community reconciliation work) have increasingly been employed by non-state actors, such as civil society organizations, groups, and initiatives, as well as human rights advocates, individual activists, and peacebuilding practitioners. The expansion of TJ from a narrower sense that was limited to legal actions to a peacebuilding function provided civil society with more space to get involved in TJ activities. The increased importance of concepts such as forgiveness, responsibility, reconciliation, and commemoration in the TJ field also allowed for more direct involvement of non-state actors. More and more attention to survivors and victims of the conflict is another factor that made this involvement possible (van der Merwe and Schkolne 2017). Civil society is now a crucial part of the efforts to deal with the past, either as a partner to the state or an enforcing actor. It can both take part in the official process with various roles and responsibilities and carry on its own non-official activities such as dialogue facilitation, peace education, data collection, advocacy, case monitoring, etc.

The involvement of civil society is important particularly because it can present a channel for those who are silenced and systematically excluded from political power. In parallel to this, especially when there is high political repression, civil society is usually the only safe space where the opposition voices can articulate their demands for political transition, dealing with the past, ending of violent

conflict through a human rights discourse (van der Merwe and Schkolne 2017). Having said that, we acknowledge that civil society itself might be a target of the state. Specifically, when there is a lack of political will for transition, vocalizing the demand for peace is criminalized itself and conducting peace-related activism becomes an unsafe practice. However, the most powerful influence of civil society is derived from its potential to engage the marginalized groups of the society, who are generally deprived from their rights to politics, in TJ processes as direct agents of peace. As it is convincingly argued, TJ measures and mechanisms that fail to adequately acknowledge victims' experiences and needs will rarely satisfy victims (Gready and Robins 2017). In parallel to this argument and as the Colombian peace process shows, civil society organizations or initiatives that are working closely with victims are powerful agents in ensuring the inclusion of the demands of victims into the political agenda when the official peace process starts (Daşlı, Alıcı and Poch Figueras 2018).

Drawing upon the increasing influence and importance of civil society in a country's approach to TJ, this paper explores the possibilities, challenges, and limits that civil society might face in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey with regards to TJ. As a powerful actor of human rights advocacy and support to victims and survivors of conflict, we believe that its competence and readiness for TJ is a key factor for determining the efficiency of TJ in those countries. Previously TJ processes tended to be managed in the absence of a satisfying consultation with the victims or the engagement of the general public. It is civil society actors who put serious efforts to engage the public in discussions about TJ and managed to locate them as actors of transition in recent TJ processes. As it was most recently demonstrated in the Colombian peace process, the more engaged and familiar civil society is with the TJ process, the more comprehensive and meaningful the process is. Having direct and local contacts with victims and survivors, civil society might manage to channel the demands and expectations of those who were actually affected by the conflict and ensure that the TJ measures and mechanisms are satisfying these demands and expectation. From this point of view, we are analyzing whether the civil society in these three countries has the competence and willingness to lead TJ that can push the state to take actions and eventually lead to a more comprehensive and meaningful TJ framework and process to be designed.

As neither Azerbaijan nor Turkey are experiencing or considering an official transition period, and the prospects of the current transitional period in Armenia do not concern the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, our paper also examines the role of civil society in TJ efforts in the absence of a meaningful state involvement. The tools and methods that are chosen for TJ activities by civil society often depend on the space that is available to them and the prevalent social and political stance towards

peace. This relates to the still-evolving literature on TJ in ongoing conflict. As Engstrom argues, the attempts to deal with a violent past after a transition from war to peace or from an authoritarian regime to a democratic one is being replaced by the attempts to seek for accountability for atrocities even before the armed conflict is resolved by a political settlement (Engstrom 2011). It is argued that the blurred lines between peace and conflict in the contemporary conflicts influence TJ as well, which has been increasingly used when the transition is unclear, fragile, or even non-existent (van Nievelet 2016). One of the recent cases in which TJ was undertaken in the middle of armed conflict is Colombia (Alcalá and Uribe 2016).

Mainstream TJ literature used to focus on institutions, top-down state interventions, and law, which puts civil society in a supportive position to official TJ processes (Gready and Robins 2017). We are aiming to shed light on the opportunities that might rise when civil society is leading such a transition without waiting for an official process to start (Grigoryan, et al. 2017). As referred to above, the Colombian peace process is a powerful example in which TJ measures were taken without a broader peacebuilding framework and eventually turned into a comprehensive and detailed TJ process (van Nievelet 2016). It exhibits that several TJ measures such as commemoration practices; demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration programs; compensation for victims have the potential to facilitate the ending of violent conflict by transforming the social setting. This paper perceives the civil society as a powerful and effective actor which might itself facilitate the beginning of a TJ process. In this context, we are analyzing whether there is a chance for civil society to pioneer such a process in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey, and what might be done or done better to increase the possibilities. An important part of our analysis therefore focuses on how and to which extent the political and social circumstances influence the participation of civil society.

Given the current social and political settings in the three countries at stake, the key questions of interest for our analysis lie as follows: 1) When there is no political process or willingness to meaningfully address the past atrocities, how much can the civil society contribute to dealing with the past within a TJ framework? 2) How much do the given social and political limitations of the countries affect the perceptions and visions of civil society actors in terms of taking initiative to deal with the past? 3) Does the civil society in these three countries have competence and preparedness in terms of knowledge and expertise needed for implementing TJ mechanisms?

How Can Civil Society Participate in a TJ Process?

According to what literature and practice demonstrate, civil society might engage with TJ with different agendas, such as human rights, the rule of law, healing, reconciliation, forgiveness, truth-telling (van der Merwe and Schkolne 2017). Backer defines the main roles that civil society organizations and initiatives might play at different stages and conditions of TJ processes as follows: "data collection and monitoring; representation and advocacy; collaboration, facilitation and consultation; service delivery and intervention; acknowledgment and compensation; parallel or substitute authority; research and education" (Backer 2003). In parallel to this, van der Merwe and Schkolne outline eight types of roles some of which are very similar to Backer's classification: "mobilizing action; targeted advocacy; monitoring and transparency; official support; public engagement; service provision and victim support; peace building, reconciliation and development; and truth telling, commemoration and memorialization" (van der Merwe and Schkolne 2017, 229). They highlight that certain roles are applicable and more valid at specific stages and under different conditions. In addition to this, these roles might also depend on the ideological background of the organizations as well as the type of relationships with the state.

Within the scope of our paper, it is important to understand which of these roles can realistically be undertaken by civil society when there is no official TJ process. Although all of these roles might be undertaken in different phases in changing levels, some of them are most efficient if civil society has a limited space of activities and there is not enough room for collaborating with official bodies. Data collection and research seem like the most obvious instruments for civil society given the political challenges they may face in the three countries. On the contrary, collaboration, facilitation, and consultation is directly related to how willing the state is to cooperate with civil society in a TJ era and requires at least a minimum state involvement. Service delivery and intervention, on the other hand, might be conducted regardless of an official process as it may take the form of psycho-social support for victims and survivors of the conflict.

Advocacy and memory work are other two important types of work that can be undertaken by civil society regardless of an official peace and TJ process. Serbia is a good example of memory work by civil society actors. For instance, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights organizes the Days of Sarajevo Festival in Belgrade with the purpose of commemorating the Siege of Sarajevo as an act against institutional silence and denial. Although the war ended 20 years ago, state denial of the past human rights violations and atrocities is still ongoing in Serbia. To challenge the official discourse and to publicly acknowledge the pain of the victims,

civil society actors play a significant role especially with commemorative practices (Fridman 2011). The Humanitarian Law Center is another organization that campaigns for TJ and conducts memory work. One of the projects of the Center is the Batajnica Memorial Initiative which aims to reveal the truth about and commemorate the 800 victims that are buried in the mass grave in Batajnica. These are only a few examples of how civil society actors might advocate for dealing with the past and TJ with different tools and methods and undertake activities without an official process.

Whether the civil society can contribute to TJ without an apparent state involvement is an important discussion because of the very nature of TJ itself. Van der Merwe and Schkolne argue that civil society might take two main positions: 1) engagement with the state and 2) engagement in processes where state involvement is low (van der Merwe and Schkolne 2017). Alongside many measures and mechanisms that might be used, trials and reparations remain the main tools to deliver justice, and these are also the ones that require a clear state involvement. Apart from the official character of these tools, in situations where the state officers, military personnel, police forces, and politicians are perpetrators themselves, civil society might only take action within certain boundaries. Crocker addresses the risk of "absolutizing civil society as the new source of salvation" and argues that civil society should not replace the state actors (Crocker 1998, 508). Our paper also acknowledges such limits and the irreplaceability of the state by civil society; yet it aims to promote a broad range of activities and roles that civil society can take up.

Methodology

Based on our theoretical approach, our understanding of civil society is not limited to registered and structured civil society organizations. We are also interested in 'non-traditional' civil society actors such as initiatives and groups who are closer to new social movements. Although most of the activities and activism in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey is conducted by registered organizations, our perspective also includes individuals who have taken part in different initiatives and efforts. Another important thing that we need to keep in mind is that each organization we interviewed has a different structure and a different method of work. While some organizations have employed members, others are mainly based on voluntary work. This naturally affects the type of work done by each organization as well as their organizational capacity. In addition to this, individuals who have been effectively engaged in civil society work for a long time but are not necessarily affiliated with an organization are also among our respondents. We chose the organizations and individuals based on their background in peace-related and rights-based work in their respective countries. In each country, we conducted five

semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Below is the list of the organizations and individuals who we conducted interviews with.

Armenia

1. Helsinki Citizens' Assembly – Vanadzor (*Հելսինկյանքաղաքացիականասամբլեայի Վանաձորի գրասենյակ*)
2. Peace Dialogue (*Խաղաղության երկխոսություն*)
3. Society Without Violence (*Հասարակություն առանց բռնության*)
4. Armenian Institute for International and Security Affairs (AIISA, *Միջազգային և անվտանգության հարցերի հայկական ինստիտուտ*)
5. Civil Society Institute (*Քաղաքացիական հասարակության ինստիտուտ*)

Azerbaijan

1. Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Azerbaijan National Committee (*Helsinki Vətəndaş Assambleyasının Azərbaycan Milli Komitəsi*)
2. Humanitarian Research Public Union (*Humanitar Tədqiqatlar İctimai Birliyi*)
3. Zerdusht Alizade (*Zərdüşt Əlizadə*)
4. Kerim Kerimli (*Kərim Kərimli*)
5. Armenia-Azerbaijan Civil Peace Platform (*Ermənistan-Azərbaycan Vətəndaş Sülh Platforması*)

Turkey

1. Truth Justice Memory Center (*Hakikat Adalet Hafıza Merkezi*)
2. Karakutu
3. Human Rights Association (*İnsan Hakları Derneği*)
4. Rights Initiative (*Hak İnisiyatifi*)
5. Peace Foundation (*Bariş Vakfı*)

Country Cases

Armenia: A General Context

Since April 2018, a new political environment has been established in Armenia. With the resignation of the then Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan as a result of mass demonstrations, a new impetus has been given to justice and social change both by the state institutions and civil society of the country.

But before the success of the latest demand for state accountability, coined as the Velvet Revolution of Armenia, bad governance and abuse of power, political oppressions, and violations of human rights were not addressed properly, with the judiciary being dictated from above for political expediency. Even prior to this, the lack of addressing the consequences and legacies of past abuses during the Soviet

era had resulted in a shortage of accountability and state responsibility in Armenia since 1991. Leaving previous impunity unaddressed had not allowed for the development of a stable system and had given room to further violations (Helsinki Citizens' Assembly – Vanadzor 2018). Currently, faith in the judicial branch is growing, as the context and conditions where justice takes place have themselves changed – political dictation has waned, and no other requirements towards the judiciary exist besides constitutional norms (Helsinki Citizens' Assembly – Vanadzor 2018). Much discussion is taking place in official circles on creating a body for TJ during these days.

Against this internal backdrop, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, frozen since 1995 with occasional escalations, is still in need of measures and mechanisms that could lead to conflict transformation and reconciliation between the Armenian and Azerbaijani societies. The absence of political will by the leadership in the region has hindered efforts in prosecuting war criminals, truth seeking, and finding missing persons. However, civil society cooperation across the conflict divide continues even after the military escalation in April 2016, albeit with even greater caution as collaboration on confidence-building measures is often perceived in Armenia as endangering Azerbaijani partners (Helsinki Citizens' Assembly – Vanadzor 2018). A far deeper issue is the dehumanization of the 'other' and the isolation of the societies for almost 25 years, rendering them unprepared for political agreements, as well as an open discussion on peaceful coexistence and the acknowledgement of own wrongdoings.

In Turkish-Armenian relations there has been a precedent of expressing the need for a TJ mechanism, when the commission for the normalization of bilateral relations was established, bringing together intellectuals and experts from Armenia and Turkey before the Protocols of 2008. The commission applied to the Council of TJ to give an evaluation of historical events, and its assessment concluded that the event that took place resembles a genocide (International Center for Transitional Justice 2002, AIISA 2018). TJ mechanisms are necessary to move forward in Armenian-Turkish and Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, as the victims, the conflict-affected populations, and the mass violations of their human rights have been neglected.

This section attempts to explore where TJ should be applied in Armenia, with regards to internal political processes, such as developing tools for delivering justice to the victims of political oppressions since the beginning of the post-Soviet era, and in the external context, mostly in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, addressing the grievances of those who have suffered. Since the change of government in April 2018, much optimism has been recorded among the civil

society for the creation of more space for dialogue regarding these issues. In this section, we attempt to find out what particular mechanisms or measures can be undertaken in these circumstances as envisioned by the civil society actors in Armenia, specifically related to addressing violations of human rights under the previous regimes, and for moving forward with conflict transformation by addressing war crimes, missing persons, and the prospects of initiating joint commissions for truth seeking.

Links and Continuities Between Past Crimes

For the Armenian case, TJ in this paper was discussed in the context of the post-Soviet period, though going deeper into crimes during the Soviet era and since the creation of the first republic would have given a more complete assessment (Helsinki Citizens' Assembly – Vanadzor 2018).

The systemic lack of justice and external and internal conflicts that Armenia went through since independence can be linked to the failure of dealing with its Soviet past. When no assessment was given to events that took place under the Soviet regime before its collapse, the system was perpetuated in independent Armenia. Not allowing for an unbiased assessment of previous crimes led to their continuation and impunity in the new system, which continued for almost 27 years. Thus, when talking about truth and justice, this is done in the first place to uphold and commit to certain principles and values in one's own society. Only then can the issue be externalized effectively. Continuity of past crimes in the Armenian case is understood as applying to the last three decades, and the lack of delivering justice to the unpunished crimes internally has been interconnected with the lack of initiative to look into the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Helsinki Citizens' Assembly – Vanadzor 2018).

In fact, the issue of delivering justice and responding to conflict internally and externally are interrelated. The interconnectedness of internal injustices and lack of truth seeking in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict comes from the idea that justice cannot be selective or incomplete. A society prescribing to a governance by the rule of law internally cannot be selective or incomplete in the application of its concept of justice. Taking the case of the war veteran and ex-parliamentarian Manvel Grigoryan, who was arrested for the possession of arms in his house, consequently revealing the hoarding of items to be sent as support to soldiers during the escalation in April 2016 (Atanesian 2018), the interviewee from the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly – Vanadzor stated that it should not be assumed that the person who commits crimes against others will not do the same against his own nation (Helsinki Citizens' Assembly – Vanadzor 2018).

Civil Society Engaging in TJ

TJ for internal issues has recently been a topic of much discussion in the civil society circles in Armenia, but in the past efforts have been taken also for the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Armenian-Turkish relations.

In the relations with Azerbaijan and in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, TJ can be applied for the rejection of the right of self-determination of a group and the violation of the rights of all victims regardless of sides, and specific incidents, such as Khojalu²³ (AIISA 2018). TJ in this context is important because there are very different narratives about truth and the past, and not finding joint mechanisms to deal with the past leads to a vicious circle of a blame-game. Many projects in confidence building and networking have taken place between civil society actors across this conflict divide, and they are "not only raising the issues of the needs of the society, or these issues of establishing justice and dangers to it, but also bringing us to the field of solutions" (AIISA 2018).

Some of the interviewed civil society actors believe that starting processes on one side, done for its own benefit, can bring out a discussion on the other side (Peace Dialogue 2018, AIISA 2018, Civil Society Institute 2018). Although voices favoring truth-seeking measures and mechanisms can be heard on all sides, at this point, all the interviewed agreed that the current political expediency is not allowing any practical steps in joint TJ efforts. Yet maintaining relations with partners across the conflict divide even during and after the April 2016 is deemed very crucial. Peace Dialogue and the Armenian Institute for International and Security Affairs especially emphasized that it would be a step back in peacebuilding efforts to loose these connections, as it would take years to come to the same point later on (Peace Dialogue 2018, AIISA 2018).

The Civil Society Institute has collaborated on projects with Turkey (regarding the Genocide and normalization of relations) and Azerbaijan, in connection with reconciliation, breaking the ceasefire, connecting civil societies, human rights advocacy, engagement with the mothers of killed soldiers, seminars on conflict and war crimes, documentaries, etc. Peace Dialogue has a database for the disappeared and all soldiers that have died during service in the army since 1994. It also produces reports on the national strategy on the protection of human rights. With Azerbaijani partners, it has also cooperated on a project called "Women's Peace Agency", where the aim has been to engage female victims of war in dialogue. The Society Without Violence has been monitoring the process of the ratification and

²³ The name of the village is Khojaly in Azerbaijani.

enactment of the National Action Plan for the Implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 for Women, Peace and Security. Work with women, including those that have had personal losses or have been displaced, has also been assessed as critical for bringing more agency to them in a conflict and post-conflict context and for moving closer to transformation (Peace Dialogue 2018, Society Without Violence 2018).

All of the interviewed organizations have had cooperation with partners abroad for capacity building and more efficient peacebuilding, mainly with groups from Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, and Azerbaijan.

The Challenges of Civil Society

The challenges that the civil society actors face in Armenia are internal and external, and these two dimensions are often interconnected. The challenges sometimes concern all civil society work in general, and efforts and prospects in conflict transformation and TJ specifically are affected in as much as it is part of the larger work.

The representative of the Society Without Violence pointed out the lack of cooperation and exchange of expertise among civil society actors as an internal challenge and expressed the belief that more cooperation and sharing of practices could increase the impact of their efforts (Society Without Violence 2018). The interviewed civil society actors feel that internal structural challenges wane due to the recent developments in Armenia, and this has brought more freedom to all actors. However, they also stress that the conversation on a formal TJ process internally has not gone beyond political discussions yet, and no practical measures and mechanisms have been offered so far (AIISA 2018). Despite the removal of structural challenges, an important internal limitation remains that the public is largely unprepared for facing own wrongdoings, and the open discussion of currently tabooed topics can make civil society actors a target of backlash and the label of 'traitor'. And again, despite increasing freedom for civil society actors, some issues still do not see opening in terms of civil society-state cooperation. For example, concern has been raised that state institutions have been reluctant to give information on missing persons, hindering effective work.

Based on the interviews, we can conclude that the internal and external challenges in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are interconnected. Internally, the civil society actors now see much more space to maneuver, but they are still wary of the prospect that open cooperation with Azerbaijani counterparts can result in the latter's state oppression or political persecution. This has forced some organizations to reduce formal cooperation and limit it to meetings outside of the

region. There are opportunities for joint projects, but the previous state crackdown on civil society actors in Azerbaijan hinders this cooperation.

The continuity of external challenges makes individuals cautious and gradually reduces their interest and engagement in cross conflict divide work. We can observe that this external limitation has an impact on what is possible internally since joint work is always more effective and less likely to be subject to backlash, and contacts across the conflict divide help societies transform internally. Nonetheless, internal efforts such as data collection and making databases for missing persons are still made and prepare ground for conflict transformation. However, they still approach their work from the position of "setting a new agenda with the *Azerbaijanis*, rather than the *current regime of Azerbaijan*" (Civil Society Institute 2018).

The external challenge in the Armenian-Turkish relations are similar, and they also complicate the prospects to work within own society internally. The representative from AIISA said: "If before [in Turkey] there was a lot of will to cooperate with Armenia, now they are much more wary, let alone all the political impasses, preventing this cooperation due to the acknowledgement that the normalization process in Armenian-Turkish relations is in a deadlock, and official positions have not changed, and there is no expectation that they will change. Consequently, interest towards this issue is also receding" (AIISA 2018).

Another external challenge pointed out by civil society actors in Armenia is politically motivated or state-sponsored counterparts in Azerbaijan, which harms trust and prevents true cooperation. The interviewed expressed their concern regarding the initiative in Azerbaijan called the "Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Platform", mainly because of the individuals that 'represent' the Armenian side, some of whom have been accused of serious crimes in Armenia. They are perceived to have no real intentions to contribute to peacebuilding and to be harming the already fragile legacy of peacebuilding in the region. The interviewed actors do not see any perspectives of real achievements by the Platform, because there is no engagement with civil society in Armenia. At the same time, the representative of the Civil Society Initiative states that though some of the efforts may damage real processes because of unreliability, on the positive side, there is an attempt to find a common language with Armenians (Civil Society Institute 2018).

When Can TJ Processes Start?

In the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, some differences in opinion arise among the interviewed civil society actors on whether TJ processes need to start before or after the political settlement of the conflict, including an official peace

deal. Starting truth-seeking processes will benefit the society regardless of the political setting (Helsinki Citizens' Assembly – Vanadzor 2018, AIISA 2018), but some efforts can be counterproductive if not guided by official decisions (Civil Society Institute 2018). Some of the interviewed civil society actors agree that political will has to be present for the work of the civil society to gain more legitimacy (Civil Society Institute 2018), yet civil society can start its share of TJ work, including more interaction with the state, immediately after violence stops. Even without an official peace deal, civil society need to prepare for the post-agreement phase, and it is important to engage in fact-finding, making databases and archives, and maintaining contacts.

Answers also vary regarding the timeliness of initiating investigations and prosecution of war crimes, as their heroization continues in the society. First of all, the interviewed civil society actors agree that the society needs to be better prepared for these measures. Joint truth-seeking commissions are deemed not feasible for now due to the lack of political will and trust on the official level, but the interviewed civil society actors find that joint truth-seeking commissions, involving both official and civil society actors and perhaps the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) will be necessary at some point. Respondents find that the application of TJ mechanisms is possible mainly in the post-settlement phase, but are also taking steps in that direction. For example, Peace Dialogue is pushing for a commission on missing persons, and the Society Without Violence is advocating for the implementation of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.

What Can and Should Be Done Now?

Following the recent developments in Armenia, some discussion on forming TJ mechanisms for addressing wrongdoings during the previous governments has already taken place. At a TJ Symposium in Yerevan in October 2018, Deputy Prime Minister Ararat Mirzoyan stated that responses need to be given to mass violations of social, political, and economic rights (Mirzoyan 2018). At the same event, Marieke Wierda, who used to be Criminal Justice Director at the International Center for Transitional Justice, stressed that when applying transitional justice tools, there might be too many violations to prosecute everyone, thus in the transitional context, a prosecutorial strategy needs to be formulated from the beginning by the government (Wierda 2018). The current method the Armenian government has adopted to address past impunities – putting emphasis on investigating violence against peaceful protestors, electoral fraud, corruption, shadow economy, etc. – shows that the state is trying to uphold responsibility and accountability. We believe that the new ruling powers need to make sure that these

values and corresponding practices are permanently diffused across all state institutions, and civil society actors will have to be one of the pillars supporting this endeavor.

According to Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, it is important to be ready to aid the new government in the consolidation of democracy and upholding state accountability (Helsinki Citizens' Assembly – Vanadzor 2018). The role of civil society will be precisely to spread information, raise awareness, and educate the society. Civil society will need to guide the state and society in dealing with the past, primarily for the years since independence. If the previous regime was the consequence of Soviet legacies and no lustration (Helsinki Citizens' Assembly – Vanadzor 2018), the new government that will form following the political developments of May 2018 in Armenia and the snap elections in December, will have to rely heavily on the support of the civil society to consolidate democracy (AIISA 2018, Civil Society Institute 2018).

The OSCE Minsk Group during the recent years has urged sides to cooperate with the Red Cross on issues pertaining to missing persons, and there is belief in the civil society that larger demand for revealing information on a missing relative can have an impact on the government to take action.

All organizations interviewed agree that now there seems to be more space for civil society to operate, given the openness that overthrowing the old regime brought with itself in Armenia. Civil society's fear of persecution by the state has waned, and the government itself is more prone to giving voice to the civil society for advice and expert opinion. But no discussion of viewing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through the lens of TJ has taken place in official circles, giving civil society much opportunity for agency.

TJ Without Official State Involvement

Clear strategies need to be developed not to harm the peace process and to prevent manipulation. Due to the transitional phase that Armenia is in right now, as well as Nikol Pashinyan's statement that Nagorno-Karabakh needs to become party to the negotiations, some are concerned that efforts need to be especially calculated not to have a destabilizing effect when it comes to preparing the society for any kind of political agreement or reconciliation processes.

Steps in fact finding, collecting data on missing and displaced persons, maintaining ties with partners are viewed as actions that could aid in TJ processes by the civil society when the state is ready. Civil society sees the Velvet Revolution as a positive development for their activities and understand their role as one of the pillars for entrenching democratic principles and holding state institutions accountable for

them, and diffusing them in the society as well. Issues cannot be addressed adequately without making truth seeking both in internal and external affairs a value on all levels of society. There seems to be a willingness in the civil society to aid the state in policy making and engaging with the society on these topics. There also seems to be a consensus among the interviewed that before going to joint projects in the sphere of TJ, the state and society have to appropriate the concept of justice for their own sake. Addressing the past without solid legal and ethical grounds would be in vain, and more violations of human rights would grow out of it. Thus, the consolidation of democratic institutions will be a precondition for effectively carrying out TJ.

If no resolution is feasible at this point, and the synergy for such work is not sufficient at this stage in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, then keeping contacts open and building bridges is still a necessity. Civil society work across the conflict divide needs to continue, and actions on both sides need to be taken to prepare the societies if and when configurations change.

Azerbaijan: A General Context

Dealing with the past has not been a consistent area of focus in Azerbaijan. During the seventy years of communism, like other communist republics in the Soviet Union, Azerbaijani people went through a lot of political repression and conflicts. Yet, the victims of communism, including those of the Great Purge, have not been redressed genuinely.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Azerbaijan did not issue a lustration law to deal with its bloody communist past like the Baltic countries – Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. Neither the leaders of the Azerbaijani Popular Front Party, who were in power in 1992-1993 nor the incumbent regime that took power in 1993, were willing to deal with the past – either the remote past, going back to the beginning of the century, the Soviet period, or the more recent one. Indeed, in its traumatic communist past, the period between the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s is particularly sensitive and important for Azerbaijan to be dealt with. During this time, a national liberation movement and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict erupted in Azerbaijan, and many crimes were committed, including the January 1990 events that later received the name Black January. For this latter, the Soviet Chief Prosecution started an investigation right after the event, but closed the file in December 1990, finding no guilty for the crime. However, the government of Azerbaijan started the investigation again in 1992 and completed it in 1994. The government of Azerbaijan asked the government of Russia to release the criminal case from their files and assist in finding the perpetrators of the Black January events that were in Russia, however, Russia never

responded to these requests (Mammadli n.d.). Nevertheless, Azerbaijan issued reparation for the family members of the victims of the Black January events (Mammadli n.d.). Another crime in this context is the Sumgait Pogrom, that was also investigated by Moscow, but neither Azerbaijanis nor Armenians are satisfied with the results, and both sides call for a genuine re-investigation of the event. Thus, TJ mechanisms have not been employed for the conflicts of the communist past of Azerbaijan, except some art works, films, journalist reports, books, and academic research contributed by civil society.

There are many reasons why TJ mechanisms have not been employed in Azerbaijan systematically. One reason might be that dealing with the communist past is a sensitive issue for the incumbent regime since today's political elite in Azerbaijan, who came to power in 1993, ruled Soviet Azerbaijan for many years. However, one can also stress that the Azerbaijani Popular Front which was born in the late 1980s and triggered nationalism and the independence movement in Azerbaijan and eventually came to power in 1992, did not want to open archives and deal with the communist past, either.

Within the same timeframe, pogroms, massacres, and war crimes were committed in the entire region of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, claiming the lives of thousands of people and leaving many more in deep trauma. Some of these tragedies are the displacement of Azerbaijanis from the districts of Kafan²⁴, Meghri, and Masis in 1987, the Sumgait Pogrom in February 1988, the Gugark, Spitak, and Stepanavan Pogroms in November 1988, the Kirovabad²⁵ Pogrom in November 1988, the Baku Pogrom in January 1990, Operation Ring in May 1991, the Karakend Tragedy on November 20, 1991, the Garadaghli Massacre on February 17, 1992, the Khojaly Massacre on February 26, 1992, the Maragha Massacre on April 10, 1992. These and other tragedies were left without joint and genuine investigation and serve as the source of trauma and hostility. We believe an extensive TJ process, with corresponding measures and mechanisms involving the survivors and the relatives of the victims of these tragedies, is needed for the transformation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and reconciliation of the societies.

As the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is still ongoing, the governments are reluctant to exercise political will for dealing with the past and the societies remain largely unprepared for this as well, and these two factors are in a vicious loop. Neither Azerbaijan nor Armenia is member of the International Criminal Court, which

²⁴ The town used to be called Ghapan or Kafan in Soviet times and is now called Kapan.

²⁵ The town is now called Ganja.

deals with the prosecution of war crimes, as both are in the state of a quasi-war between each other, and they are avoiding the implications of such membership.

Civil Society Engaging in TJ

The interviewed civil society actors in Azerbaijan are mainly acknowledged as peacebuilders, journalists, scholars, and practitioners in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. They actors have carried out activities that can be characterized as fitting a TJ logic in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as well as other conflicts in the recent history of Azerbaijan.

Kerim Kerimli was a war journalist during the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. He was a special reporter of the "Karabakh" newspaper and the head of a printing house in Shusha²⁶ when the conflict escalated. As a witness and participant of the events in Nagorno-Karabakh, he has written several books and special reports. Now, he is trying to create a "Karabakh" museum. He is collecting artifacts from Shusha and other places in Nagorno-Karabakh in his own house. He has plans to find a proper place to display the items he has so far collected and find financial support for their conservation and maintenance (Kerimli 2018).

Zardusht Alizade, a political analyst and former politician, was a participant of the events in the late 1980s and early 1990s – in the middle of popular movements and the Nagorno-Karabakh war. He has produced several scholarly articles and books analyzing the political events of that time. He says his recent book reveals interesting facts about "national betrayals" of that period which caused tragedies such as the Black January events. Although the book was published in the Russian language several years ago, he has not succeeded yet to publish it in the Azerbaijani language due to financial difficulties (Alizade 2018).

The Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Azerbaijan National Committee has worked in finding missing persons, exchanging hostages, and working with the displaced people in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as well as focused on human rights issues and democracy building in Azerbaijan. One of the recent activities of the organization is a research project studying hate speech and the rising militarist discourse in social media (Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Azerbaijan Committee 2018).

The Humanitarian Research Public Union has also worked with displaced people, has produced several documentaries, and done other projects in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Recently, the organization has launched a project for collecting memories and archives, mainly digital materials regarding the Nagorno-

²⁶ The town is called Shushi in Armenian.

Karabakh conflict, covering the years 1988-1994 (Humanitarian Research Public Union 2018).

Finally, the Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Platform was created in 2016 with the aim of unifying peace initiatives by civil society in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict context and strengthening the overall process. Since its onset, there has been some controversy around the organization. It is believed that the government of Azerbaijan has initiated this project involving some experts, political asylum seekers, or other individuals from Armenia or of Armenian origins. However, none of the Armenian members of the Platform live in Armenia now, and some of them are considered "national traitors" as they have come to Azerbaijan and engaged in the Platform. Also, as the organization admits, its former representatives have damaged the image and reputation of the organization both inside and outside the country, and it is now that the organization has started to engage in confidence-building activities sincerely (Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Platform 2018). One of the recent projects of the organization centers around the story of an Armenian-Azerbaijani couple who were forced to break up when the conflict started, but 30 years later, they found each other and got married in Russia. Due to this case, the Armenian woman was blamed for "national betrayal" in Russia by members of the Armenian Diaspora. She faced the problem of losing her career in Russia. The organization even helped her to solve this problem. The Platform believes that when the story is ready to be released, it will positively impact the peacebuilding process (Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Platform 2018).

TJ Without Official State Involvement

There are different views of the civil society on whether TJ is applicable to an ongoing conflict, such as Nagorno-Karabakh, or it is exclusively useful for post-conflict settings. For the majority of them, the TJ mechanisms and measures seem effective and possible mainly for the post-conflict transformation period. There are many possible post-conflict TJ mechanisms and measures that are considered useful in order to redress to the survivors of past tragedies and the relatives of the victims and those who have been directly affected by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in general. However, most of them are perceived as inapplicable unless there is a comprehensive, holistic and official peace process with mechanisms and measures complementary to each other. In addition, applying some of the measures and mechanisms in isolation could even create problems rather than deliver peace and justice.

For instance, public apology, which is a common TJ tool in many post-conflict societies, might be a significant tool for the war crimes in the context of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, according to the Humanitarian Research Public

Union, unless there is a peace agreement, public apologies could put in peril the ex-combatants or those who hold responsibility for committing war crimes (Humanitarian Research Public Union 2018) because in the current official approach, they did not do anything wrong but defended their people. The sides have divergent and mutually exclusive narratives of the past. Once there is an official peace agreement, these narratives will be transformed, and the societies will be prepared to embrace truth from new perspectives. And a truth-seeking commission will play the main role in revealing the truth behind major war crimes and then due to this revealed truth, public apology will work.

Another TJ instrument is the prosecution of war criminals in the International Criminal Court in Hague. This is also a post-conflict TJ tool. However, the majority of the interviewed civil society actors think that this mechanism is not desirable and would not be effective for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict because it has lost its trustworthiness in the Yugoslav case due to political manipulation of the great powers.

Finally, reparation for the Khojaly Massacre is not considered feasible as the Armenian state financially is not ready for this. More importantly, a moral compensation, i.e. a public apology, is considered more effective and can redress the survivors and the relatives of the victims of the Khojaly Massacre and other war crimes. However, according to most civil society actors, these tools are applicable and effective only after the sides reach a peace agreement. Thus, without having a peace agreement, it is considered useless to talk about post-conflict TJ tools in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

A joint Armenian-Azerbaijani truth-seeking commission for the investigation of war crimes, on the other hand, is a TJ instrument that is considered effective for both ongoing conflicts and post-conflict contexts. This commission could involve qualified lawyers, experts from the OSCE Minks Group and international peacebuilding organizations, and the local civil society in order to redress the survivors and the relatives of the victims of war crimes, such as the Khojaly Massacre. However, the common view is that before this step, each side should be able to organize platforms separately for themselves to discuss their own wrongdoings internally (Alizade 2018). The Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Azerbaijan National Committee suggests, for instance, that a joint truth-seeking commission could investigate the origins of some rumors that have been spread in the societies about the war crimes. This is deemed important for acknowledging how and by whom they have been provoked. The civil society in Azerbaijan believes that the Russian KGB (stands for "*Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti*" translated into English as "Committee for State Security") has played the main role

in creating and sustaining the conflict at all stages; therefore, they want to start this process as soon as possible proving that Russia has been the main actor encouraging violence between people by different means, especially in the case of the Sumgait Pogrom which triggered the conflict (Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Platform 2018, Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Azerbaijan Committee 2018). Regarding the Khojaly Massacre, there are different stories told both in Armenia and Azerbaijan especially about the killings of people (Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Azerbaijan Committee 2018). There must be a proper investigation by a joint Azerbaijani-Armenian commission to explore the truth about the Khojaly Massacre (Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Azerbaijan Committee 2018).

The Challenges of Civil Society

Civil society actors have faced many challenges while trying to employ unofficial TJ-like measures to deal with the past. The first challenge is the absence of sustainable financial resources to initiate independent projects, such as filming documentaries and publishing books. Kerim Kerimli has written a book as a response to Tomas De Waal's "Black Garden" but he has not found financial support to publish it yet. In this book, Kerimli claims that De Waal has misrepresented some important facts about the Khojaly Massacre. His ideas about "our own wrongdoings" to prevent the Khojaly Massacre are valuable sources in the context of TJ which is unknown for the wider Azerbaijani audience. Kerimli suggests that the lack of sufficient financial means hampers the materialization of such projects:

"There are misrepresentations of some facts in Tomas' book. I wrote this book, but I have not been able to publish it, and now I don't even want to do it as I have been demotivated. People read Tomas' book and think that this book is unbiased, but it is not! As a participant, I know the truth about Khojaly. I know even our own wrongdoings in Khojaly... for instance, how the head of the X region carelessly left Khojaly defenseless... I can write about these cases, but there is no funding, no financial support" (Kerimli 2018).

Zardusht Alizade also has an unpublished book that can contribute to a TJ process. As discussed above, he has not succeeded yet to publish it in the Azerbaijani language due to financial problems (Alizade 2018).

Another common challenge in terms of TJ for civil society in Azerbaijan is more related to political dynamics. Some of the archives of the Soviet period remain only in Moscow, and Russia has so far been unwilling to open the archives as, for example, in the case of Black January (Kerimli 2018). This is a political issue and

should be solved at the level of the governments. However, the archives are not disclosed by the current government of Azerbaijan either. The Azerbaijani Popular Front Party's government in 1992-1993 did not open the archives concerning some of the conflicts in Soviet Azerbaijan either. There is only one book on the issue, "Sumgait: Beginning of the Collapse of the USSR" by Aslan Ismayilov (Ismayilov 2011) that discusses the Sumgait Pogrom. Aslan Ismayilov was the prosecutor investigating the crime in 1988. According to Zardusht Alizade, the book is a valuable documentary discussing Aslan Ismayilov's observation in the court on how the Soviet KGB provoked the Sumgait Pogrom, but the book also has biased views in the sense that it puts emphasis on blaming the ethnic Armenian Grigorian as the sole executor of the crime (Alizade 2018).

Another challenge is the absence of a green light by the state. Dealing with the past in a comprehensive project without the authorization of the state is perceived dangerous for civil society. It seems that once this is identified as a need by the state, there will be a green light for doing comprehensive work in this field. Such preconditions as well as financial difficulties discourage civil society actors in Azerbaijan from engaging with TJ. However, this does not mean that the government blocks everything in this regard. Civil society has always engaged in dealing with the past through different ways.

Critical Views on the Past

The interviewed civil society actors in Azerbaijan have critical views on the past. First, the leadership of Soviet Azerbaijan is blamed for taking the wrong action or not taking action to prevent the tragedies in the late 1980s. The Azerbaijani leadership could take measures against the Armenians who committed crimes in Nagorno-Karabakh, but they did not do this (Kerimli 2018). Their silence and fear of Moscow worsened the situation. Moreover, the Azerbaijani Popular Front leadership provoked people to dismiss Abdurrahman Vazirov who in 1988-1990 was the head of the Azerbaijani Communist Party that caused the tragedies (Alizade 2018).

Concerning the Sumgait or Baku Pogroms against ethnic Armenians, a joint truth-seeking commission is considered effective to investigate these cases together with the Armenian side to find out what caused and who were behind these crimes. The interviewed civil society actors also hope that a joint truth-seeking commission could investigate ethnic cleansing cases of Azerbaijanis in Armenia (Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Azerbaijan Committee 2018). For instance, the Humanitarian Research Public Union emphasizes that "Armenians have serious accusations toward Azerbaijanis about the Sumgait Pogrom; in most cases, it is exaggerated", therefore "Azerbaijan should be interested to create a joint Armenian-Azerbaijani

commission for the Sumgait case" in order to "see if we are the sole guilty party of this Pogrom, or whether we were perhaps only those who were provoked?" (Humanitarian Research Public Union 2018). The organization believes that "it would be a good reference to investigate other similar pogroms and war crimes committed against Azerbaijanis including the Khojaly Massacre. Khojaly is not comparable with such pogroms. It is a big one, but there were other pogroms in Armenia against Azerbaijanis, such as the Garadaghly and Gugark Pogroms, the death of Salatin Asgerova, the Garakend Tragedy" (Humanitarian Research Public Union 2018). Thus, these cases should be jointly investigated and once the truth about the war crimes becomes widely acknowledged, it would be an effective TJ tool to deconstruct "national enmity" by transforming the responsibility from the nation to specific people: "These crimes were committed by specific people, ex-combatants, but today all are guilty, and the responsibility for these crimes is on the shoulders of the two nations. If you prove that not the entire nations, but specific people are guilty, you take off the responsibility from the whole nations that opens opportunity for reconciliation" (Humanitarian Research Public Union 2018).

These views obviously promote TJ and peace in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. A similar view is voiced by the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Azerbaijani National Committee as well as Kerim Kerimli and others (Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Azerbaijan Committee 2018, Kerimli 2018). In this regard, civil society actors, who are inclined to deal with the past through different instruments, really want to start this joint truth-seeking commission, considering it essential for peace and justice.

What Can and Should Be Done Now?

Although the main TJ instruments are perceived possible and effective in post-conflict cases, the interviewed civil society actors suggest several instruments for the current situation. First, the confidence-building dialogues between different target groups are considered vital for further joint work. An Open Dialogue Platform for all confidence building initiatives is suggested by the Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Platform which "will generate a lot of relevant ways for reconciliation in itself" (Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Platform 2018). An Open Dialogue Platform can be formed in each country which can support all peace initiatives. Second, many of the interviewed civil society actors consider that it is very important to work on creating documentaries and archives and recording 'alive history' through the participants and witnesses of the events while this is still possible (Alizade 2018, Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Platform 2018, Humanitarian Research Public Union 2018). Moreover, the civil society can work on the issue of

missing persons as well as the displaced people, the survivors and relatives of the victims of past tragedies and those who have been directly affected by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, addressing their humanitarian problems and providing rehabilitation (Humanitarian Research Public Union 2018) (Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Azerbaijan Committee 2018). These are the main activities that are considered urgent and that could be effective if implemented properly. These will also prepare the societies to think about peace and reconciliation and facilitate the way to a political agreement.

Turkey: A General Context

Various tragic events and atrocities have marked the history of Turkey, yet none of them has been dealt with within a TJ framework. The legacy of widespread and systematic human rights abuses, state violence, and military coups still haunts the country. In addition to past wrongdoings, the ongoing Kurdish conflict is making it even harder to talk about the past, while violence remains a present-day issue.

In parallel to the armed conflict between the PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* in Kurdish or Kurdistan Workers' Party) and the state since 1984, the armed forces and the state-led paramilitaries employed indiscriminate violence towards civilians in the Kurdish-populated regions which were under emergency rule until 2002. The combination of a state-sponsored amnesia and denial resulted in a deficiency of justice and reconciliation. Since mass atrocities played a significant role in consolidating the political power of the nation-state in Turkey, historical injustices and the past still haunt the present. After the recent peace process collapsed in 2015, escalated violence resulted in massive human rights violations in the Kurdish region, which was added to the legacy of a violent past.

Limited attempts for TJ both led by state and civil society have occurred in recent years. Yet, these attempts have not been undertaken in a systematic or holistic manner. State-led TJ efforts in Turkey, such as the trials and the Law on Compensation²⁷ have not satisfied the demands of the victims (Alpkaya, et al. 2017, Uçarlar 2015, Kurban 2012). These laws and trials have been perceived as a fundamental change in the contemporary history of the state in Turkey (Budak 2015), and they were introduced as mechanisms to come to terms with the past. However, many have convincingly argued they were, in fact, pragmatic, short-term maneuvers done with the purpose of satisfying the demands for TJ which were raised by the local actors and supported by the European Union and the European

²⁷ The Law on Compensation for Losses Resulting from Terrorism and the Fight against Terrorism was enacted in 2004 to address the forced displacement in the 1990s.

Court for Human Rights (Budak 2015). Moreover, they had an individual character instead of aiming at a collective reparation. Such individualization of TJ response was used to ignore the systematic, collective, and/or institutional nature of the abuse. These measures have not implied any political responsibility and they did not attempt to transform the political setting in which the atrocities happened, which is, in fact, one of the main challenges of implementing TJ in the absence of a fundamental political transition.

It is important to acknowledge that the state-led initiatives took place as a response to the increasing quest of the society to remember the conflictual past and come to terms with historical injustices. The struggles of victim and survivor groups and human rights organizations for recognition and right to truth, in return, have largely developed in response to, and partly been shaped by, the state-sponsored denial, impunity, and amnesia which have continued in different forms. The social dynamics of forgetting and remembrance in relation to the Kurdish conflict in Turkey started to change due to the popular demands for truth and remembrance (Budak 2015). Part of the struggles took the form of judicial processes such as the proceedings at the European Court of Human Rights (Budak 2015), while an important part consisted of non-judicial initiatives which focused mostly on memorialization, such as the Truth and Justice Commission for the Diyarbakır Prison²⁸, the Museum of Shame²⁹, the Roboski Museum Initiative³⁰, the Saturday Mothers³¹, and the Database on Enforced Disappearances. These initiatives might be considered as demands for recognition by subnational social groups which reinforce legal and normative developments for TJ and the right to truth (Bevernage and Wouters 2018). Justice- and truth-seeking for the forced

²⁸ The Diyarbakır Prison has been notorious for severe human rights violations of the inmates after the 1980 military coup. The Truth and Justice Commission for Diyarbakır Prison was established by human rights activists in 2007 with the aim of transforming the Prison into a memory site. It was designed as a starting point for developing official truth commissions for the other atrocities and wrongdoings in the history of the Turkish Republic.

²⁹ In 2012, a temporary Museum of Shame (in Turkish "*12 Eylül Utanç Müzesi*") was established as a memorialization attempt for the human rights violations committed following the 1980 coup.

³⁰ The Roboski Museum Initiative was formed with the purpose of collectively building a museum and memorial place next to the cemetery of those who were killed during the Roboski Massacre in 2011.

³¹ The Saturday Mothers, as relatives of forcibly disappeared persons and a group of activists, have been gathering each Saturday at the central square of Istanbul since 1995 to seek for truth and justice for the disappeared.

disappearances have been the fundamental path towards TJ. The Human Rights Association, for instance, has been following the trials for years, and it gave birth to the demonstrations of the Saturday Mothers. The Truth and Justice Center, on the other hand, has been working on legal documentation and monitoring as well as following the trials of the forced disappearances since it was established. It has also formed a database on of the forced disappearances and raised awareness on the topic using different media such as photos and video-interviews with the relatives of those who disappeared forcibly. Both organizations contributed to the memorialization of one of the most widespread human rights violations in the past of the Republic of Turkey.

Links and Continuities Between Past Crimes

Almost all of the organizations that we interviewed in Turkey draw parallels between the different crimes and atrocities of the past.

There are links observed between the different dimensions of human rights violations. "When you talk about forced disappearances you also talk about displacement. Or if you are talking to the wife of a missing person, you are also talking about the gender dimension," said one of the respondents.

Another important link that comes out in the interviews is the one between the 1915 Armenian Genocide and the forced disappearances in the 1990s. Even if the organizations themselves are not working specifically on the Genocide, they think there is a clear link between what happened in the Kurdish conflict and the Genocide. Some of the organizations make it very clear that coming to terms with the past has to start with 1915 and not with the Republic era.

According to our respondent from the Human Rights Association, forced disappearances in custody started with the 1915 Genocide and if the link between the Genocide and the Saturday Mothers is ignored, forced disappearances cannot be addressed adequately. The Truth Justice Memory Center confirms that by saying "forced disappearances of Armenians on April 24 is a historical momentum that starts the tradition of disappearances".

Although the Human Rights Association is the only organization that holds specific events to commemorate the victims of the Genocide and to discuss its implications, the other organizations as well generally have a perspective to understand different atrocities or time periods in a holistic way. Karakutu, for instance, does not have a specific time period that it focuses on, but it addresses different events of the past that are not mentioned in official historical narratives and are silenced. They relate different topics to each other in their memory walks. One of the walks is organized in Taksim, the heart of Istanbul, and the young participants are taken to Yeşilçam

Street which used to be the center of the Turkish cinema industry. The purpose of this visit is to let the participants know about Nubar Terziyan, a very famous Armenian actor and to emphasize that "there was this guy when nobody used Armenian names".

Given the long and complex history of atrocities, human rights and peace organizations direct their focus mostly to the most immediate problem, the 40-year-long and still ongoing Kurdish conflict. As much as they understand and care for the linkages between different eras and forms of state violence, it does not seem possible to address the other periods unless the Kurdish question is politically solved to a certain extent.

Challenges and Shortcomings of Civil Society

A general view expressed by the respondents is that the civil society is not prepared to contribute to a possible peace process from a TJ perspective. Several reasons are named for that. The first and most frequent argument relates to differing working method and the lack of cooperation among different organizations. Our respondent from the Rights Initiative considers that most organizations conduct a conventional way of human rights advocacy which makes their work less effective.

A common critique is that the civil society does not have reliable and complete data. An example given by the Rights Initiatives was that if the state decides to take action on the files of missing persons, there will be differences among the organizations which have been documenting, following, and advocating for the cases of missing persons for decades. The Peace Foundation thinks that the civil society needs to be better equipped institutionally to respond to the needs of a possible peace process.

Another concern is that some demands of TJ do not go beyond political discourse, and they are not able to propose practical, concrete, and data-based solutions. For instance, although a Truth Commission is a popularly claimed mechanism, it seems more like a politically motivated intention instead of a well-prepared proposal with a solid background.

Linked to the first concern, the lack of cooperation is believed to be decreasing efficiency. Instead of doing the exact same thing and collecting the same data, specializing on different topics and having joint centers for documentation are thought to be more efficient. The civil society does not have platforms to learn from and about each other's work. The Truth Justice Memory Center thinks that joining forces would make civil society stronger to push the state. There should be specialization and harmony among the organizations. Taking into account the decreasing number of people working in these areas and the increasing oppression

on peace-related organizations, developing new strategies becomes even more urgent. Without making relevant preparations, claiming TJ will not bring a meaningful solution.

Another important challenge is that the human resources are decreasing while the topics to address are increasing. In parallel, the public space that was available to civil society during the peace process was much larger than the civil society has access to now.

A criticism which was mainly put forward by the Peace Foundation is that the civil society usually focuses on the wrongdoings by the state. According to our respondent, "The crimes committed by the armed group PKK, such as the forced recruitment of children or the targeting of the village guards should also be on the TJ agenda of civil society". The TJ efforts, otherwise, will fail to address the whole complexities of the conflict and remain inefficient.

Another significant challenge is the hardship of addressing the past while that past is currently repeating in other forms by victimizing the same population. As Karakutu pointed out, "When we were planning to go to Şırnak to do memory work there, it turned into a site of violence again. We were addressing the September 6-7 pogrom in our memory walks, and suddenly we found ourselves in a time when similar atrocities are being committed". Documenting ongoing painful events is different than addressing the past. Moreover, some of the organizations that are conducting memory work hesitate to reach out to the victims of the past to commemorate their missing relatives from the 1990's when they are also the victims of current displacement. Apart from documenting the past atrocities, civil society should learn skills and adapt methodologies to document the abuses during an ongoing conflict. For example, the organizations feel the need to apply a different methodology when they interview a recently displaced person.

In relation to the ongoing conflict, the current oppressive regime is a big challenge to the organization of public campaigns. As the Human Rights Association indicated, TJ is not possible when people do not feel secure to raise their voices: "Before TJ, we have to have the freedom of expression. It also depends on international politics, and this is not impossible. But I don't think the internal public is ready for pushing for TJ".

What Can and Should Be Done Now?

All five organizations have different answers to this, although they have a strong common ground. They think that the current period of not having a political or social atmosphere to discuss peace might actually be used by civil society for

capacity building, developing new strategies, and accumulating more data on how to deal with the past.

One of the ideas is to discuss what the civil society can do if a peace process is established again. A useful way to do it might be to establish a peace network among everyone who undertakes peace work, including academics who work on different topics related to peace and conflict. This might also address the need for cooperation and coordination among the organizations and also help specializing on different topics and areas complementing each other.

Documentation, classification, and data collection are the most common strategies that are stated by the organizations. Having more structured data and more systematic documentation are perceived to be the most urgent and meaningful ways of strengthening the capacity and influence of civil society. As the Rights Initiative states, having approximate numbers does not have the same impact as having all the concrete details of a case of human rights violation. Data-based advocacy can also be more functional to mobilize the international institutions and to collaborate with them.

TJ Without an Official Peace Process

Most of the civil society actors see their current role in data collection and research on TJ mechanisms. By doing so, they hope to have enough resources and the necessary support to intervene in a future official process. A shared argument is that when there is no official peace process, it is difficult to imagine or discuss TJ. However, there are more optimistic approaches as well that consider TJ and peace long-term goals and see the current period as an opportunity to prepare the society and to build capacity in the civil society.

Official and non-official TJ efforts are considered complementary, rather than interchangeable. However, the current situation limits the ability and capacity of the organizations to lead high impact initiatives, and they think that it is only to a certain extent that the civil society can contribute to TJ in the current situation. As our respondent from the Human Rights Association put it:

"The state definitely has to get involved. We do such things [non-official initiatives] from time to time, but they don't really contribute much. I have gone and reported for almost all atrocities in Kurdistan. But it was the first time that the people were happy when there was the peace process. They trusted it; they had faith, and they felt secure. Because the state was involved".

She also adds: "It is true that the state has to be involved. But the civil society shouldn't make the mistake of waiting until the state takes action. Because, one of the first roles of the civil society is to push, mobilize the state". This account reflects well the attitudes and approaches of the whole civil society which might be called 'cautious'. Although they inherently believe that the civil society should be more proactive, they are also aware of the current limitations.

The existing despair and frustration within the society as well as the civil society actors is indeed an important factor that limits these efforts. The civil society actors are influenced by the oppressive regime that creates frustration and fear. They know that they have a more limited public sphere and that they have to choose their words perfectly in order to refrain from any risk their organizations might face. A very important comment is that the civil society should not withdraw from what it has been seeking (such as reaching out to parliamentary commissions), but it should update its actions according to the needs of the present time. Even if no structured TJ process is possible now, these efforts can at least start and sustain the discussions on dealing with the past. Karakutu believes that none of the efforts to deal with the past has short-term goals, and even if peace is reached, dealing with the past will take years to achieve. It is for this reason that the civil society should not take a step back just because they cannot do everything now. Even if it is a small amount of work, it should continue.

First Things to Do in Case of a Peace and TJ Process

The civil society organizations that we interviewed do not have comprehensive or detailed comments as to which TJ mechanisms and measures will be the most urgent and effective to address the difficult past in case there is an official peace process.

The Truth Justice Memory Center believes that the first thing should be the recognition and acknowledgment of the crimes and the state's responsibility. Memory work, which is already at play, will spread over time and can continue along other measures and mechanisms. In terms of the judicial and non-judicial TJ, the common idea is that truth seeking and prosecutions should be undertaken at the same time as complementary.

With regards to prosecutions, the Truth Justice Memory Center thinks that the punishment does not have to be in one specific format. Several tools and methods might be developed instead of using the heavy punishments such as life imprisonment. Discrediting high-ranking military officers formerly and currently occupying positions might be a good way of acknowledging the crime and holding the preparators accountable. Those who were most affected by the conflict can also

be involved in the process of elaboration of various mechanisms to better deliver justice.

According to the Human Rights Association, the first and foremost measure to take is to lift all restrictions on the freedom of thought and expression. To do that on the legal level, they argue, there needs to be a constitutional change and a new, democratic constitution is needed. Conscientious objection and amnesty for political prisoners are other things that might be implemented. But in order to discuss several options and decide what is the best for the country, people should feel safe to express their authentic and possibly controversial thoughts. This is the only way to have a public and transparent discussion on TJ, so that the needs of the victims and survivors are met effectively.

Another measure is to start with dialogue activities to pave the way for dealing with the past. Karakutu suggest that such activities might be held between Kurds and Turks as it is done by several initiatives between Armenian and Turkish youth. Even if a truth commission is established, there needs to be prior work on dialogue; otherwise, the society will not be ready. In parallel to this idea of dialogue and reconciliation, the Peace Foundation thinks that the common ground and emotional needs of different groups should be addressed.

A comprehensive vision for TJ or even initial steps are difficult to outline now. However, the shared view is that these will emerge once we have a common ground in which victims, survivors, human rights advocates, and peace activists can express their ideas and discuss the topic. Even though civil society organizations claim their interest in and attention to TJ, it is not easy to talk in concrete and practical terms. Their demand for dealing with the past is not well supported by research on available and applicable TJ tools.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Our research demonstrates the need for more knowledge and competence as well as visions and strategies for TJ in these three countries. Although almost all civil society actors we talked to acknowledge the need for TJ to deal with the past and to deliver accountability for the past injustices, there is not enough preparation regarding the specific TJ mechanisms and measures that can be adapted to the needs and demands of the victims and survivors of these injustices. Moreover, given the lack of official peace processes with a TJ component, the civil society efforts are limited. Organizational capacity and lack of financial resources are often a challenge reducing the possibility of reaching a wide audience and restricting the activities of several civil society organizations. The oppressive political settings especially in Turkey and Azerbaijan is yet another factor that affects the public

space that is available to civil society. In Armenia, there is more space to discuss several issues from a broadened perspective; however, this discussion often does not take place in reference to the oppressive political settings in the neighboring countries.

Our recommendations address the civil society actors in these three countries and summarize what should be done to include TJ as a more comprehensive framework into their agenda and become competent enough to make TJ a critical part of any peace efforts that might emerge in and between these countries. The recommendations are mainly based on the areas and measures discussed by the respondents during the interviews. We are also proposing several approaches to contribute to TJ efforts in these countries when there is no almost no peace process.

Our first and foremost recommendation is derived from our theoretical approach which concerns TJ in the absence of an official peace process:

- Include TJ into your peace agenda and explore the ways to use TJ measures and mechanisms as a facilitator of conflict transformation.
- Learn from different experiences in which TJ measures and mechanisms were used in order to prepare the society for an official peace process.
- Investigate the applicability of different measures in your counties and contexts.
- Use the ongoing situation for capacity building of your organizations, awareness-raising in the society, and structural empowerment with regards to knowledge and expertise on TJ.

And here are our country-specific recommendations:

Armenia

- Develop a peace agenda (unilateral or joint) and coordinate the efforts of different civil society actors.
- Take on the role of proposing new initiatives under the light of the recent political developments. Use this as an opportunity to explore ways to change the public discourse on such topics as war and dehumanization of the 'other'. Civil society organizations can embark on testing this environment by initiating new discussions on sensitive topics with the public, such as own wrongdoings, but this must be very well calculated to prevent repercussions.
- Continue maintaining relations and increasing confidence-building measures with Turkish and Azerbaijani partners, despite crises or unfavorable political conditions, as losing these ties would set the process back significantly.

- Continue collecting data and personal stories, making archives and documentaries, as well as promoting expression through art. These actions perpetuate discussions and add alternative voices.
- Work with victims and survivors of past tragedies and their relatives, the displaced as well as other conflict-affected populations both for humanitarian purposes as well as to empower them as peace constituencies.

Azerbaijan

- Work with the Armenian partners to explore the option of a joint dialogue platform to coordinate civil society efforts, merging and multiplying resources to support confidence building and peacebuilding.
- Create a joint platform of civil society to develop a TJ agenda, build capacity, and raise awareness in the society and relevant authorities about TJ.
- Continue collecting data and personal stories, making archives and documentaries, as well as promoting expression through art. These actions perpetuate discussions and add alternative voices.
- Work with Armenians from Azerbaijan who were displaced when the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict began. It will have a huge impact for peace. The Armenia-Azerbaijan Civil Peace Platform has recently initiated such a project.
- Work extensively with the survivors of the Khojaly Massacre who live in Pirshagi, in the countryside of Baku. A comprehensive research should be conducted and documented to disclose the truth about the Khojaly Massacre and raising awareness for the Armenian side.
- Work with victims and survivors of past tragedies and their relatives, the displaced as well as other conflict-affected populations both for humanitarian purposes as well as to empower them as peace constituencies.

Turkey

- Establish joint mechanisms (such as a joint human rights documentation center) for several organizations so that the resources are used more efficiently, and a wider audience is reached.
- Establish networks or mechanisms to learn from each other's work and develop a common agenda to push the state to take actions.
- Develop new strategies to address the current and past human rights problems. Adopt a more updated, data-based method of human rights advocacy. Make connections with international organizations that have capacity and resources to support local organizations.

- Produce educative and pedagogical materials such as handbooks and toolkits on TJ that address different groups (policy makers, parliamentarians, activists, etc.).
- Take different international legal documents and conventions into account and use them for advocacy.
- Learn more from the international experiences and get to know more about each TJ mechanism that are available to any conflict or post-conflict setting. Investigate different cases and work with experts to analyze their applicability to Turkey. Work on the advantages and risks that each mechanism might have in the context of Turkey.
- Make a risk assessment and elaborate mitigation strategies of how to adapt the TJ approach in case of conflict escalation.
- Learn skills and adapt methodologies to document the abuses during an ongoing conflict, such as forensic anthropology.

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The Environment, Human Rights, and Conflicts in the South Caucasus and Turkey: Transboundary Water Cooperation as a Mean to Conflict Transformation

Jeyhun Veliyev, Tsira Gvasalia, Sofya Manukyan

This paper focuses on environmental issues as a human rights concern in the context of conflicts and tensions in the South Caucasus and Turkey. The main objective of the paper is to elaborate if environmental issues can become a tool for dialogue and conflict transformation. The authors of the paper believe it is key for conflict transformation to assess and seek solutions for environmental issues even in the absence of political resolutions to conflicts.

The paper starts off by surveying the international and regional legal frameworks within which the countries of the South Caucasus and Turkey operate when they (mis)manage environmental issues. It also reviews the projects implemented by different international agencies, institutions, and donors aimed at better cooperation on environmental protection in the region. The paper then discusses some cases of transboundary environmental issues in the context of human rights and conflicts in the region, concentrating on the Kura-Araks basin and the impact of hydropower plants, dams, and reservoirs on the basin and the environment at large with some cases of dire non-cooperation and some cases of relative success and collaboration. The paper also surveys the sources of water pollution in the region.

The paper finishes off with a set of recommendations for conflict transformation and dialogue with a focus on environmental rights. The authors believe that although conflicts may seem a hindering factor for cooperation, for the sake of the environment and human rights, routes for cooperation should be established.

Introduction

"The impact of water on all aspects of development is undeniable: a safe drinking water supply, sanitation for health, management of water resources, and improvement of water productivity can help change the lives of millions", said Dr. Rajiv Shah, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Administrator on World Water Day in 2011 (US Agency for International Development 2011).

This paper focuses on environmental issues as a human rights concern in the context of conflicts and tensions in the South Caucasus and Turkey. By referring to success stories from the region, we are seeking a framework for conflict transformation and dialogue with a focus on environmental rights. Our main objective is to elaborate if environmental issues can become a tool for dialogue and conflict transformation. We believe it is key for conflict transformation to assess and seek solutions for environmental issues even in the absence of political resolutions to conflicts.

From the perspective of conflict transformation, it is of particular interest to study the transboundary character of environmental issues. One such environmental issue that has both a transboundary character and is also very visible and tangible for people on the ground is the water issue, particularly its availability and quality necessary for sustaining flora, fauna, and humans' life. We, therefore, take water flow modification and pollution in rivers as the two main variables throughout the case studies of this paper.

We see environmental rights linked to basic human rights such as those to air, water, food, shelter, and land. Moreover, the most fundamental right to life cannot be realized without the basic right to clean water, air, and land. Adebowale et al. argue: "human rights, the right to life and the right to development cannot be realized in the absence of the right to a healthy environment" (Adebowale, et al. 2001). Thus, a clean and sustainable environment is people's right to possess as the freedom of speech or the right to education and work.

Studying the triangular relationship between conflicts, the environment, and human rights is the main focus of this paper. The conflicts in the South Caucasus, namely the Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia conflicts, the tense or absent Turkey-Armenia relations³², as well as other negative dynamics between the

³² We discuss environmental issues in the context of conflicts for Turkey only in its relations to the South Caucasus.

countries, societies, and communities in the region affect the environment and ecology, including people's lives. These protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus and its neighborhood have led to the violation of environmental rights of the populations of the region. It is, therefore, important to first understand what environmental problems exist in the region; how they are exacerbated by the lack of cooperation; and whether further hazardous impact can be mitigated.

As a matter of fact, due to the conflicts in the South Caucasus and Turkey, hundreds of thousands of people were forced to flee their lands, which deprived them of their basic rights, including that to property. The rights to land and resources were one group of such violated rights and the most immediate to notice. However, the impact of conflicts on the environment and rights related to the environment go much beyond the rights to land and resources. As nature is not limited to borders, and the deterioration of the environment has cross-border implications, not only does environmental protection stem from the need to protect livelihoods, but it is also important for avoiding future conflicts or the exacerbation of current ones. As it is argued in Jensen et al., environmental issues, depending on how they are handled, have a tremendous potential either for peacebuilding or conflict exacerbation and escalation (Jensen, et al. 2013). In other words, cooperation around environmental protection can act not only as a tool for conflict transformation but also for conflict prevention.

The countries and societies in the South Caucasus, as well as the neighboring countries not only share borders and hence the environment but also a history of political conflicts. However, instead of viewing common environmental problems as areas to collaborate on, the governments often view these as another reason for blaming the "other side" and thus exacerbating conflicts. In addition, the environment suffers not only due to existing political conflicts, but also as a result of years of failed policies. For instance, there is no conflict between Armenia and Georgia, or Georgia and Azerbaijan, yet there seem to be no cooperation here either, and the polluted waters flow from Armenia to Georgia and then combined with polluted waters from Georgia, they flow to Azerbaijan, which is due to the overall lack of care towards the environment. We argue that for the sake of providing adequate standards of living for people as well as for securing biodiversity, it is within the interests and obligations of states to frame and implement actions aimed at the prevention of pollution and protection of the environment. Since common problems demand joint solutions, regional and international cooperation is central for addressing these issues.

Legal Frameworks and Projects Implemented in the Region

While discussing human rights and environmental protection, it is first necessary to put the subject into a legal framework. A brief look at the internationally accepted rules and norms protecting the environment from hazardous actions may provide some basis to cement human rights and the environment as two mutually inclusive notions. As environmental protection is also a state's responsibility, this conceptual part sheds light also on regional agreements and national policies. Studying the international dimension of environmental protection is important to develop regional and local management mechanisms for preventing the cross-border implications of ecological disasters.

The International Legal Framework

The rise of awareness about environmental issues propelled the establishment of a legal framework on the environment on the international level. International treaties and agreements are considered as major sources of international environmental law, and since the 1970s, plenty of environmental protection debate has been heavily articulated in international conventions (Ivanova and Escobar-Pemberthy 2017). First of all, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly founded the UN Environment Program (UNEP) in 1972 with the purpose of assisting countries in cooperating for environmental protection, providing general guidelines and policy recommendations (Samaan 2011).

The Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment of 1972 and Rio Declaration on Environment and Development of 1992 are accepted as the cornerstones of international environmental law. The environment and human rights became connected through the basic principles outlined in these declarations, and other forthcoming multilateral agreements. As Guenther Handl argues, "The Stockholm Conference was the first taking stock of the global human impact on the environment – an attempt at forging an outlook on how to address the challenge of preserving and enhancing the human environment... [Whereas] by the time of the Rio Conference, the task for the international community became one of systematizing and restating existing normative expectations regarding the environment, [...] [while] positing the legal and political underpinnings of sustainable development" (Handl 2012).

The underlying principle of the Stockholm Declaration is the "human's fundamental right to [...] adequate conditions of life in an environment [...] that permits a life of dignity and well-being" (Report of the United Nations Conference

on the Human Environment 1972). The Rio Declaration in turn claims that "human beings are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature" (UN Conference on Environment and Development 1992). In addition, the most important provision of both declarations is establishing a state responsibility to ensure that its activities within own area do not cause damage to the environment outside of the national jurisdiction or in other countries (Handl 2012). It is also worth to mention that the latter provision is an important point of reference for this study.

Other international documents have linked the environment with development. Along with economic development and social development, environmental protection stands as one of the three main pillars of sustainable development identified in the 2002 Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002). The UN Human Rights Council Resolution in 2005 recognized the link between human rights, environmental protection, and sustainable development (Boer and Boyle 2013). Environmental sustainability stands in parallel with poverty eradication and development as a core principle of the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN, adopted in 2015 (UN Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform 2016).

On paper, these international environmental laws seem excitingly inspiring, but they are not without deficiencies, especially in regards with implementation since international organizations do not possess any authority of enforcement.

The Regional Legal Framework

The UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), set up as one of the five regional commissions of the UN in 1947, has negotiated several environmental conventions. The Convention on the Protection and Use of the Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (referred to as the Water Convention), adopted in 1992 in Helsinki and entered into force in 1996, aims at strengthening transboundary water cooperation and measures for ecologically sound management, as well as fostering the implementation of integrated water resources management (Introduction. About the UNECE Water Convention n.d.). Furthermore, the Water Convention requires parties to prevent, control, and reduce transboundary impact, and parties bordering the same transboundary waters have to cooperate by entering into specific agreements and establishing joint bodies (Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Helsinki, 1992) 1992). Among the South Caucasus countries,

only Azerbaijan has thus far joined³³ the Water Convention (Status of the Water Convention 1992). It also joined the Water and Health Protocol. While Armenia and Georgia have only signed, yet not ratified the Protocol to the Convention (Status of Water and Health Protocol 1999). As the official web page of UNECE elaborates, this Convention promotes cooperation among countries with transboundary water issues through joint partnerships (Water Convention n.d.).

There are a few other important international agreements, which only one or two countries of the region have joined so far. Yet, these are important for the joint control of environmental issues particularly those of a transboundary character, and therefore the accession of the other countries to these agreements is important. The Espoo Convention (with the formal name "Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment"), adopted in 1991 and entered into force in 1997, sets out the obligations of parties to assess the environmental impact of certain activities at an early stage of planning and to notify and consult each other on all major projects that are likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact across boundaries (ESPOO Convention 1991). Both Armenia and Azerbaijan have joined the Convention, while Armenia has also ratified the Protocol to the Convention (Status of Protocol on SEA 2003). Georgia is not party to the Espoo Convention (Status of the ESPOO Convention 1991).

Another relevant treaty is the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, adopted in 1998. This one is particularly relevant because it links environmental rights and human rights and imposes obligations on parties regarding access to information, public participation, and access to justice in environmental issues (Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development n.d.). It is the only Convention among the described ones that all three countries of the South Caucasus have joined (Status of the Aarhus Convention 1998). It means that all three countries ratified the Convention, but only Armenia and Georgia signed the Protocol (Status of the Protocol to Aarhus Convention 2003). Additionally, Armenia and Azerbaijan have joined the Convention on Transboundary Effect of Industrial Accidents (Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents 1992), the aim of which is to help its members to cooperate and prevent industrial accidents that can have transboundary effects as well as to get prepared for such accidents in case they should occur. This convention also encourages

³³ There are several stages of joining a convention – signing and then ratification or accession (the latter two are referred to as "joining" in this paper). Other terms such as "acceptance" and "approval" are also used instead of "ratification" or "accession".

cooperation and joint research as well as information exchange. On the other hand, however, none of the countries of the region are signatory to the UN Watercourses Convention, adopted in 1997 and entered into force in 2014. This Convention in fact aims to foster cooperation for regular exchange of data and information, protecting ecosystems, preventing and reducing pollution including during armed conflict (Schulz 2014).

Additionally, the National Environmental Action Plans (NEAP) have been adopted by all three countries to reform national legislation in order to address environmental issues adequately. And yet, while Armenia and Georgia have chosen to renew their NEAPs, Azerbaijan decided to opt for other national environmental strategies and plans (Leonardelli 2016).

Like many other countries that incorporate environmental rights into their domestic legislations, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia as well accepted responsibility upon membership to the European Neighborhood Program in 2004 to initiate environmental reforms. Within another regional initiative of the EU, the Eastern Partnership (EaP), established in 2011, the member countries and the EU adopted a Roadmap in the Vilnius Summit in 2013, aimed at monitoring reforms including those in environmental matters. A flagship institute, the EU Shared Environmental Information System, was launched to strengthen environmental governance and partnership (European Commission 2016).

One of the most important regional environmental frameworks is the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD), which is the key operational tool of the EU Water Initiative (EUWI) that aims to provide water reform policies for the EU countries and beyond. Its objectives per the EUWI Report of 2016 include improving the institutional and regulatory framework and managing water in a way that contributes to water, food, and energy security and economic development (European Union Water Initiative 2016). The 2014 assessment report of the EUWI on National Policy Dialogues shows that Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia have achieved significant improvements in adopting the principles of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) in which the EU WFD and UNECE Water Convention serve as a framework to facilitate the transition, although transforming those frameworks into practice remains a challenge. There is a big gap between commitment and enforcement; enough attention is not paid to monitoring and inspection as well as engaging the regulated community and deterring violations, which weaken the effectiveness of environmental laws (UN Environmental Programme 2014). The lack of transparency and public awareness are also mentioned as grave concerns (Mardiste, et al. 2014).

In general, there is a serious lack of regional cooperation bringing all three countries under one legal umbrella. As the case studies below demonstrate, the region has complex transboundary water issues that cannot be properly addressed without such cooperation.

The Projects Implemented in the Region

There have been different capacity-building and sub-regional cooperation projects that include the South Caucasus countries, such as the project on Capacity Building in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia in 2004-2008 (Subregional Cooperation and Capacity-Building 2017). The EUWI Plus for the Eastern Partnership (referred to as "EUWI+4 EaP" or "EUWI plus East") is another such program that aims to bring domestic legislation in line with the EU policy in water management, such as the EU WFD, specifically concentrating on transboundary water management, water quality, and equitable sharing of water at the basin level (EU Neighbours 2016). This project is not however the first of such initiatives. In the past years, other projects supported by donor organizations such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the USAID, the EU Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), have taken place in the region aiming at legal, policy, and planning activities. For instance, USAID, in collaboration with Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI), implemented the South Caucasus Water Management project in 2000-2002 aimed, "at strengthening co-operation among water agencies at local, national and regional levels and demonstrate[ing] integrated water resources management" (UN Environmental Program 2002). And yet, even though there are bilateral agreements between Georgia-Azerbaijan (1997) and Georgia-Armenia (1998) regarding transboundary environmental protection, until now there is insufficient cooperation and lack of data exchange among these pairs of countries, which has been a major problem preventing productive water resource management so far (UN Water Activity Information System 2007).

In addition, between 2002 and 2007, NATO and the OSCE realized the South Caucasus River Monitoring Project, which is considered the only reliable data in the field and is highly valued by experts from all three countries (North Atlantic Treaty Organization 2011). Its general objectives were to establish the social and technical infrastructure for a joint international transboundary river water quality and quantity monitoring, data sharing, and watershed management system among Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. However, one of the general problems of such

projects is that there is little or no cooperation among organizations and agencies who carry out such projects, as despite the overlapping activities, they do not share or exchange information also due to the lack of legally binding data exchange requirements (Campana, et al. 2008).

Environmental protection has turned into an international issue for decades now. Environmental protection, development, and poverty reduction have become mutually inclusive matters in internationally accepted rules and norms, including Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN. Additionally, there are regional initiatives in Europe, which cover the post-Soviet countries in the South Caucasus too. These regulations are expected to facilitate the management of environmental matters specifically with a transboundary impact. The overview of the international and regional legal frameworks demonstrates that regional cooperation has sufficient initial legal ground. However, existing problems, be it related to domestic governance or inter and intra-state conflicts, significantly reduce the prospects for cooperation, without which achieving visible impact to protect the environment is less likely. The case studies will, therefore, shed light on environmental issues to reveal deficiencies in the transition from policies to actions.

Transboundary Environmental Protection in the Context of Human Rights and Conflicts in the Region: Water Flow (Mis-)Management and Pollution

A General Overview

In the Soviet Union, the South Caucasus countries did not have any overt hostilities with each other concerning transboundary water management because the Kura-Araks river basin, which is considered the main source of water for these countries, was within the common borders of the Soviet Union. However, changing political dynamics between neighboring countries has been a big factor influencing the management of cross-border water issues (O'Hara 2000). As such, the lack of adequate cooperation stemming from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has caused a big hurdle for developing a viable and efficient multilateral water management system in the region. For example, there are no water related treaties among the three countries, a condition directly related to the political situation in the region (Campana, et al. 2008). The conflicts are further exacerbated by tensions related to transboundary water resources. These tensions are conditioned by factors such as the unequal distribution and reduction of water; the construction of uncoordinated water structures and irrigation systems; the use of water and water structures in conflict zones as provocation tools; pollution; weak cooperation between

governments, environmental structures, and NGOs; the lack of compatibility of water standards, etc. (Yildiz 2017).

However, a study by Campana based on in-depth interviews with environmental experts from the countries of the region demonstrate that the interviewees (93.3 percent) agreed that water resources cooperation among Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia could lead to peace and improved welfare in the region (Campana, et al. 2008). For this to be realized, the countries are expected to sign, ratify, and implement regional and international agreements. And yet, as discussed above, there are several international agreements on addressing environmental issues that have been signed by the countries in the South Caucasus, but rarely all three have signed or ratified an agreement, which promotes regional cooperation based on mutual accountability and commitment. Although conflicts may seem a hindering factor for cooperation, for the sake of the environment and human rights, routes for cooperation should be established. It is therefore necessary that the South Caucasus countries sign and ratify environmental agreements to ensure coordinated management, accountability, and mutual exchange of statistical data on the environment.

The Kura-Araks Basin

In the regional context, the Kura-Araks (or Aras in Turkish) river basin, specifically the management of these rivers as well as their tributaries, is of most interest. The transboundary river basin area is about 190,110 km², and the majority of this is located in Azerbaijan (31.5 percent), Georgia (18.2 percent), and Armenia (15.7 percent). The rest is located in Iran (19.5 percent) and Turkey (15.1 percent) (UN Food and Agriculture Organization 2009). The main use of the Kura-Araks waters in is agriculture in Georgia and agriculture and industry in Armenia. In Azerbaijan, the Kura-Araks water is the primary source of fresh water, including 70 percent drinking water.

There are rigid problems related to the quality and quantity of water concerning the South Caucasus countries. In general, the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) indicates several common transboundary problems concerning the Kura-Araks basin – freshwater flow modifications, the pollution of drinking water, the loss of ecosystems, the exploitation of fisheries, the fluctuating climate, such as droughts and floods (UN Water Activity Information System 2007). To expand, Campana and et al.'s statement depicts the situation: "In general terms, Georgia has an oversupply of water, Armenia has some shortages based on poor management, and Azerbaijan has a lack of water. [...] The basin is excessively polluted due to a lack of treatment for urban wastewater and agricultural return flows, pesticides

such as DDT that are used in Azerbaijan, and the recent resurgence of chemical and metallurgical industries in Georgia and Armenia" (Campana, et al. 2008). Almost 80 percent of the countries' wastewater loads are discharged into the surface waters of the Kura-Araks basin (Campana, et al. 2008).

In addition to pollution, a lot of water flow modification has taken place in the past years mainly due to the constructed water dams and reservoirs and hydropower stations on the rivers. According to 2009 data, more than 130 major dams and reservoirs exist on the tributaries of the Kura and Araks rivers, while two big ones exist on the rivers themselves (UN Food and Agriculture Organization 2009), the biggest being the Mingachevir dam in Azerbaijan (Kerres 2010). These dams and reservoirs are used for hydropower and irrigation, as well as for regulating the river flow and preventing floods (Kerres 2010). Although dams and reservoirs have an important socio-economic role, they also result in the reduction of hydrological flow in rivers which in its turn negatively affects the environment and humans downstream. As a result of human activities, it is calculated that 40 percent of the water in case of Kura and 27 percent of the water in case of Araks is not discharged to the Caspian Sea (Kerres 2010).

The pollution of rivers due to heavy metal extraction, mining, and other activities is also an issue that transcends borders in the region since the polluted water in one country flows into one of the major rivers, either Araks or Kura, that eventually end up in the Caspian Sea. Pesticides and fertilizers used in agriculture, as well as untreated wastewaters are yet another cause for river pollution. Although water treatment facilities were installed throughout the Kura-Araks basin during the Soviet times, few of those if any are operational today (Kerres 2010). Since all three countries use waters from the Kura-Araks basin for their agricultural needs, while for Azerbaijan these rivers are also a source of drinking water, from the human rights perspective, keeping these rivers clean stems from the obligation of all these states towards their citizens to provide them with adequate standards of living (Article 11), including high standard of physical and mental health (Article 12) and the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain living by work (in this case, agriculture as a source of living) (Article 6) (UN Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 1966). This is one of the clear manifestations of the interlink between a clean environment and socio-economic rights which are at stake when local and transboundary environmental damage is not addressed effectively. It is also important to highlight that the different studies regarding the already implemented regional projects assessing water quality from the early 2000s till 2010 show that these initiatives mainly cover the three South Caucasus countries

and do not include Iran or Turkey³⁴ which, however, also share a portion of the basin. This is one of the factors causing a lack of coordination and effective management at the wider regional level.

The Impact of Hydropower Stations

Hydropower generation is a major water user in the Kura-Araks basin, along with agriculture. Although it is considered a non-consumptive use of water, dams for hydropower generation store large amounts of water that cannot be used for a certain time. For example, in summers, when there is an increase of water needs for irrigation purposes in agriculture, water is still stored for electricity generation for winter. Meanwhile, water reduction in rivers has ecological consequences leading to the degradation of floodplain forests, the reduction of fish stock downstream, bank erosion, etc. (UN Water Activity Information System 2007). Some other causes of the flow reduction in rivers include the loss in water distribution systems for irrigation as well as deforestation (UN Water Activity Information System 2007).

The Water Dams and Reservoirs on the River Araks in Turkey and Armenia

There are around 14 hydropower plants constructed or planned on the River Araks in Turkey. Five of these are complete (Aras Nehri [Aras River] n.d.). The location of one of the planned projects, the Tuzluca dam, is near the border with Armenia, and it has faced particular criticism and opposition for its environmentally destructive character. The environmentalists from Turkey have raised alarm that this project, planned as both a dam for irrigation and power generation, will destroy the River Araks Bird Sanctuary – an important nesting area and migratory route for about 240 bird species (Rivers Without Boundaries 2013). Additionally, there are five villages nearby which together with their agricultural lands will be submerged for the purposes of this project and some 2,000 people will be displaced (Environmental Justice Atlas 2017). As for the Armenian side, as mentioned in a recent interview by Ayser Ghazaryan, the deputy minister of nature protection of Armenia, the construction of many dams on a single river is not only going to be environmentally burdensome for the habitats downstream the river, but also the

³⁴ The review of the report prepared by the Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus with the support of the UNECE (Regional Environmental Center for the Caucasus 2011) gives a clear picture that multiple regional projects implemented have included the three South Caucasus countries in one project or as a part of a bigger project that covers the post-Soviet states, which means that Iran and Turkey are not part of those frameworks.

reduction of water flow in the river will force Armenians to rely even more heavily on water from Lake Sevan, which is already burdened with human activities (Econews 2018). In such circumstances, the role of the River Akhurian (or Arpachay in Turkish) flowing from the homonymous reservoir also increases, as it is not only a feeding source for the nearby habitats, but also a source for the River Araks. On the other hand, anthropogenic interference also affects the Akhurian reservoir as there are two dams on Lake Childir (Çıldır Gölü [Lake Childir] n.d.) and at least one more is being constructed on the River Kars (Karsmanset 2018). On the other hand, the Armenian side also impacts the flow into the River Akhurian with small hydropower plants. In 2014, environmentalists alarmed about the excess of small hydropower plants on the River Akhurian since two small hydropower plants were being planned to be constructed in addition to the three existing ones (Armenian Environmental Front 2014). Thus, hydropower plants on the River Araks in Turkey and some small ones on the River Akhurian in Armenia pose threats of degradation of agricultural lands due to a lack of irrigation water and the disturbance of the ecosystem.

The Akhurian/Arpachay Agreement

In the context studied in this paper, there is also a positive story to lean on as a point of reference albeit with its deficiencies. Despite the long-lasting absence of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey, today the water intake from the Akhurian reservoir is still regulated by agreements dating back to the Soviet times when agreements were signed on water use and dam construction in 1927 and 1973. According to these agreements water intake is equally distributed between the two countries – 50 percent for each side (Government of Armenia 2011). However, the director of the Akhurian-Araks Intake Closed Joint-Stock Company (CJSC) Eduard Sargsyan says that when signing the agreement, the Turkish side was obliged to let 350 m³ of water into the reservoir, and according to the agreement, there should have been no human interference with that amount. Yet, there are many dams now, and, as Sargsyan notes, the agreement is violated, and equal distribution is under question (Grigoryan 2013).

The Sarsang Reservoir

Several water dams and reservoirs in the South Caucasus are from the Soviet times. The Sarsang reservoir, a water infrastructure built on the Tartar river, is one of them situated in the zone of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In the past, apart from providing local communities with potable water, this reservoir served as a water basin to irrigate lands in the surrounding regions, which extend beyond the conflict zone to south eastern and north eastern areas in Azerbaijan. On the other hand,

there is a hydropower plant on the Sarsang reservoir that remains the main source of energy for Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakhpress 2018). The conflict is an obstacle for finding common methods to refurbish the dam and use water for drinking and irrigation purposes. Therefore, the Sarsang reservoir is an appropriate case to better understand the impact of conflicts on the environment, how local communities are constantly affected, and how authorities politicize environmental issues, which further reduces the chances for collaboration. Nevertheless, the Sarsang reservoir may seem a window for cooperation for Azerbaijanis and Armenians by targeting the environment as a common goal, despite growing divergences as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Milica Markovich states that due to this conflict, hundreds of thousands of people have been deprived of quality drinking water, but also a hundred thousand hectares of fertile lands lack appropriate seasonal irrigation in six regions of Azerbaijan adjacent to the conflict zone (Markovic 2015). Lack of water supply to the frontier regions of Azerbaijan as well as security risks related to maintenance problems of the Sarsang reservoir were issues reported to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), who adopted a resolution in January 2016 calling for independent engineers to inspect the situation and asking the Armenian authorities to stop using water as a political tool (Markovic 2015). The Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) report, however, shows that the Armenian population in Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijanis living in adjacent regions both suffer from lack of irrigation water from the Sarsang reservoir (Poghosyan, Novruz and Musaelyan 2016). In other words, due to the conflict, all local communities are affected although the degree of the negative impact and number of people affected may vary. To reclaim the main thesis of this work, it is the right of people living in conflict-affected communities to have access to clean water, which is clearly an issue as an outcome of this conflict in the South Caucasus.

Concerning the Sarsang reservoir and a potential humanitarian catastrophe, the Obama Administration called for arranging a meeting between technical experts from the sides to discuss water management and dam inspections (Mkrtchyan 2016). There is, however, no political will explicitly demonstrated by both authorities. For instance, back in 2013, the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities stated that they are ready to cooperate with Azerbaijan for maintenance and water management in the Sarsang reservoir (Asbarez 2013), yet Baku rejected the offer to negotiate with the Karabakh authorities (Meydan TV 2016) as only Armenia is accepted as a side to negotiate. Consequently, the authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh highlighted that the resolution by PACE reflects Azerbaijan's standpoint as the latter lacks will to negotiate (Asbarez 2016). Similar tones of resentment and

blaming are found in the official discourse in Azerbaijan as well, as its Foreign Ministry's spokesperson said: "the use of water resources as a tool for ecological terror and pressure is the state policy of Armenia" (Rashid 2017). It seems that the candid goal of both authorities is not to reach a resolution to address some urgent problems of the local communities, but rather use this issue as a mean to win on political terms by labeling the other as an aggressor or as non-cooperative. On the other hand, there are no legally binding requirements accepted by the countries in the region. Thus, there is a lack of information exchange between the government agencies, which in its turn creates a lack of trust in the data being unbiased. Leylekian states that Azerbaijan artificially perpetuates the Sarsang dam issue for political purposes, and the data is not reliable as it is politically biased (Leylekian 2016).

Phil Ghamagelyan, director of the Imagine Centre for Conflict Transformation, who was interviewed for this study, stated that based on the initial success of repairing the Zonkari dam by a third party to avoid a catastrophe, the Imagine Centre attempted to bring water engineers from the OSCE and the EU together for fixing the maintenance problems of the Sarsang reservoir. The attempt, however, ended in failure soon after it started as both Armenian and Azerbaijani authorities sought to politicize this process. Ghamagelyan noted: "The Armenian side tried to tie it in with some form of legitimization of the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities, while the Azerbaijani side continued to publicly blame the Armenian side for negligence, poisoning of water, and similar. It never gave the explicit green light to the EU experts". While comparing the Zonkari and Sarsang cases, he underlined that the former succeeded since the Georgian and South Ossetian colleagues agreed to depoliticize humanitarian and ecological issues, and this process did have no impact on the recognition or non-recognition of South Ossetia. On the other hand, the intensification of tensions in Nagorno-Karabakh in mid-2014 made the Azerbaijani experts retreat offering to wait for better times to resume to dialogue on this matter.

This case demonstrates that it is necessary that sides commit to environmental protection without perceiving their actions as a political loss or victory. Allowing a third party to fix the maintenance problems or repair the irrigation canals to provide all with water with zero media coverage can work in practice, which in fact has a precedent in case of Georgia as the below discussion shows.

The Zonkar/i Reservoir

The Zonkar/i reservoir, situated in eastern Georgia, sits among three villages – Upper Zonkar/i, Lower Zonkar/i, and Atsriskhevi/Atsriskheu. It gets its water

supply from Little Liakhvi and has the capacity to contain 40 m³ of water. According to some engineers, the reservoir has a potential to sustain a dam which could generate 8 megawatts of electricity a year (Alania Inform 2009). The Zonkar/i reservoir was built and put into exploitation in 1973 and was maintained by engineers assigned by the government of Georgia up until 2008. After the August 2008 War, the reservoir remained on the other side of the South Ossetia conflict divide and is no longer controlled by the government of Georgia, and the engineers assigned by the government of Georgia are not allowed to enter the reservoir territory for ongoing monitoring.

When the reservoir was functional, it was feeding two main local channels, Tiriphon/i and Vanati/Uanat, as the main source of water for the watering systems of about 60 villages, both Georgian and Ossetian. After 2008, the shields were closed during irrigation seasons for either side, which caused water accumulation. The South Ossetian authorities, after receiving recognition by Russia in 2008, wanted to cooperate with Georgia only on the condition where all the official documents would be sealed and signed by both as two sovereign parties. The Georgian government was unwilling to accept these terms. In 2011, the water inside reached an alarming level and became a danger for the surrounding three villages. The Georgian media reported that due to the dire technical condition, the reservoir could collapse failing to hold excess water, which would wash over villages populated by Georgians and Ossetians (Expert Club 2011). In November 2012, after the alarm from the local villagers, the Georgian technicians requested the visit to the reservoir to check its condition (Aptsiauri 2012). Politicians and diplomats gathered in Istanbul and Yerevan several times to discuss the issue of the reservoir crisis. "I confess that as a former minister of integration I also did not make enough steps for its resolution because I did not feel I was supported from the higher levels of the Georgian government", Paata Zakareishvili says in an interview conducted for this paper, "I think the Ossetian party was much closer to cooperation than the Georgian one but neither government had any clear vision of the solution. I felt weak during negotiations because I knew I would have problems with my own government later if I really did what I believed in". The eventual collaboration on the problem is a sign that at some point, the potential humanitarian disaster became apparent to all.

The final agreement was not the best outcome of the negotiations, but it was the minimum to avoid the worst. Without signing any document, Georgian experts were allowed to conduct maintenance only once to prevent a potential flood. The water reservoir shields were opened, and the accumulated water level yielded down. The cooperation did not result in more than this, and since then, the water

reservoir is not used for irrigation either by the Georgian or the Ossetian side. However, the parties involved in negotiations say that the Zonkar/i reservoir case was positive because it helped to avoid a flood, even though the negotiations were not fully utilized to achieve more mutual benefits. In an interview conducted for this paper, Gela Zaziashvili said that there is potential for further negotiations, although the talks on the issue did not take place for more than a year.

The Zonkar/i reservoir is now being operated by the de-facto South Ossetian government. They operate it in a manner opposite to the local needs: it is closed during the irrigation season and opened during winter, when irrigation water is not needed. The reservoir is in dire technical conditions. Since the government of Georgia is not able to use the Zonkar/i reservoir water for irrigation, it has installed a water pumping infrastructure to pump water from the River Big Liakhvi for irrigation. The infrastructure uses electricity for pumping, and its operation costs more than the use of the Zonkar/i reservoir would have been.

The Enguri Reservoir

The Enguri dam and hydropower plants that are in the zone of the Abkhazia conflict, has been a place for Georgian and Abkhazians to meet, talk, and cooperate. The war of 1992 put the divide between different parts of the largest hydropower facility in the Caucasus, with the dam on the Georgian side of the River Engur/i and the power plants on the Abkhazian side. The complex has strategic importance: this is the main source of electricity for both Georgians and Abkhazians. Since this strategic complex can only function as a whole, the conflicting parties have agreed on certain terms to maintain its constant operation for their energy security. The cooperation over the River Engur/i water resources was born out of economic and social necessity (Cohen and Garb 1999).

Regardless of the tense political relations between governments and authorities, the Georgian and Abkhazian staff have maintained relationships and have worked together without major disagreements. In other words, the power complex has forced the then-leaders Ardzinba and Shevardnadze, as well as the current Georgian and Abkhazian leaders to communicate via telephone or in person. These constructive conversations have facilitated the negotiations (Garb and Whitely 2001). Even during the short period of the closure of the complex for rehabilitation in Winter 2017, part of the energy to Abkhazia was provided by Russia, whereas the rest of it was supplied by the government of Georgia (Civil.ge 2017).

Despite the cooperation, there remain disagreements about energy distribution. Abkhazians, including the Gal/i residents (mostly ethnic Georgians), do not have electricity meters. The Abkhazian authorities started to install meters, but the

process is on halt for unknown reasons. The electricity monthly bill is fixed at 400 rubles per month by the Abkhazian authorities, although it is unclear how this figure was calculated. According to the last report published on the website of the electricity provider Engurhesi Ltd., the company has growing financial problems. If the situation does not change, the company will not be able to cover the debts only with payments from one side of River Engur/i pays (Geoworld 2011). By the last reporting³⁵ time of 2016 the company loss constituted 38,129 GEL. The report cites that the electricity given to the de-facto government of Abkhazia free of charge is one of the major problems which needs to be addressed immediately. Officials on both sides acknowledge that the demand for electricity in Abkhazia is rising which is a growing concern for officials in Georgia (Kokaia 2017) and think tanks in the energy sector (Margvelashvili 2017). In addition, the Georgian media reports about the dire circumstances of the power plant complex. In May 2018, the Georgian media reported that the main power generator of the plant was flooded, and the water stood 20 cm high inside (Georgian Broadcaster 2018). During the period of this technical problem, Georgia imported electricity from Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Armenia to meet the electricity demand in the country.

Similar to the Zonkar/i case, there remains unused room for cooperation in the case of the Engur/i complex.

Water Pollution in the Region

For Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, municipal, industrial, and agricultural sources are the main causes of the pollution in the Kura-Araks basin. As long as wastewater treatment systems are old and expensive to refurbish, urban and rural wastewater constitute the most important pollution sources.

The Sources of Water Pollution in Armenia

Water quality is another factor negatively impacting the ecosystem and habitats in and around the River Araks. According to the 2017 data from the Environment Impact Monitoring and Information Center, the River Voghji, which is another tributary of Araks, is classified as a 5th class river, which is the worst quality or heavily polluted³⁶ (Environmental Impact Monitoring and Information Center 2017). According to an earlier research, the mining industry had been identified as

³⁵ As of this writing, the company has moved its website, and the file is not available online to be cited for now.

³⁶ Armenia has a government decision specifying water quality classification (Government of Armenia 2011).

the reason for such a heavy pollution of Voghji (Ողջի գետի աղտոտումն ու լեռնահանքային արդյունաբերությունը՝ փորձագիտական գնահատական [Voghji River Pollution and Mining Industry – Expert Evaluation] 2010). Norashenik is its main tributary, and it has also been identified with the 5th category, and this is no surprise considering its heavy influence by wastewater from the Artsvanik tailing dam, the biggest in the region. Overall, the heavy presence of mining industry in the region has impacted the increase of such metals as iron, manganese, zinc, lead, cadmium, and others in the River Voghji (Gabrielyan, Shahnazaryan and Minasyan 2018).

The mining industry has been one of the major polluters in the Kura-Araks basin. Although it is reported that metallurgical and mining sites in Armenia and Turkey are especially concerning for the River Araks (Kerres 2010), in recent years, mining has also developed alongside the River Kura and its tributaries. As a result, the concentration of metals at the confluence of Araks and Kura exceeds permissible levels by up to nine times; the concentration of phenols is six times higher, and mineral oil and sulphates are two and three times higher, respectively (Kerres 2010). If years ago, the main source of pollution for the River Kura was untreated municipal wastewater, in recent years, the pollution from mining has added both from the Georgian and Armenian side (Bakradze, Kuchava and Shavliashvili 2017). It is worth a note that to stop further pollution of rivers in Armenia, a movement by environmental groups has been launched in the past years to halt another mining project in Amulsar, an area where two more rivers are located – Arpa and Vorotan, tributaries of the River Araks (Liakhov and Khudoyan 2018).

On the Armenian side, the River Debed, another tributary of Kura, also suffers particularly from mining activities. Again, according to the 2017 state monitoring data, water quality in the River Debed is in the 5th category at the border with Georgia. Its Akhtala and Shnogh tributaries are as well in a similar condition (Environmental Impact Monitoring and Information Center 2017). In all cases, the concentration of molybdenum together with other metals is high, which is indicative of the sort of metal mining that is taking place nearby. The River Shnogh is specifically impacted by copper-molybdenum mining in Teghout. Only within 3-4 years of construction and exploitation of this mine, the water quality in the River Shnogh changed from the "good" to the "bad" category (Minasyan 2015). The most recent reported case about leaks from the mine's tailing dam was at the beginning of 2018 (Teghout Tailing Dump Tails Flowing into Shnogh and Debed Rivers: Inspection Following Alarm Signal 2018). Ever since, the mine has stopped its operation. Various reasons have been mentioned, one of them being the tailing dams' instability. The company operating the mine has confirmed this in a letter

(Teghout CJSC Confessed: Teghout Tailing Dump Sustainability Indicators Don't Comply with Armenian Legislative and International Highest Criteria 2018).

The other tributary of Debed, Akhtala, is impacted by the activity of the Akhtala Mountain Enrichment Combine and its tailing dam (Akhtala River Resembling a Tailing Pipe Because of Accumulation of Akhtala ODC Dumps 2015). Some of the heavy metals found here in addition to molybdenum, are zinc, copper, manganese, and cobalt (Environmental Impact Monitoring and Information Center 2017). The most recent reported case about leaks from the dam was at the beginning of 2018. Following the raised alarm, the Inspectorate for Nature Protection and Mineral Resources carried out an analysis and revealed a high concentration of heavy metals in the water of the River Debed. Although a penalty was set for the company, certain skepticism was expressed regarding the measures to stop the pollution (Arzumanyan 2018). The copper mine of the town of Alaverdi and particularly its dam is also reported to pollute the River Debed (through its tributary Madan) as a result of uncontrolled rain flows washing the surface of the dam and going into the river (Paremuzyan 2014).

The pollution of rivers along with the pollution of air and soil is not only an ecological issue, but directly affects human health and economic activity. Cases are periodically reported in Armenia regarding health problems in communities near mining zones (Paremuzyan 2014). The disruption of such economic activities as land cultivation and plant growing that is due to polluted waters from rivers near mines and tailing dams are also reported periodically (Nikoghosyan 2018). Therefore, a clean environment, apart from its importance for biodiversity, is directly linked with people's wellbeing and their economic and social rights.

The Sources of Water Pollution in Azerbaijan

To begin with, it is worth to mention that unlike in Armenia and Georgia, pollution deriving from oil extraction in the Caspian Sea is one of the main sources of pollution in Azerbaijan as the pollution from the oil industry constitutes more than 90 percent of air pollution in the country (Mustafaev and Yuzbashov 2001). The water quality in the Kura-Araks basin is a big issue in Azerbaijan since a significant portion of drinking water comes from that basin. *Vibrio cholera*, a globally spread gastrointestinal disease, is found in surface waters in Azerbaijan, including in rivers and the Caspian Sea, which is due to the insufficient treatment of water (Ahmadov, et al. 2013). In fact, as the report by Vogel et al. shows, although there are 16 wastewater treatment plants in the country, only some of them are functional (Vogel, et al. 2017). On the other hand, the deteriorating conditions in small mountain rivers in Azerbaijan is due to intensive water withdrawals for irrigation

and high pollution deriving from the mining industry in the Small Caucasus (Abbasov and Smakhtin 2009). To be more specific, the water pollution is due to several factors, such as untreated wastewater discharges from sewerage systems, both urban and industrial, and loads of agricultural fertilizers (Euwipluseast n.d.). Plants and mining centers discharge significant amounts of wastewaters to the tributary rivers in the Kura-Araks basin, such as the Rivers Agstafachay, Qoshgarchay, and Ganjachay in the north-western part of the basin.

In general, most of the pollutant materials include dissolved oxygen, iron, and other metals. For instance, Ganjachay is highly polluted with ammonium and nitrate, whereas Agstafachay is polluted with dissolved oxygen, oil products, and copper, the latter coming from Armenia (International Hydrological Program Association Report 2013). In addition, agricultural waste is also discharged to different tributaries in the basin, including the Rivers Tovuzchay and Zayamchay. In general, the heavy metal content in the soils in Azerbaijan exceeds world standards by 8 times for lead, 3 times for cadmium, twice for nickel, 50-60 times for zinc, and 10 times for copper (Ewing 2010). Such a level of soil contamination is likely to pollute the rivers as well. The lack of effective mechanisms for environmental water management in the South Caucasus have in their turn exacerbated the problem (Abbasov and Smakhtin 2009). Azerbaijan, therefore, faces the challenge of the low quality of water in rivers that is the result of both domestic and transboundary pollutants.

The Sources of Water Pollution in Georgia

As in Armenia and Azerbaijan, there are different sources of water pollution in Georgia. Mining is one of the causes of water pollution in Georgia. There have been major heavy metal pollution cases in the River Mashavera, that joins the River Kura. The official monitoring on surface water systems, conducted by the Agency of Natural Resources of Georgia, shows excess of some pollutants in certain points not only in the River Kura, but also in its tributaries, Kazretula and Mashavera, flowing nearby the mining company Rich Metals Group. In Fall-Winter 2016, manganum concentration exceeded the norm in several monitoring points in the Kura River. In the village of Kesalo, Gardabani municipality, the manganum concentration was higher than permitted by Georgian law (42.2 mg/l; threshold limit value – 1.1 mg/l). The sulphates concentration (1,218.52 mg/l; threshold limit value – 2.4 mg/l), and calcium concentration (297.74 mg/l; threshold limit value – 1.7 mg/l) as well exceeded in the same monitoring point (National Environmental Agency 2017).

Moreover, the amount of ammonium nitrates was higher than permitted in the Borjomi municipality, ranging from 0.163-1.757 mg/l, whereas the threshold limit value is 1.4 mg/l. The ammonium nitrate concentration was higher in five samples in the Kareli municipality and in Tbilisi near the Zahesi dam. In one sample, the oxygen concentration near the Vakhushti bridge was also lower than regulated by the law. In the River Kazretula, which flows by the mining company Rich Metals Group, and later joins the River Mashavera, ammonium nitrate exceeded the maximum permissible value in case of 20 samples out of 23. For example, the calcium concentration was 73.18-260.75 mg/l with the threshold limit value being 1.4 mg/l. The River Poladauri also had a slight excess of such heavy metals as barium and cadmium (National Environmental Agency 2017).

Sewage is another source of pollution for rivers. 11.7 percent of the Georgian population are still connected to a wastewater collecting system without subsequent treatment (National Statistics Office of Georgia 2017). On the other hand, while about 70 percent of the urban sewage collecting systems are directly connected to sewage collecting systems, rural households are still polluting the environment (European Union Water Initiative 2012). In addition, illegal waste landfills, dump sites, including those of construction waste are also a major issue affecting the water quality along the River Kura. Such waste sites found in the river basin, made by common people, do not meet any standards; they do not have bottom sealing or leachate collecting systems. Consequently, hazardous substances pollute not only groundwater, but also the river since they are mostly stored on riverbanks and are flushed away during floods, polluting rivers by organic material and plastic waste (European Union Water Initiative 2012).

In Georgia, one major hotspot with respect to transboundary water management is represented by the wastewater treatment plant in Gardabani, located close to the border with Azerbaijan. It is the only operating wastewater treatment plant in Georgia, and it collects and treats municipal wastewater from Tbilisi and Rustavi, although it ensures only mechanical treatment and discharges partially untreated wastewater in the River Kura, which flows to Azerbaijan. Seemingly, there is a lack of proper infrastructure to manage wastewaters across the borders, and the sources of water pollution are multiple, mainly being sewage and heavy metal concentration from mining (European Union Water Initiative 2012).

Conclusion

This paper sought to examine the existing environmental problems in the South Caucasus region, specifically the Kura-Araks basin, which is a common environmental denominator for the South Caucasus countries as well as Iran and

Turkey. We have argued that access to potable water and water sources to irrigate lands to produce goods for living are the rights of people in local communities affected by the conflicts in the region.

The focus has been primarily on transboundary water management and two different problems deriving from it: water flow and pollution. Our review of regional and international legal frameworks shows that while there are several environmental agreements binding one or two of the South Caucasus countries, there is always a missing party that reduces the coordination and management of transboundary water issues. In addition, there is not a single trilateral agreement signed between Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia that would force them all to commit to obligations to protect the environment. Also, the regional projects are mainly initiated by foreign donors and implementing organizations, such as USAID, UNEP, and EU institutions, but they rarely include Iran or Turkey as riparian states in those projects. On the other hand, the pollution of waters seems a significant issue in all three countries, but there is a lack of a mechanism to exchange data between the sides and take responsibilities to reduce pollution. The data from all three countries show that the sources of pollution are mainly wastewaters from sewage, agriculture, and the mining industry. The upstream pollution, doubled with downstream pollution, considerably damages the environment as waters become more polluted, which is a grave concern in regards with Azerbaijan where most of the drinking water comes from rivers in the Kura-Araks basin unlike Armenia and Georgia that use underground water for drinking. Also, Kura is the second largest river flowing into the Caspian Sea providing around 10 percent of the total inflow, and it thus might provide an even greater share of the Caspian's pollutants (UN Water Activity Information System 2007).

The politicization of environmental problems is another issue hurting any potential for non-political engagements on environmental protection. In other words, some of the water reservoirs happen to be in conflict zones, which cause an additional challenge to manage waters, be it for irrigation or drinking. Therefore, local communities on both sides suffer from lack of the unresolved conflicts and the non-cooperation on environmental matters.

Positive collaboration stories, such as that of the Zonkar/i reservoir demonstrate that there is always an opportunity for mutually beneficial decisions. The same argument can be claimed about the deal between Turkey and Armenia, regarding the Akhurian reservoir. However, it is clear that not all expectations can be fulfilled when partnerships take place, which is the case with the Enguri dam, but it is much better to have some deal than nothing at all as it is the case with the Sarsang dam in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In this case, there is lack of trust

and shortage of reliable data. Also, the actions of all sides are politicized, which reduces the chances for cooperation in non-political matters without taking steps politically. The politicization of environmental issues is paralleled with active media coverage, the objectivity of statements in which are difficult to verify. One solution offered so far could be the involvement of local district officials of Azerbaijan and the authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh with relevant representatives of water management agencies and even NGOs to work out the terms of equitable distribution as well as prevention of floods and contamination of water resources (Huseynov and Poghosyan 2012).

It is worth also to mention that most of the environmental issues are legacies of the Soviet period, but significantly exacerbated since the 1990s. On paper, all three countries have adopted domestic laws corresponding to international norms. However, as it was mentioned previously, domestic institutions are often inept in putting those rules into practice. In addition, at this stage, the type and magnitude of transboundary issues are still poorly understood. For instance, while it can be inferred that pollution in an upstream country is very likely to affect downstream countries, no actual measurement has been undertaken at the borders so far. Thus, no actual data is available, for example, on the type and quantities of pollutants passing from one country to the other nor on the actual contribution of erosion in an upstream country to floods in downstream countries (European Union Water Initiative 2012).

Recommendations

In our opinion, it is of utmost importance that governments perceive domestic and transborder environmental issues and human rights as mutually inclusive, for which the needs and interests of the local communities should be prioritized. This process must, however, begin with an effort by the conflicting sides to detach the prevailing environmental problems from the conflicts. The sides must avoid seeing environmental problems as a tool to make political gains. It reduces trust and sparks further antagonism.

The sides must take very local and small-scale attempts, if necessary, with no media coverage, to exchange visits to observe the conditions of the reservoirs. It is to be understood that much longer time and resources are necessary to succeed in achieving tangible outcomes. On the other hand, the sides should take the short-term needs of local communities into account to ensure they are not deprived of their rights to access to water and a clean environment. This is possible if the sides understand that these measures should be taken to preempt certain humanitarian catastrophes, which was successfully done in the Zonkar/i case. In this regard, one

of the important steps will be engaging some representatives of local communities that are directly affected by environmental problems.

There are several environmental agreements that must be signed by all three countries for building a legal ground for trilateral cooperation. It will facilitate data exchange, which is one of the serious problems causing a lack of trust. International agreements are important, and yet without external and internal incentives, the implementation of responsibilities envisioned by local laws and international agreements can take more time than humans and nature can afford. It is important that there is support and guidance as well as demand from international institutions and states to solve transboundary issues such as the prevention of pollution of the Kura-Araks basin.

The role of foreign actors, such as those from the UN and European agencies in monitoring the situation on the ground in cooperation with the local agencies is vital. Monitoring should be done in all states as well as in conflict zones. Such monitoring will help to make a working action plan for pollution prevention in the whole region. Moreover, monitoring in conflict areas will also disperse uncertainty regarding the state of environment there, which often becomes a source of myth making in conflict rhetoric and therefore additional ground for conflict exacerbation.

The five littoral countries of the Caspian Sea (Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran, and Azerbaijan) should pay additional attention to the protection of the river basins feeding the sea, including the Kura-Araks basin, in addition to controlling other industrial activities in the sea such as oil extraction. This policy recommendation is in addition to the suggestion directed at regional institutions to be inclusive in their projects, implementing them in the so-called "three plus two" format, alluding to the South Caucasus countries, as well as Iran and Turkey.

Finally, it is a must for each state to make a sober assessment of losses caused by the pollution of water, soil, and air that extends from issues such as the loss of biodiversity to issues such as economic losses due to decreased agricultural potential, budget expenditures due to pressure from the healthcare sector, migration from polluted areas, and even potential of conflict exacerbation due to transboundary pollution. This data must then be compared with the perspectives of developing green economy with nature- and human-friendly policies. Once the losses and benefits are clear, there are higher chances for harmonized coexistence of humans and nature, and one less reason for conflicts between neighbors.

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Meet the New *Normal*: Community-Driven Clean Energy Partnership and Regional Cooperation Between Turkey and Armenia

Yaprak Aydın, Suren Sargsyan

This paper discusses the project *Under the Same Sun* that has opened a new intersecting area of solidarity, conflict transformation, environmental rights, and energy democracy between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and communities in Turkey and Armenia. Community-based renewable energy production and active citizenship have been the locomotives of this solidarity.

The paper argues that renewable energy technologies not only have economic benefits and are safer for the environment but are also decentralization mechanisms which work to empower communities to create alternatives that can challenge the normality of the time. The determining agents of normalization can shift from governments and institutions to people. *Under the Same Sun* serves here as a good case study to discuss participatory rural development and decentralization in energy production in Armenia and Turkey.

Introduction

This paper discusses the project *Under the Same Sun*³⁷ that has opened a new intersecting area of solidarity, conflict transformation, and energy democracy between NGOs and communities in Turkey and Armenia.

The project partners – Troya Environmental Association (Troya) and Ayrudzy NGO (Ayrudzy)³⁸ – as two local NGOs have been carrying out projects on renewable energy sources³⁹, energy efficiency, energy cooperatives, regulations on renewable energy, and sustainable development in rural and urban spaces in Armenia and Turkey. Despite their long track record, the project partners did not know each other until they came together for the first time in November 2017.

By then, for a while, Troya had been in search of funds for the installation of a small-scale solar power station in the village of Gülpınar located in the southwest of the city of Çanakkale in Turkey. The main livelihoods of the local community are agriculture, precisely olive cultivation and viticulture, as well as tourism. However, the region was hit by severe earthquakes in the last few years which

³⁷ The project *Under the Same Sun* was funded by the program Support to the Armenia-Turkey Normalization Process (ATNP). The ATNP is a sub-grant scheme which was created in 2014 by a Consortium of eight civil society organizations from Armenia and Turkey with the financial assistance of the EU (Support to the Armenia-Turkey Normalization Process 2017).

³⁸ The authors of this paper were volunteers of Troya and Ayrudzy within the project *Under the Same Sun*. They also undertook the editorship of the project publication that serves as the source for all the information regarding the project in this paper (Under the Same Sun 2018).

³⁹ Renewable energy uses energy sources that are continually replenished by nature – the sun, the wind, water, the Earth's heat, and plants. Renewable energy technologies turn these fuels into usable forms of energy – most often electricity, but also heat, chemicals, or mechanical power (National Renewable Energy Laboratory 2001). The potential of renewable energy sources is enormous as they can in principle meet many times the world's energy demand. A transition to renewables-based energy systems is looking increasingly likely as their costs decline while the price of oil and gas continue to fluctuate. The development and use of renewable energy sources can enhance diversity in energy markets, contribute to securing long-term and sustainable energy supplies, help reduce local and global atmospheric emissions, and provide attractive options to meet energy needs, particularly in developing countries and rural areas, that help to create new employment opportunities (Herzog, Lipmann and Kammen 2001, 8). Renewable energy has advantages over hydropower plants as well that produce no air emissions but can affect water quality and wildlife habitats (National Renewable Energy Laboratory 2001).

destroyed houses and caused serious infrastructure problems in many villages, including Gülpınar. Troya came together with the village head many times before and discussed how to give the villagers a ground for a renewable energy cooperative to sustain the electricity needs of the agricultural production in the village. Considering that energy is one of the main factors determining sustainability in agricultural production, the local community supported the idea of establishing a renewable energy cooperative. However, when it came to practice, they were reluctant. As in the rest of the country, due to increasing rural poverty, small landowners are turning into landless agricultural workers. Following the devastation of the earthquakes, it became impossible for the local community to create the initial budget required for the installation of a solar power plant. At this juncture, the ATNP sub-grant scheme turned out a good opportunity.

On the other side of the border, Ayrudzy, founded in 2007 by a group of engineers and architects, had also been focusing on renewable energy sources, practices and cooperatives. The association was originally established in 1980 as a horse farm, where activities such as equestrian sports, folk dances, and shadow theatre took place on a 20-acre site. Today a riding club, Ayrudzy is located in the town of Ashtarak that is approximately 22 km northwest of Armenia's capital Yerevan. Ashtarak is a partially rural town with a population of 18,000 people and fruit growing as a thriving economic activity in the region. As a community and a place that has been able to produce concrete solutions to its own needs, Ayrudzy is a good model of how to keep structures local and sustainable. Similar to Troya, Ayrudzy has been in communication with legislative and executive bodies to improve the laws and regulations on renewable energy production in Armenia.

Before the two partners met, as one of the founding members of the International CLEEN Climate Change Network, Ayrudzy had also been in search for ways to expand its network in the field of renewable energy and to establish the first community-based renewable energy cooperative in Armenia. After the application for *Under the Same Sun* was selected by the ATNP Consortium, Ayrudzy and Troya rolled up their sleeves in March 2018 not only to launch a short-term project but also a partnership that they hope will last for years.

Following the project implementation, Troya as a member of the European Federation for Renewable Energy Cooperatives (REScoop.eu) became the co-organizer of the International Conference for Renewable Energy Cooperatives, which was held on September 10-11, 2018 in Izmir where experts from the European Union (EU), the Balkans, Turkey, and the Caucasus participated. Ayrudzy was the first ever participant of the conference from Armenia. The project *Under the Same Sun* was presented at the Conference.

The Economic Impact of the Solar Energy Stations in Gülpınar and Ashtarak

Within the project *Under the Same Sun*, two solar energy stations, which can produce energy at a 3-kilowatt (kW) capacity, were installed. The one installed on the roof of the village guesthouse in Gülpınar consists of 11 solar photovoltaic⁴⁰ (PV) panels of the “Telefunken” brand. Each panel has a capacity of 300 watt (W), that means the total capacity of the station is 3,300 W⁴¹. The solar PV panels on the guesthouse's roof generate approximately 20-25 kilowatt hours (kWh) electricity. The total energy production of the PV panels so far⁴² is about 1.25 megawatt hours (mWh) which amounts to 450 Turkish Lira and 1,248 kWh energy saving in the last three months. On the other hand, the solar power station installed on the garden wall of Ayrudzy Riding Club in Ashtarak consists of 9 solar PV panels of the “Topray” brand. Each panel has a capacity of 320 W, which means the total energy generation capacity of the station equals to 2,880 W.

There are off-grid and on-grid solar energy systems: in the former case, solar energy is stored for personal use (accumulated in batteries), whilst an on-grid solar energy system can sell the surplus of electricity back to the grid.

The solar energy system installed in Ashtarak is on-grid with an inverter⁴³ of the “Sofar” brand. The daily average energy production of the solar energy system is approximately 17.5 kWh during the summer season, hence 525 kWh per month. Considering the hot summer season⁴⁴, this is a good result, given also that the efficiency will increase in the fall season. The annual electricity consumption of Ayrudzy Riding Club is about 25,000 kWh. Previously, 5-kW capacity PV panels had been installed on the roof of a building at the riding club. Since the extra 3-kW

⁴⁰ Photovoltaics is a term denoting the conversion of light into electricity.

⁴¹ For comparison, here is the data for the energy consumption of some home appliances. The average energy consumption of modern refrigerators is 400-600 kWh per year. That is 33-50 kWh per month, or an average hourly power consumption of 46-69 Wh. The energy consumption of a washing machine during an average cycle is 900-1,350 Wh. For an iron, the average hourly energy consumption is 1,080 Wh; for a vacuum cleaner it is 750 Wh, and for an air conditioner it is 1800Wh (The Center of What's Possible n.d.).

⁴² The station was installed on May 5, 2018, and the data was taken on August 13, 2018.

⁴³ A solar panel produces a direct current (DC) where the electric current only flows in one direction. An inverter converts a DC to an alternating current (AC).

⁴⁴ The PV panel productivity decreases by 0.5 percent per each degree above 25 degrees Celsius of outside temperature.

capacity was added, the total electricity generation has increased to 13,000 kWh (13 mW). After all, approximately 52 percent of the annual electricity consumption of the riding club is compensated.

The solar energy system installed in Gülpınar is also on-grid. The guesthouse supplies its electricity needs from the PV panels during daytime, but due to insufficient capacity and lack of storage space, the guesthouse uses electricity from the main grid at nighttime. With the current capacity, the guesthouse saves 25 percent of its monthly electricity expenditure.

The Social Impact of Community-Driven Renewable Energy Projects. A Conceptual Framework

This data is important not only to grasp the impact of technical know-how on the economy but also on the society. It is all about decentralization and the empowerment of local communities, particularly in disadvantaged regions. Empowered communities can engage in decision making and have a say in what the new *normal* will be. Renewable energy technologies (PVs, wind turbines, biomass systems, and so on) are decentralization mechanisms which work to empower communities to create alternatives that can challenge the normality of the time.

In his article entitled "Normalization", Tanıl Bora says, "the narrative of normalization is miscellaneous" (Bora 2018). In contrast to its lexical meanings as usual, common, conventional, suitable, etc., the representation of normality in sociological discussions may not always correspond to the one that is defined by the *norms* as a 'truth', as what it should be. 'Normalization' in statistics refers to the methods of levelling data differences and multiplicity, but human beings are neither codes nor digits. Foucault re-conceptualizes it in his "Discipline and Punish" and refers with normalization to a set of methods for standardization, homogenization, and classification to ensure the disciplinary power in modern societies (Foucault 1995). Considering that Foucault focuses on key institutions such as the military, schools, and hospitals, these methods impose a relation between docility and utility. Through a constant control of time and space, governments build a new political anatomy of power that determines the limits of normalization between docile bodies. In international relations, similarly, there is a mainstream discourse of "normalization in bilateral relations" (Aras and Özbay 2008, Leogrande 2015, Cornago 2010, Duran 2018). Especially the media continuously speaks of normalization with Armenia, Turkey, China, Russia, Georgia, the EU, Azerbaijan, etc. which appears as a pure matter of diplomacy with

no real people inside. In reconciliation studies (Barbanel and Sternberg 2006), normalization is a politics of recovery that comes up with forgetting, remembering, acceptance, apology and/or memory work. Although this politics tends to face the facts, it also carries the uncanny possibility of normalizing the abnormal (or the anomaly), if adopted by any authority. Therefore, the norm does not necessarily correspond to the truth.

These miscellaneous meanings of normalization turn upside down when normalization is the turning into the new normal of that which is emancipatory against the norms of the authoritarian. Political scientists Moseley and Moreno used the term "Normalization of the Protest" in the context of democratization in the post-economic crisis in Argentina and Bolivia (Moseley and Moreno 2010). They suggested protest itself as the normalized form of the political voice of the ordinary people and shifted the discussion to the increasing community activism and participation in decision making. In other words, the determinants of normalization have been shifting from governments and institutions to people.

Developed by academic and development practitioner Robert Chambers, the Participatory Rural Appraisal approach uses local NGOs and community-driven initiatives to mobilize local communities in order to determine what they really need; what the limits of their reality are; and the way they can develop realistic solutions on their own. Therefore, Chambers asserts the decentralization of state authority and the empowerment of people as the two main processes to sustain rural development (Chambers 2013). Smoke defines decentralization as a change of mindset that is the result of reforms in the public sector, the fiscal system as well as politics, ownership, and accountability (Smoke 2003). In this context, *Under the Same Sun* serves here as a good case study to discuss participatory rural development and decentralization in energy production in Armenia and Turkey.

Decentralization, Active Citizenship, and Energy Democracy

Both Turkey and Armenia have centralized state structures, which are the only actors buying, selling, and distributing energy. Even though there are private companies producing energy, the state is the only authority to buy and distribute electricity, which means the state is also the only authority to set the market price of energy⁴⁵. In contrast to the EU, most citizens in Turkey and Armenia cannot

⁴⁵ In Morris and Jungjohann's "Energy Democracy", there is a great chapter comparing the Chicago School and the Freiburg School approaches to neoliberalism in terms of how they

choose their power operator. For example, in Germany, with the policy of the Energy Transition (*Energiewende* in German), community and citizen energy cooperatives have been allowed to generate electricity for their own needs as well as to sell the electricity surplus to other citizens. In this way, the centralized energy industry under the monopoly of the state-driven companies has been dissolved and "the power market has been opened to newcomers, especially those generating renewable energy" (Morris and Jungjohann 2016, 12). As a result of such policies, today REScoop.eu, for example, is a growing network of 1,250 energy cooperatives with more than 1,000,000 active members.

In Turkey, there are 16 community-owned renewable energy cooperatives. These are registered entities with a limited number of members, and due to complicated bureaucracy and/or the lack of start-up capital, none of them have yet been able to enter the stage of energy generation. Even though they could overcome the bureaucracy, the feed-in tariffs⁴⁶ to the community-based renewable energy cooperatives are 7.3 US Dollar cents/kWh for hydro and wind energy, 10.5 US Dollar cents/kWh for geothermal energy, and 13.3 US Dollar cents/kWh for biomass and solar energy, but only for 10 years⁴⁷, whereas this period is 15 years for coal-fired thermal power plants. Feed-in-tariffs are crucial because they bring costs down and represent a kind of state interventionism to ensure greater competition by adding new entrants on an oligopoly market" (Morris and Jungjohann 2016, 169). However, it leaves the 'how to' up to the market, and the Turkish government decided that the country needs more energy, but they do not prioritize it as green energy.

Today, in Turkey, there are 7,201 agricultural development cooperatives registered with 775,876 members in total (Cengiz 2017). If the necessary legal arrangements are made, these cooperatives can also produce renewable energy for agricultural

interpret Adam Smith's "invisible hand" as the pricing mechanism of the market. Although both approaches have the same roots as liberalism, the Freiburg School considers the intervention of the state necessary at some point, so it emphasizes "order" in the market to protect the small, the local, and the new against the energy giants. For this, taxation and feed-in tariffs are effective tools. Ordoliberalism, instead of less taxation, promotes environmental taxation for private companies and long-term feed-in tariffs for community-owned energy cooperatives (Morris and Jungjohann 2016, 161-196).

⁴⁶ A feed-in tariff is a payment made to households or businesses generating their own electricity through renewable sources.

⁴⁷ This limit is set by Article 6/A of the Law 5346 on the Use of Renewable Energy Resources for the Purpose of Generating Electrical Energy, amended on May 10, 2005 by the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources of the Republic of Turkey.

production and reduce the massive costs as well as the high carbon emissions. Creating renewable and self-sustainable bodies out of this potential of existing agricultural cooperatives is possible when only the state leaves its monopolistic status in the energy industry and ensures the competitiveness of these cooperatives with feed-in tariffs against international corporations in the market, which usually do not care about the 'how to' part of energy generation and do so for the profit.

In Armenia, according to the Statistical Committee's 2018 Yearbook 620,000 out of 1,084,700 total rural population are working in agricultural sectors (Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia 2017, Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia 2018). 303,900 of them are employed in 7,440 commercial farms (Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia 2018). According to the e-database of the State Register Agency of Legal Entities of the Ministry of Justice, 3,737 producer and 307 consumer cooperatives were registered till 2013 (State Register of the Legal Entities of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia 2018).

However, it is difficult to identify the number of agricultural production cooperatives separately within this total number because Armenia does not have a single comprehensive law on cooperatives. The cooperatives are mainly regulated by Article 51.3 of the Civil Code which says that "Depending upon the nature of activity, cooperatives may be organizations pursuing the extraction of profit as the basic purpose of their activity (commercial organizations) or not having extraction of profit as such a purpose (noncommercial organizations)" (National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia 1998 (2018)). However, renewable energy cooperatives are a completely new phenomenon in Armenia. With this in mind, starting from 2014 and for three years, in cooperation with Women Engage for a Common Future and Tapan NGO, Ayrudzy organized a series of trainings on cooperatives and democratic business models (Women Engage for a Common Future 2016).

Today, in the countries with centralized state structures such as Armenia and Turkey, taxation is one of the most direct control mechanisms on citizens. In contrast to Chamber's Participatory Rural Appraisal method, the state collects taxes through its institutions and makes decisions on behalf of citizens and decides how to allocate these taxes for public service, if deemed necessary. However, such centralized fiscal systems are mostly associated with higher corruption leading to the embezzlement of public resources, and citizens are mostly passive at the disposal of public goods and services. Although decentralization varies across countries, fiscal decentralization is an established practice (Fisman and Gatti 2002, 325) encouraged by international financial supporters or investors to enhance auditability, the effective use of resources, and the participation of people in the

planning and implementation stages of development projects in their environments. These practices of decentralization trigger new grounds to re-examine the concepts of citizenship and land. Shifting the concept of citizenship from a unilateral state-citizen relation to a pluralistic model (Young 1989) has led to new definitions of the concept such as active citizenship (Lister 1997), participatory citizenship (Gaventa 2002), inclusive citizenship (Kabeer 2002), and global citizenship (Carter 2001).

When it comes to energy and environmental policies in conflict and post-conflict contexts, conservatives and conservationists are united on one point – the interests of the community (McKibben 2007, 112). Both groups support the principles of energy independence and the right to fair and clean energy. This allows citizens from different social, ethnic, and economic strata of the society to negotiate and cooperate on the use of natural resources and renewable energy production as well as the independence of such a use from the state's intervention. *Bürgerenergie* (literally "citizen-energy" in German) is the name of residential and ground-mounted solar, biogas, and wind farms in Germany, funded by citizens as shareholders and businesses as investors. In Germany, when a small town talks about going renewable, it is mostly about installing solar panels on the roofs by citizens as community energy. This collective consciousness is grounded in the century-old law of *Eigentum verpflichtet* which could be translated as "with property comes responsibility" which means that property ownership entails a responsibility toward other stakeholders (Morris and Jungjohann 2016, 101-102).

Under the Same Sun has opened a new intersecting area of solidarity, conflict transformation, environmental rights⁴⁸, and energy democracy between non-governmental organizations (NGO) and communities in Turkey and Armenia. Community-based renewable energy production and active citizenship have been the locomotives of this solidarity. How did these play out?

Not only earthquakes disturbed the village of Gülpınar in the recent period. In 2017, an energy company started drilling operations in olive groves, 700 meters away from the village, in order to establish a geothermal energy plant in the region

⁴⁸ The Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund defines environmental rights as immanent to community rights: "Community Rights include *environmental rights*, such as the right for clean air, pure water, and healthy soil; *worker rights*, such as the right for living wages and equal pay for equal work; *rights of nature*, such as the right of ecosystems to flourish and evolve; and *democratic rights*, such as the right of local community self-government, and the right for free and fair elections" (Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund n.d.).

without taking into consideration the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report. Thereupon, the Gülpınar villagers, predominantly women, started a sit-in protest against the cutting of legally protected olive trees and the threatening effects of the geothermal drilling works on the environment and public health⁴⁹ (Vardar 2017). The protest lasted for 33 days, making the energy company leave the area.

The local community in Gülpınar is aware of the hidden costs of the geothermal power plant operating next to their village. For this reason, instead of waiting to be included by the authorities into the decision making about their living environment, they took action. During the protest in Gülpınar, the villagers received the support of many NGOs and the general public. It seems that the normalization of protest raised a kind of consciousness of active citizenship among the local community. People realized that they are more than passive consumers, but potential prosumers in the face of promises such as cheap energy, employment, and regional development. Projects such as *Under the Same Sun* provide them real evidence to rule out the accusations of "naysayers" or "utopians" by the officials and big capitalists that there are no alternatives. The reason why *Under the Same Sun* has become a case study for this paper is that it has implemented something little in the short term (two 3 kW solar energy stations) but sustainable and progressive in the long run (inter-communal cross-border cooperation) between two local NGOs. As a result of this cooperation, Ayrudzy has become the first Armenian organization that participated in the annual International Conference of Renewable Energy Cooperatives that is held in Turkey and became a part of a community-to-community network.

⁴⁹ Although geothermal resources are both legally and scientifically considered as renewable (because the heat from the Earth is essentially limitless), geothermal energy has some disadvantages as well. The first one is the substantial amount of greenhouse gases under the earth's surface. These underground reservoirs contain toxic heavy metals such as mercury and arsenic that can be released to the surface of the earth while operating the power plant. This causes pollution and related chronic diseases. All the more interesting, in case of an excessive generation of electricity, geothermal emissions can be higher than coal. According to the 2016 report by the Ministry for the Environment of New Zealand, geothermal power plants emit 724,000,000 kg of greenhouse gas per year compared to the coal-fired power plants with 635,000,000 kg (Ecotricity 2016). The second disadvantage of geothermal energy is the surface instability. The construction and operation of geothermal power plants potentially triggers earthquakes. While drilling, hot water and gas entrapped in natural fractures may erupt to the surface, and the sudden fall of pressure might cause collapses (Kukreja 2013).

While, the Gülpınar Sustainable Life Association, the organizational body of the villagers, represents the participatory characteristic of active citizenship, within the project *Under the Same Sun*, Ayrudzy has shown another characteristic that is necessary for a self-governed community- knowledge.

Ayrudzy has reached hundreds of young people so far and has become a place where the new generation establishes a deep bond with nature, animals, and traditions. In such a place, the solar PV panels are not only the embodiment of energy efficiency, but also an inspiration and role-model for the visitors. The design of a space affects human behavior: a sustainable space vests individuals with an awareness of renewable energy.

Besides Ayrudzy, Power of Light is another local NGO developing solar power systems in order to use solar energy for fruit drying and water heating. A feature shared by Power of Light and Ayrudzy is the profile of members. They do not need anyone to measure and calculate how much energy they consume; which spot and angle is the optimum; and accordingly, how many solar panels they need to install. In contrast to the stereotype of a rural community member⁵⁰ in a developing country (Chambers 2013, 64), they are well-educated engineers and architects who have technical know-how as well as capability to build their own PVs.

For developing countries, competing with China and the United States (US) products in the global solar energy industry under present conditions may not be possible in the short term, but such local attempts are challenging the norms through positioning 'ordinary citizens' into the hearth of production and consumption relations that bring with it fundamental structural changes in the long term. Thus, they do not stay only as the innovators but also the maintainers of the technologies that empower them against large international investors and centralized state structures.

When community residents become "innovators, planners, and decision-makers on how to use and create energy that is local and renewable" (Center for Social Inclusion n.d.), energy solutions become more democratic; places become environmentally healthier; and carbon emissions and costs fall⁵¹. This has recently

⁵⁰ In Chambers' comprehensive work "Rural Development: Putting the Last First", the stereotype of the rural appears as "ignorant," "lazy," "poor", and even "stupid". Chambers strongly disagrees with it.

⁵¹ Prices of PVs are falling, and green employment is rising every year as the solar sector grows in the whole world. In 2016, the global employment in solar PVs increased by 12 percent to 3.1 million jobs, and at least 75 gW of solar PV capacity was added worldwide –

started being discussed in environmental movement and advocacy as energy democracy:

"In recent years, the notion of 'energy democracy' has proliferated in Europe, especially in reference to ongoing energy transitions and their directions. It has two meanings: it either denotes the normative goal of decarbonization and energy transformation, or it describes already existing examples of decentralized and mostly bottom-up civic energy initiatives" (Szulecki 2018, 23).

Between New and Old Nuclear Power Plants

As the destructive effects of global warming have increased more and more every year with the irresponsible use of natural sources, the political boundaries have become blurred and the meanings they represent are gradually eroded. The Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant is located 36 kilometers away from the border of Turkey. If a nuclear accident happened at the power plant today, would it be a problem of only Armenia? Or would it constitute a problem for Turkey as well? What about the other neighboring countries? Located more than 1,000 kilometers away from Chernobyl, Turkey still suffers from the negative effects of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident today. According to the latest World Nuclear Industry Report, the Armenian Government insists on continuing to operate Metsamor until a new nuclear reactor is introduced by the planned date of 2026, because it is one of the three main energy sources of Armenia by meeting 32.5 percent or 2.4 TWh of the country's total energy requirement. However, the European Nuclear Safety Regulators Group warns about safety-related problems" (Froggatt and Schneider 2018).

In Turkey, three separate nuclear power plant projects, one each in Akkuyu, Sinop, and İğneada, are being developed. Despite the controversial EIA report and construction permit processes, the construction formally began in Akkuyu in early 2018. The financing company, the Rosatom State Nuclear Energy Corporation, same company that constructed Chernobyl, will own 51 percent of the shares, when

equivalent to the installation of more than 31,000 solar panels every hour (Renewable Energy Policy Network for the 21st Century 2017). These developments have also reflected on the prices in Armenia and Turkey. In 2015, the price for a 1 kW capacity solar station was 2,500-2,800 US Dollars in Armenia. In 2016, the price range decreased to 1,200-1,400 US Dollars and to 970-1,100 US Dollars in 2017. Today, the prices of PVs in Armenia range between 870 and 950 US Dollars for 1 kW solar station. In Turkey, with a similar decrease over the years, the price for solar panels with a capacity of 1 kW is 800-900 US Dollars today.

the plant will start operating in 2023 at an estimated budget of 22 billion US Dollars. However, in 2017 the European Parliament warned Turkey to consider its earthquake-prone location and to negotiate with neighbor countries – Greece and Cyprus. The Sinop project has similar safety risks, which has caused the increase of the budget to 46.2 billion US Dollars. The Iğneada project is planned to be built in the heart of Europe's largest floodplain forest reserve by a Chinese corporation with a budget of 25 billion US Dollars. What is more, these international companies are backed by governments with high feed-in tariffs and incredibly low taxation. After all, these billions are wasted for the sake of "cheap energy" and "energy independence" as two classic arguments of governments to legitimize such expensive projects in the eyes of the public, but it mostly returns to citizens as higher consumption taxes in order to compensate the investment of the companies and the government. On the other side, the wind and the sun are available there free and clean.

Conclusion

In all this nuclear madness, it is crucial to repeat and multiply the questions: What is the *abnormal*? Who is the 'Other' threatening the values of the people living in the region? Whose natural sources? Do environmental rights recognize national boundaries?

We have carried out this reflection on the project *Under the Same Sun* to think over those questions from different perspectives, because it puts the 'community' in the center. Thus, "community identity is defined in terms of that which is endangered by something 'Other'. It is often simultaneously an expression of fear and a token of defiance, a rearticulation of some traditional themes but in new ways in a new context" (Dalby and Mackenzie 1997). The project *Under the Same Sun* embodied a local community-network, which consists of people from two nations with a common history of a conflict, by using solar energy stations against the environmental threat in the context of economic and political neoliberalism. In this period, Troya and Ayrudzy NGOs had applied two methods: a participatory approach and international funds for civil society organizations. In this way, they could find financial resource to purchase and install solar panels as well as to equip citizens with legal, technical, and economic knowledge. In this sense, international funds for civil society organizations and community-based energy cooperatives can be utilized as a start-up strategy against governments' inadequate incentives and loans, low feed-in tariffs, and a monopolistic tax system. It is also important that the project had the opportunity to make its name to a broader community in an international conference. Likewise, it is much encouraging to see that this new

local community-network between Armenia and Turkey has also developed a common vision to establish their own energy cooperatives that will contribute to the formation of a cross-border decentralized sustainable energy and environmental policy.

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Beyond NGOs: Decolonizing Peacebuilding and Human Rights

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This paper argues that the Eurocentric approaches to civil society and its limitation to forms of institutions intelligible to donors, deepen the divide between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the grassroots social-political organizing, and perpetuate a transnational apparatus of neoliberal governmentality. The authors suggest that civil society actors should consider alternative forms of organizing, and they see inclusive social-political movements as the better alternative, against the institutionalization and professionalization of activism. As spheres of activity, the paper takes peacebuilding and women's rights organizations, and as a geographical context it considers Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey.

Introduction

The concept of civil society has a central role in the modern understanding of democratic states and democratization processes. Although definitions of civil society may somewhat vary across disciplines and ideologies, as do beliefs about its scope and purposes, civil society is often characterized by two main features, namely being "outside the institutional structures of government" and "not primarily commercial" (Salamon, Sokolowski and List 2003). Within the modern market economy based state structures, civil society is positioned as "the population of groups formed for collective purposes primarily outside of the State and marketplace" (Van Rooy 1998, 30). This relational definition has led some researchers to question whether the concept of civil society is applicable to forms of organization beyond Western contexts (Lewis 2000, 17).

Outside of critical academic and practitioner circles, however, the existence or the gradual development of a civil society as a separate 'sector' and entity, is automatically assumed. Civil societies in non-Western contexts have been primary targets and instruments in the global political project of building democracy and peace around the world (Lewis 2000, 17). There is an assumption that civil society as a meta-form of social and political organization is geographically and culturally universal; what is more problematic, however, is the Eurocentric⁵² tendency to limit civil society to a narrowly defined institutional arena (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 22). The primary unit of civil society that has a subjectivity within the political arena of international organizations is the NGO, and it becomes intelligible for international actors through replicating the bureaucratic and normative order of the international structures.

In other words, within the nomenclature of international organizations and donors, or the international development discourse in general, civil society is simply the cluster of various NGOs, and in fact the term civil society is often used interchangeably with NGOs. Support for the emergence and strengthening of NGOs forms a central part of the liberal democratic agenda (Archer 1994). In this paper, we argue that Eurocentric approaches to civil society and its limitation to forms of institutions intelligible to donors, deepen the divide between NGOs and the grassroots social-political organizing, and perpetuate a transnational apparatus of neoliberal governmentality. We suggest that civil society actors should consider alternative forms of organizing, and we see inclusive social-political movements as

⁵² We use Eurocentric to refer to the underlying presumption that Western/European modes of thought, knowledge, methods, and institutions are superior, and that they are the idea to which non-European countries and cultures should strive to catch up with.

the better alternative, against the institutionalization and professionalization of activism. As spheres of activity, we take peacebuilding and women's rights organizations, and as a geographical context we take Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey.

Are NGOs Grassroots? A Critique of Institutionalization

Largely as a result of the efforts to decolonize Eurocentric interventions into various democratization and peacebuilding processes in the Global South in favor of the local or the so-called "local turn", international organizations and donor governments have become increasingly aware of the importance of transformations that take place "from bottom up" or "locally". For the past two decades, the international development/democracy/human rights discourses have been dominated by buzzwords such as "local capacity", "sustainability", "empowerment", etc. The heightened focus on sustainability, be it peacebuilding or women's rights or poverty eradication, has reiterated that processes and transformations must be both appropriate for the particular cultural-political context and be initiated by the local agents themselves or, in other words, be local and grassroots. Many supranational structures and major donors have incorporated the idea of grassroots into their rhetoric and strategies.

Within this scope, NGOs are seen as crucial in building the institutions of democracy and peace from bottom up. Most donors claim to be supporting local organizations in a particular cause, and market their support to grassroots activists as good practice. For example, the European Union (EU) claims to be "active in dialogue processes involving civil society organizations at grassroots levels, in particular through the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP)" and the United Nations (UN) increasingly uses the discourse of grassroots in its work, particularly with regards to women's rights (United Nations Development Programme 2012). The instrumentalization of NGOs as the 'bottom' thus makes NGOs synonymous with the desired 'grassroots'. This conflation of the local and the grassroots with NGOs, we argue, promotes the proliferation of technocratic elites, thus usurping the space for grassroots organizing.

NGOs as Technocracies

Alvarez, Jad, and Smith distinguish between NGO-based activism and autonomous grassroots social movements (Alvarez 1999, Smith 2007, Islah 2007). Accordingly, under the term grassroots movements, we mean groups and organizations which direct their efforts towards (a) organizing and mass

mobilization and (b) activism which answers to local needs and context instead of reiterating universalist framings and/or agendas set by donors. Consolidation and orchestration of social movements into intelligible institutions, or in other words the 'NGO-ization' of activism is understood, by Smith as the taming of existent or potential radical social movements, so that they would not demand radical change, directing their efforts to social reform instead, and being safe for the existing order/system (Smith 2007). In this paper, we accept the definition of NGO-ization as the taming of social movements through the neoliberal civil society constituted by NGOs and projects depending on mainly external/foreign funding.

The dependence of NGOs mostly on foreign funding means that local activism becomes financially dependent on foreign donors, and NGOs increasingly structure and position themselves to cater to the bureaucratic requirements of donors. As a result, they focus on developing the technical specialization and infrastructure required to satisfy international donor requirements and start functioning as service providers. Donors subcontract tasks such as peace and women's rights to local service providers, who along with these also provide a range of complicated bureaucratic services. However, because of the scarcity of financial resources and cycle-based funding dependency, NGOs often do not employ the specialized staff who would assist in providing these administrative, financial, and legal services to donors. As a result, NGO workers have to function as project managers, accountants, lawyers, and social workers at the same time. For many NGO workers, the time and effort spent handling reports, paperwork, financial transactions, and preparing reports for donors far exceeds the time required for working in the field, towards a particular project goal. NGO practitioners in the Global South have described themselves as being "more focused on survival and how they can meet donor demands while also meeting their own goal" (Cohen 2014).

This professionalization of activism has two repercussions. Firstly, overworked NGO staff increasingly drift away from grassroots activism to administrative-technical office tasks. Secondly, it is also problematic that organizing is carried out by a few educated people employed by NGOs. (Smith 2007, 7). The grassroots are not the subject, but rather the object of the NGOs, where NGOs package the grassroots into problems, data, solutions, and, subsequently, project proposals (Petras 1999). Most NGOs, especially larger ones in capital cities have very little access outside of the bureaucratic elites. Smaller NGOs, informal initiative groups, regional grassroots initiatives, and social movements who do not satisfy intelligible institutional features are excluded from outside support or are targeted solely for 'capacity-building' purposes. Increasingly dependent on foreign funding, NGOs,

small and large, compete for funds, further perpetuating the importance of technical expertise over actual transformative action.

In the context of the Global South, we also consider NGO-ization to be the instrument of global neocolonial governance. Governmentality is a concept of Michel Foucault, meaning a system of rational governance and management of population (Foucault 1991). Harrington notes that the term has "two related meanings: mentalities of government and government of mentalities" (Harrington 2013, 139). Thus, governmentality implies both objects and rules of governance and appropriate subjectivities. In the case of neocolonial governmentality, the forms, instruments, actions, and jobs of 'civil societies' are structured by global governance. The institutionalization of activism in the form of NGOs is part of neoliberal and neocolonial development brought and managed by global governance. On the one hand, the agendas of local activism often become defined by the requirements of donors. In the case of peacebuilding and women's rights organizations the main subjects and implementers of neocolonial agendas are international governmental organizations (IGOs), such as the UN. On the other hand, the uniformization of civil societies through the constitution of normative/Western-centric institutions perpetuates neocolonial relationships of knowledge/power. It is also not a coincidence that the recent decade has seen the proliferation of GONGOs – government organized non-governmental organizations – whereby states are incorporating the format of NGOs into their apparatuses of governmentality.

In the following sections, we discuss examples from Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey that highlight the various issues and power dynamics that arise from the current NGO-based organization of civil society.

Peacebuilding Work in Armenia

Civic initiatives in Armenia aimed at building peace with both Azerbaijan and Turkey started shortly after its independence. The institutionalized character of the field and the cycle-based funding dependency have made it difficult to plan and implement sustainable and inclusive peace movements. Except for very few individual and collective initiatives in the 1990s, civil society attempts to build peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan have been conducted by a small number of NGOs. The same is mostly applicable to Armenia and Turkey, however there have been a few examples of non-NGO based initiatives, such as the "I apologize campaign", "Workshop on Armenian-Turkish Scholarship", "Beyond Borders: Linking Our Stories", and a few artistic or photography initiatives.

There has never been a big variety of actors or groups working on Armenia-Turkey and Armenia-Azerbaijan peacebuilding processes, and more recently there has been a tendency to consolidate actors into large clusters. It is not rare to see multiple layers of 'subcontracting peace', whereby a government or intergovernmental donor contracts European organizational clusters, who in turn subcontract a large local institution to manage the distribution of funding to local groups or organizations. The EU has played a leading role in consolidating funding into large inter-institutional clusters. In fact, EU's involvement in both the Armenia-Turkey and Armenia-Azerbaijan civil society efforts in the recent years has been mostly through consortiums. In the case of Armenia-Turkey, since 2014 a consortium of eight established local NGOs to implement the Support to Armenia-Turkey Normalization Process program funded by the EU. Similarly, European involvement into the Armenia-Azerbaijan civil society dialogue happens mostly through large consortiums, namely the Consortium Initiative between 2003-2010 and its successor the European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (EPNK) from 2010 till present. Within the scope of the EPNK consortium, between 2012 and 2015, out of a total of almost €6 million allocated to confidence building in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through the EPNK, only a total of €100,000 was distributed directly to organizations on the ground (EPNK n.d.).

Together with the lack of multiplicity of organizational voices, NGOs working in Armenia have been targeting a rather narrow group of people in their work, mostly the educated elites already involved in institutionalized civil society activities, with an already significant experience of international travel, and knowledge of foreign languages, such as English and Russian. As a result, NGOs either leave out marginalized groups, especially those directly affected by the conflict, those living outside of the capitals, border regions, minorities, or have approach them only as objects of their work. Even when some organizations explicitly aim to target those marginalized in the conflict discourses, outreach to these groups is often hindered by the rigid technical requirements and project jargons deployed by these institutions. For example, a recent funding mechanism managed by Eurasia Partnership Foundation in Armenia claimed to be targeting youth, refugees and IDPs, persons with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, and war veterans and was providing a travel allowance for these individuals to participate in meetings aimed at building trust across the conflict divide. The application form, however, required, among other things, an assessment of possible risks related to their meeting along with a risk mitigation strategy, either in Russian or English. In the world of institutionalized peacebuilding, everyone, including war veterans and IDPs are capable of coming up with a risk assessment and mitigation strategy in a

foreign language. This is an example of the kind of highly technical bureaucratic skills required to participate in building peace, which has been rendered into a professional activity dominated by technocracy. The Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation has also often committed to recruiting the majority of its program participants from vulnerable and marginalized populations; however, this has not always been possible due to the same abovementioned technical and bureaucratic barriers. The Imagine Center has also at times rejected applications from representatives of marginalized groups, such as ethnically Armenian citizens of Turkey, since their participation would not fit into the rigid definition of what a 'Turkish-Armenian' dialogue constitutes.

In fact, NGOs in Armenia have become so versed in the technical language of peacebuilding and project proposals, that many have been carrying out activities while holding non-constructive, xenophobic, or racist ideological beliefs about the conflict. During the major escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in April 2016, representatives of a number of NGOs in Armenia that have been the partners and grantees of donors such as the EU and the United States for many years, publicly made racist and hateful statements inciting violence. The coordinator of the Helsinki Initiative-92 Nagorno Karabakh Committee, laureate of Peace and Human Rights International prizes has repeatedly made hateful comments and incitements to violence on his Facebook page. While those are not publicly available, he has also made similar statements to press, particularly calling upon the public to "unite with the authorities of Artsakh and Armenia to prevent the attack of the barbarians", referring to Azerbaijan or Azerbaijanis, as well as has expressed disappointment about the allegedly small scale of Armenia's military involvement in the April 2016 escalation, by stating that "[I]n response to Azerbaijani aggressive operations, Armenia was to give a crushing counterblow to Azerbaijan not only in the direction where the aggression occurred but in any direction where danger emerges." (Aravot 2017, Aravot 2018).

More than content, intention or results, funders place primacy on subcontracting peacebuilding and human rights agendas to institutions with intelligible bureaucratic and institutional features, familiar jargons. In an annual report, Eurasia Partnership Foundation Armenia prides itself on being a "local foundation with international quality standards" and the fact that it "belongs to the family of international development" (Eurasia Partnership Foundation Armenia 2015). This is exemplary of the way large NGOs in conflict affected areas "foster a new type of cultural and economic colonialism under the guise of a new internationalism" (Veltmeyer and Petras 2001, 132). For many international actors and governments, who are interested in and involved in mediation and peacebuilding efforts in conflict areas, building peace abroad often serves as a source of building 'social

capital', as a way of building an image of a neutral or peaceful actor, or part of economic or foreign policy interests. Therefore, what matters is not the real capacity of a certain recipient organization to reach out to the grassroots and transform the conflict, but rather the institutional capacity of managing financial flows and providing a certain level of donor visibility, or in other words – a secure investment environment. Directing funds into large bureaucratic institutions hinders inclusive grassroots peacebuilding efforts, instead encouraging the institutionalization of the civil society in a neo-liberal paradigm.

Decolonizing the Feminist Movement in Georgia

Women's rights activism began in post-Soviet Georgia in the middle of the 1990s. These were the first steps towards creating a feminist movement in the new reality. However, this emergent activism was immediately dominated and structured by a system of NGOs. Japaridze and Melashvili claim that in post-Soviet Georgia, this NGO-ization was not preceded by a different form of the women's/feminist movement (Melashvili 2014, Japaridze 2012). More precisely, because of the specific Soviet experience in Georgia, there was a big gap between the women's independent activism in the 1910s and the activism of the 1990s. So, it can be argued that the NGO boom as a variety of the women's movement emerged from 'nowhere'.

The feminist activism in the 1990s and 2000s did not aim to mobilize women. The feminist NGOs and activists of the time worked to introduce international norms about equality between sexes to Georgia and to institutionalize women's rights on the state level. As a result of their efforts, the Georgian parliament approved the law On Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Domestic Violence in 2006 and the law On Gender Equality in 2010. However, the patriarchal culture of Georgia was very violent towards women. One of the main actors who deployed sexist and heterosexist discourse was the Georgian Orthodox Church and the Patriarch of Georgia, Ilia II. In the years 2008-2016, he spoke a lot about the "proper family" and a woman's role in it: the only appropriate role for a woman was deemed to be motherhood; she was called to sacrifice herself for the family, be obedient to her husband, and "wash his feet" (Beraia and Tabidze 2016). Abortion was declared to be a deadly sin. Neither jobs nor sexual education were available for most Georgian women and the sexist discourse from an authoritative figure, such as the patriarch, contributed to the deterioration of women's status in the society and made them even more susceptible to exploitation and violence.

The NGO-ized feminist activism was not able to withstand such challenges. In 2011, the Independent Group of Feminists (IGF) was born in Tbilisi as a reaction to

both sexist and oppressive institutions and culture and to the 'silent' and elitist activism of the NGOs. The IGF engaged in the praxis of radical and/or lesbian feminism. They made visible the topics of reproductive and sexual rights. "My body – my business" became one of the main slogans associated with the IGF. Several members of the IGF – for example, Tamta Melashvili and Ida Bakhturidze – have noted that they criticized and opposed the previous generation of feminists in the NGOs because they did not care for mobilization and creating a grassroots feminist movement in Georgia (Melashvili 2014, Union Sapari 2017). The activism for institutionalization was not able to inspire women to fight for their rights. The IGF was the first feminist group which held demonstrations and marches in the streets of Tbilisi and openly opposed the Georgian Orthodox Church for its sexist and misogynist discourse. The group also made efforts towards intersectional feminism by supporting workers' strikes and joining the marches on the International Workers' Day in the years 2012-2013. Nowadays, many feminist activists claim that the IGF was the group that did a great deal for the popularization and legitimization of feminism in Georgian society.

In 2013-2014, Georgia was hit by a wave of femicide. The special report of the Public Defender of Georgia presents the statistics concerning femicide: 21 cases of femicide occurred in 2013, and 34 cases were registered in 2014 (Public Defender of Georgia 2015). The report states that 2014 was the worst year by the number of femicides in Georgia (Public Defender of Georgia 2015). The study also revealed that 50 percent of killings was caused by domestic violence, and 94 percent of the perpetrators were men.

The IGF reacted by organizing rallies in front of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. However, the mass protest of women against femicide happened after an activist Baia Patariaia decided to gather more women than usual. Accordingly, in November 2014 a new feminist group, known as the Women's Movement was created in reaction to the rates of femicide. Women reacted across the country, and rallies were organized in 25 urban areas. The Women's Movement has continued to work on women's issues and to support or advocate initiatives about preventing violence against women and sexual harassment as well as gender quotas in political parties.

Both the Independent Group of Feminists and the Women's Movement are still active. Despite their reactive positions (especially, in the case of the IGF), they were not able to fully eradicate problems associated with NGO-ized activism. The IGF made feminism visible and 'loud' but still was not able to directly reach and mobilize women, especially those living outside of Tbilisi. The early intersectional direction of the group was also lost. As for the Women's Movement, at first it could

boast of larger participation of women both from Tbilisi and the regions. However, this tendency has declined, and the group has become mostly online-based with the participation of women who have a higher economic or political standing and live in Tbilisi. In addition, the group often worked about women's issues solely, without taking into consideration its interrelatedness with sexuality, class, ethnicity, and religion. The Women's Movement's major initiatives about violence against women and gender quotas lacked a structural analysis and mostly followed the formulas set by the international organizations and/or donors.

These were the reasons of dissatisfaction among some of the queer and socialist feminists, who directed their criticism towards the Women's Movement. Feminist groups such as the Women's Gaze, Georgian Young Greens, and various independent activists underlined the importance of women's work and intersectionality. They tried to speak for communities of women who were marginalized from the feminist movement. Queer feminists and trans-feminists voiced the criticism of the feminist movement because it excluded transgender women and sex-workers, was not able to represent them properly, and did not advocate for transgender rights despite the many violations and oppression suffered by transgender women. On March 8, 2018, the Women's Movement organized a rally and petition for transgender rights, which can be understood as an answer to the criticism and activism of the queer feminists.

Various groups of feminist activists have been acting in various contexts, struggling for mobilization and creating local agendas. Their development has not always been linear or easy, but it can be said that the struggle for decolonization continues. The feminist movement in Georgia still faces various challenges and destructive effects of NGO-ization. This can be seen on the levels of its agenda, mobilization, and general influence of feminist politics.

The laws on the eradication of domestic violence and violence against women are oriented towards punishing abusers. In this system, structural inequalities as causes of violence are neglected. Moreover, as Ana Arganashvili noted at the feminist conference, these policies alone are not able to empower women. Even if the abuser is punished according to the law, women often remain vulnerable and defenseless, as they do not have access to jobs, education, and housing (Union Sapari 2017). At least some of the feminist activists acknowledge that the problem of violence against women cannot be properly solved, if feminists and the state will not care about eradicating poverty in general and poverty of women in particular. As Margvelashvili notes, women in Georgia are in a state of dispossession, disempowerment, and lack of equality in economy (Margvelashvili 2017).

The situation is worsened by the oppressive culture and social norms. We can perceive the interconnection of economic and cultural oppression in that marriage remains a powerful cultural norm as well as one of the main 'economic' prospects for women in Georgia. Women marry earlier: according to the data of 2015, 83 percent of those married at the age of 16-19 and 56.8 percent of those married at the age of 20-24 were women (Geostat 2015). Moreover, the data of 2016 shows that 42 percent of women were economically inactive, while the same indicator is 22 percent for men (Geostat 2017). Early marriages mean that women are getting involved in unwaged housework, do not get education and jobs, and, as a result, become economically inactive.

Women who are economically dependent on their husbands are susceptible to violence. Even if the abuser is punished or the victims of domestic violence get divorced, these women often do not have any property, education, or skills to survive. According to the official statistics, 53 percent of women are employed; however, it is important to underline that 30 percent of these women are self-employed (Geostat 2017). Most of this latter category are employed in informal economy and are engaged in small scale farming and informal trade (Keburia 2017). Besides, there is also sex work which presumably is not counted in the official statistics of self-employment. Women involved in informal street trade and sex work may be the victims of domestic violence, but in addition they become exposed to violence from police and/or clients. For example, one of the transgender activists tells that transgender sex-workers work in conditions of everyday violence - they are abused by the police, by clients and even by passersby (Union Sapari 2017). Overall, these statistics show that economic aspects need to be included in gender equality policies and gender aspects in economic policies.

In this respect, the feminist debates of recognition/redistribution can also be referenced. According to Nancy Fraser, the struggles for cultural recognition for 'different' categories of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and other features have become mainstream in social movements and in feminism as well (Fraser 2000). In her opinion, demands about redistribution of wealth have become marginal. Questions of recognition have somehow displaced struggles for redistribution. Thus, struggles for social justice become misguided as they do not address the injustices of economic inequality. Fraser claims that struggles for recognition should be integrated with struggles for redistribution. Thus, struggling for redistributive and development policies – together with struggles for recognition – remains one of the challenges of feminism in the process of decolonization.

The low mobilization and exclusion of certain groups/communities of women are also problematic. As mentioned earlier, the feminist movement has taken steps to

include transgender women and advocate for their rights. Transgender women have also become more visible and active in LGBTQ organizations. However, transgender women remain one of the most vulnerable groups in society, and the struggle for their rights must be made sustainable. Still more must be done to reach and mobilize students, women workers from the regions, women who represent ethnic and/or religious minorities, etc. It is noteworthy, that in the recent years in Georgia, there have emerged ultra-right/neo-fascist groups, which are known for their racist, sexist, homophobic, anti-immigration rhetoric and actions and often attack or threaten movements and activists fighting for human rights. This may also be considered as the failure of feminist mobilization and politics.⁵³ This is definitely a sign that feminists have to pay more attention and put more efforts in mobilization.

One of the major challenges of the feminist movement is also women's exclusion from politics and decision-making positions. For example, it is noteworthy that women do not have solid representation in the Georgian parliament: only 16 percent of the MPs are women. Feminists cannot properly influence state policies while acting from the position of civil society. This is evident as the Georgian parliament/government has recently rejected or neglected initiatives about gender quotas, sexual harassment, and transgender rights. Rejection of gender quotas also means maintaining the status quo, where women are not properly represented, and feminist policies hardly become part of the state policies. To make real feminist politics seems to be a difficult but much needed task for the feminist movement.

Decolonization Through Civil Society in the Kurdish-Populated Regions of Turkey

In the discussion about the role of NGOs in the reproduction of colonial relations, Diyarbakir presents an instructive example. Together with the issues of state repression, discrimination, and economic disregard, the oppression of cultural expressions has been one of the consequences of the homogenizing strategies of the Turkish nation-building project on Diyarbakir and the larger region (Gambetti 2008).

With the takeover of the municipalities by Kurdish political forces in 1999, a new space opened for cultural and social expression, as well as civil society in general

⁵³ The emergence of the ultra-right movements has complex reasons, and the feminist movement, activists, or women's rights NGOs cannot be blamed for it, however as this piece focuses on strategies and challenges of the feminist movement, from this position, we consider this a feminist "failure".

(Gambetti 2008). The 2000s marked the beginning of a massive social and cultural transformation. The municipality used its institutional power to boost the space for organization and mobilization for informal initiative groups and regional grassroots initiatives as well as NGOs. The Women's Problems Research and Application Center (DIKASUM), the Amida Women's Counseling Center, the Ceren Woman Association, and the Bağlar Women's Cooperative, the Diyarbakir Arts Center (DSM), the Diyarbakir Culture and Art Festival, the Amed Theatre Festival, and the Amed Music Festival, the Diyarbakir Institute for Political and Social Research (DISA), the Tigris Social Research Center (DITAM), and a large list of other NGOs and informal initiative groups were all formed in the 2000s. With the growing number of NGOs, civil society organizations, many international actors and governments became involved in fields such as democracy, human rights, women's rights, and peacebuilding. Following the breakdown of the peace process, many NGOs were forcefully shut down by the government, and the remaining ones had difficulty continuing to carry out their work both because of the political pressure and also the withdrawal of foreign donors from the region.

On the one hand, the emergence of an active civil society and the proliferations of institutions was synonymous with the decolonization of the Kurdish identity and its expression. NGOs working in various fields, but particularly women's rights, peacebuilding, arts, and culture were instrumental in opening up the space for local activism. Sonia Alvarez states that NGOs can have a "hybrid character", meaning that some NGOs can be more like grassroots movements, since they direct their resources towards consciousness-raising and mobilization (Alvarez 1999, 189). Most of the NGOs in Diyarbakir have both come out of and managed to mobilize large grassroots constituencies.

On the other hand, organizations and European/Western donor-funded interventions were part of the neoliberal transformation in Diyarbakir, which took place in many fields, including the civil society, the local economy, the urban landscape, etc. Gambetti claims that Diyarbakir is not yet postcolonial, but one caught between the process of cultural decolonization and the simultaneous process of neoliberal (global) colonization (Gambetti 2008). In this context, NGOs in Diyarbakir have acted as both actors of cultural decolonization and simultaneous neoliberal colonization.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Starting from the end of the 1990s, large international organizations and governments working in the fields of development, peace and human rights, have responded to the calls to consider local sociocultural specificities, systems of

knowledge and have integrated terms such as "local capacity", "sustainability", and "empowerment" into their goals and methodologies. However, as a result of the donors' preference to invest in large and bureaucratic NGOs who deliver feasible and visible results along with a host of paperwork, the deployment of the "local" in the international discourse has often remained merely a rhetorical tool. Larger institutions tend to be more focused on administrative procedures and technical expertise and have less access to what is truly 'local' or grassroots. At the same time, these large NGOs are not necessarily as 'privileged' as it may sound: the cycle-based funding means that these NGOs are unable to plan and execute long-term and sustainable transformations and are always trying to raise funds for projects with short-term results that are attractive for donors. The burden of fundraising, the complicated and time-consuming donor requirements, and other types of highly technical expertise are carried out by NGO workers who are often not specialists in any of these fields, leaving very little space for transformative grassroots outreach. While acknowledging the fact that it is very challenging for any group, movement, or institution to be completely 'autonomous' in the face of the structural, political, and cultural realities, we as authors propose a set of recommendations that may help transform the current consolidation of activism into funding-dependent NGOs, on the one hand, and the effectiveness of international funding mechanisms, on the other hand.

We suggest that civil society actors should consider alternative forms of organizing. We see inclusive social-political movements as the better alternative, against the institutionalization and professionalization of activism. NGOs should make more effort to reach out to and mobilize marginalized groups and communities; try to build inclusive mass movements alongside with building institutions. An inclusive peace movement or women's movement, where activism is not a technical profession or an administrative job, but an ad-hoc form of self-organization can have more power to transform social orders. Transformative agendas should also integrate the issues of cultural and economic oppression of women, ethnic minorities, refugees, and other marginalized groups in order to bring up issues of redistribution and economic justice and development.

We encourage smaller NGOs, initiative groups, and marginalized groups to think creatively about alternative and sustainable sources of funding and less dependency on foreign grants. While large funding from foreign actors can seem attractive, it comes with a large set of constraints and limitations that are worth considering.

We also encourage international donors and governments to reconsider the current funding distribution mechanisms, particularly make more effort to support both

smaller NGOs and also non-NGO civil society actors, groups, and communities, who do not necessarily function as Western-style institutions.

Finally, we also believe that legislative changes should accompany social transformations. Governments should pass laws that increase women's, ethnic minorities', and marginalized populations' representation and facilitate their participation in politics, for example, through laws about obligatory quotas in political parties and different groups' participation in local policy making and political parties.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AC – Alternating Current

AIISA – Armenian Institute of International and Security Affairs

ATNP – Armenia-Turkey Normalization Process

CJSC – Closed Joint-Stock Company

CR – Conciliation Resources

DAI – Development Alternatives Inc.

DC – Direct Current

DIKASUM – Women's Problems Research and Application Center

DISA – Diyarbakir Institute for Political and Social Research

DSM – Diyarbakir Arts Center

EaP – Eastern Partnership

EIA – Energy Information Administration

EPNK – European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh

EU – European Union

EUWI – European Union Water Initiative

GONGO – Government Organized Non-Governmental Organization

IA – International Alert

IcSP – Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace

IDP – Internally Displaced People

IGF – Independent Group of Feminist

IGO – International Governmental Organization

IWPR – Institute for War and Peace Reporting

IWRM – Integrated Water Resources Management

KGB – *Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti* (Committee for State Security)

LGBTQI – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex

NEAP – National Environmental Action Plan

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization
OSCE – Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PACE – Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
PKK – *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
PV – Photovoltaics
SDG – Sustainable Development Goals
SIDA – Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
TACIS – Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States
TDA – Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis
TJ – Transitional Justice
UN – United Nations
UNDP – United Nations Development Program
UNECE – United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNEP – United Nations Environment Program
UNSCR – United Nations Security Council Resolution
US – United States
USAID – United States Agency for International Development
USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WFD – Water Framework Directive

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