

Challenging the Order or Reconfirming It? Reflections on Nationalism and Gender in the Nagorno-Karabakh Self-Determination Movement, 1988-2001

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ABSTRACT: *The Armenian self-determination movement in Nagorno-Karabakh has been male-dominated throughout its duration. And yet, there are many ways in which women have resisted, subverted, accommodated, or even reinforced the prevailing social order, while making significant contributions of their own. Through interviews and participant-observation, I probe various aspects of women's involvement in the war effort. In so doing, I find that the Karabakh movement, rather than upsetting prevailing gender divisions, often utilized them—even bolstered them—in order to facilitate nationalist mobilization. Indeed, the essentialization and valorization of “women's work” received active support from many women, who often willingly participated in policing the gendered borders of the nation. There are also other cases that do not conform to the prevailing order. Some women sought to carve meaningful, revamped niches of political participation through a subtle blend of acquiescence and subversion. Others clearly departed from established practice and sought more direct involvement in the armed struggle. The latter cases, although tied to instances of social change, did not generate lasting momentum by war's end, however. Rather, a phase of post-war reaction has set in, pointing toward the need for sustained activism regarding women's issues.*

INTRODUCTION

Overview

In the following pages, I offer a portrayal of the Armenian movement for self-determination in *Nagorno-Karabakh*.¹ Since 1988, this mountainous Transcaucasian enclave has been the site of bitter contestation between Armenians, who seek the territory's unification with neighboring Armenia; Azerbaijani Turks, who seek to maintain its status as part of Azerbaijan; as well as various regional actors holding a stake in the outcome of the dispute. At the same time, the Karabakh struggle has been not simply over territory, state power, and self-determination, but also over the exercise and interpretation of *national identity*. As such, the conflict has involved not only armies, diplomats, and policymakers, but a variety of social actors, operating at various scales of resolution, who collide and collaborate in many different ways. Consequently, in portraying this struggle, I have departed from the norm by relying substantially on my involvement in the region as a participant-observer.² In this way, I have sought to provide concrete *analysis* of certain social conditions while at the same time offering

flavor and perspective on what it is like to *live* in those same conditions, in hopes of presenting a stereoscopic work that is most centrally about *people*, their lives and their struggles, rather than about lonely processes descending from above.

Such concerns are particularly salient with respect to gender issues in Karabakh, which reveal a nationalism that is more visceral than abstract, more subjective than objective; an ideology capable of galvanizing entire populations and yet embedded in the substance of everyday life. Indeed, such revelations complicate the standard view of nationalism as an unproblematic expression of fixed, homogeneous communities (nations) that seek or uphold congruent political-territorial structures (states). For while nationalism has certainly become a potent political force by promoting a durable sense of horizontal comradeship, it is also a variegated, highly mobile form of consciousness, shot through with numerous social relations that dissolve its seeming permanence into something more fluid, malleable, and open-ended.³ It is this dimension that I wish to probe as I move towards an exploration of gender and the specific ways it relates to nationalism and militarization in Karabakh. But first, a few words about the conflict's larger regional context.

Nagorno Karabakh: History, Geography, and Background to Ethnic Conflict

Approximately 4,400 square kilometers in area—roughly the size of Delaware—Nagorno Karabakh occupies one part, essentially the mountainous part, of southeastern Transcaucasia (Figure 1). Possessing an average altitude of 1,300 meters, Karabakh is greatly dissected in terms of relief. It is, in fact, bounded by mountain chains to the west, south, and east, which effectively separate its interior from the low-lying agricultural plains found within neighboring regions of Iran and Azerbaijan. The prevailing continental macroclimate—long, cold, snowy winters and hot, dry summers—has combined with a fragmented topography to set the context for decentralized, rural societies based upon pastoralism and small-scale agriculture.

Over the past several centuries, Karabakh has generally served as a marchland between Armenian mountain-dwellers and Muslims of the adjoining plains. During this time, most regional inhabitants identified themselves ethnically as Armenians, Kurds, or Turks, with the latter deploying a distinctive *Azerbaijani* national identity only with the onset of the Soviet period

(Dudwick, 1995; Swietochowski, 1995). Semi-independent Armenian princes governed most of Karabakh, mainly in feudal, patriarchal arrangements, until the early nineteenth century when imperial Russia annexed the region from Iran. Until that time, ethnoterritorial boundaries had remained relatively fluid, accommodating seasonal land-use patterns of Muslim pastoralists migrating between mountains and plains. Through the century of tsarist rule, however, Karabakh became linked administratively with richer areas to the east—the agricultural plains of Ganja and the oil fields of Baku. With growing integration came the crystallization of national identities: territorial boundaries became increasingly fixed and policed; tsarist administration exercised its presence through taxation, education, and land reform; and as market economies gained a greater foothold, migrant labor pools began to form along ethnic lines in neighboring metropolitan areas. At the same time, Karabakh's Armenian majority increasingly came into contact with Armenians of neighboring regions, who carried nationalistic ideologies that converted ethnicity into a marker of broader political solidarities (Suny, 1993).

With these developments came a phase of growing



Figure 1. Map of Nagorno-Karabakh (Source: Zoryan Institute).

inter-ethnic tension, and by the turn of the century Karabakh—indeed, much of Transcaucasia—had become the site of intermittent, often bloody hostilities between Armenians and Turks. These hostilities usually took place under the watchful—and, at times, actively divisive—policies of Russian imperial agencies (Giulkhandanian, 1933; Walker, 1989). In 1917-18, however, the Russian Revolution paved the way for withdrawal of Russian troops and administrators from Transcaucasia, thereby creating a power vacuum. Karabakh's Armenian majority responded by voicing a desire to join neighboring Armenia, which along with Georgia and Azerbaijan had newly declared its status as an independent republic. Azerbaijan, however, opposed the move and with support from neighboring Turkey, applied military pressure to keep Karabakh within its dominion. The ensuing several years were marked by much diplomatic jockeying as well as turbulence on the ground, until Russian power reasserted itself—this time in Soviet garb—in 1923. In July of that year, under Josef Stalin's supervision, the Caucasian Bureau of the Communist Party fashioned a decree assigning Karabakh the status of an Autonomous Oblast within the newly sovietized Republic of Azerbaijan.

At the time of annexation, Azerbaijan's leadership commissioned a census of Karabakh's five administrative units, revealing that Armenians constituted close to 90% of the region's 126,000 inhabitants (Astourian, 1994). And yet, for the next 70 years this population would remain subject to severe restrictions in the realms of cultural and economic policy, as Karabakh remained an enclave within Azerbaijani jurisdiction, one of several glaring anomalies within the Soviet ethnoterritorial system.

Glasnost, Perestroika, and the Outbreak of Recent Hostilities

Compared to the preceding years, the Soviet era was one of relative quiescence in Karabakh. And yet, beneath a surface of calm and stability, Karabakh Armenians continued periodically to call for change in the region's political status, be it through clandestine agitation, acts of civil disobedience, or periodic appeals to Moscow by prominent intellectuals. These initiatives were largely sporadic and short-lived, however, as Azerbaijan—with the blessings of the Soviet center—exercised considerable boldness in policing and often

suppressing Armenian claims (Mutafian, 1994). During the post-Stalin period, new grievances would emerge alongside traditional ones: With the relaxation of central restrictions on national expression, Armenians also leveled increasing complaints against Azerbaijani state practices of social and cultural discrimination, economic underdevelopment, and unpunished violence directed against Armenians.

Local resistance eventually reached a decisive phase beginning in the mid-1980s, as Armenians—encouraged by the rhetoric of *glasnost* and *perestroika*—sought to test the Soviet leadership's apparent tendency toward acknowledging and redressing historical grievances. In February 1988, following months of quiet orchestration, *Karabakhisi* activists began a series of non-violent demonstrations in each of Karabakh's five regional centers, calling for unification with Soviet Armenia based on their constitutional right to self-determination. Although premeditated, these moves rapidly generated a great deal of spontaneous enthusiasm among local Armenians, and at first appeared to catch regional, national and international observers off-guard. While authorities in Moscow hesitated and appeared to be confused, Armenian activism grew in scope and in confidence: Ever-larger rallies spread from Karabakh to Armenia, while Karabakh's regional soviet, in an unprecedented move, voted by 110-17 in favor of unification (Mutafian, 1994).

Within a few weeks, however, forces of reaction had set in: Within Karabakh, Azerbaijani authorities imposed martial law while in Azerbaijan proper, armed gangs undertook large-scale massacres of Armenian civilians. These were followed, in turn, by threats of retaliation against Azeris living in Armenia's borderlands, which led eventually to an enormous exodus of refugees on both sides (Baev, 1997).

By the end of 1989, a state of low-intensity warfare had emerged throughout Karabakh, pitting local Armenian guerrillas against Azerbaijani special forces backed by the Soviet military. This condition persisted until the demise of the Soviet Union, upon which the Karabakh struggle escalated into a full-blown conventional war, one marked by increasing regionalization involving neighboring states and peoples. With assistance from Russia and Armenia, Karabakh Armenians eventually scored a series of military victories that led to their assertion of *de facto* independence in 1992. By mid-1994, Karabakh

Armenians had completed the effort to drive out Azerbaijani occupation, and soon thereafter the warring parties agreed to a cease-fire, which holds to this day. It is here that I wish to pause, so as to proceed with the story of gender and nationalism within Karabakh's self-determination struggle.

THE MATTER AT HAND

Gender and Nationalism Since 1988

Throughout its duration, the Karabakh struggle has been largely a male-dominated affair, not only in the orchestration of local resistance strategies, but in the definition of larger priorities, assumptions, and divisions of labor on which the movement rests. This point, while hardly surprising in itself,⁴ is worth noting because it connects to an important counterpoint, reflecting some of the more illuminating and enlivening aspects of my discoveries in Karabakh. This counterpoint concerns the various ways in which *women*—individually and collectively—have resisted, subverted, accommodated, or even reinforced the prevailing social order in making significant contributions of their own. Below I probe various aspects of women's involvement, in hopes of providing not simply a richer, fuller picture, but a basis for critical reflection on the movement's different aspects covered elsewhere in my work.⁵

Can I do the dishes?

It was early July in 1993, and after days of preparation and anticipation, I received my first chance to visit Karabakh's battlefronts. Faced with a choice of destination, I decided to hop on a convoy of trucks headed for Hadrut—Karabakh's southernmost region—where fierce border clashes had been raging for several weeks. Along the way, our convoy stopped to deliver supplies at an encampment a few miles from the southeastern front. There I noticed a commotion and, seeing a large number of returning fighters and artillery, decided to stay on and discover what it was all about. I soon learned that the unit had just returned from a victorious engagement, and so I followed my journalist's instincts and proceeded to interview the

unit's commander, Col. Vitaly Balasanyan, and his charges. Grateful for my attentions, Balasanyan and friends invited me to stay for dinner, and I gladly accepted as the convoy moved on without me.

Following dinner, I took a walk around the camp, noticing that the majority of the staff—cooks, cleaners, helpers—were women, along with a few older men. Feeling a need to reciprocate their hospitality, I thought it mannerly to offer my assistance to one stout, middle-aged woman who was scrubbing pots and pans. Her negative reaction was as startling as it was extreme: Not only did she refuse my assistance, but she seemed genuinely taken aback by my offer. She promptly snatched away a pan I was holding, snarling that this was not my affair.

Fresh off my rejection, I inquired with a nearby male acquaintance, who explained that she was simply guarding her "turf," and that I need not bother with such tasks again.

As I discovered in ensuing weeks, women were seldom to be found directly involved in combat; rather, they held numerous "support" roles—as secretaries, food suppliers, radio signalers, health care servants, aid workers, or simply moral supporters—which effectively served to "free" men for fighting. Most women did not challenge these roles. Rather, they often felt they were doing something they had never been allowed to do before: performing tasks recognized as being politically important, even if such tasks might still be viewed as customary "women's work." Indeed, the very fact that they were fulfilling basic needs became, for some, an *added* source of pride, indicating that women were making valuable contributions in ways men could not, and in ways *they* were best suited to perform. This tendency was aptly demonstrated by a young field nurse during a 1994 interview with my friend, *Karabakhtsi* journalist Gegham Baghdasarian. With pride, she noted: "Could you imagine *men* handling the tasks we perform? There are just some things women are better suited for."⁶

These small vignettes exemplify how the Karabakh movement, rather than upsetting the existing gender division of labor, often utilized it—even bolstered it—in order to facilitate wartime mobilization. Although various explanations might be offered to account for this, suffice it to say that with the entrenchment of patriarchy in Karabakh's countryside over many generations, the essentialization—even valorization—of

“women’s work” received active support and promulgation by many women themselves who, like my ‘pots-and-pans’ adversary, often became active, willing participants in policing the borders of this divide.

Buttressing Nationalist Ideology

At the same time, there were reserved for women a number of “informal” roles with respect to the war effort;⁷ roles that at first glance might appear subordinate or interstitial, but that in fact took on clear ideological functions that further buttressed the movement. For example, many elderly or married women have served as chroniclers or storytellers, periodically narrating different aspects of the struggle in order to educate and orient children, visitors, or distant kin. I experienced this firsthand in July 1993, when I arrived late one evening at the home of my first hosts in Hadrut, the Abrahamyan brothers. The brothers—Emil and Erig—had gone away on activist business and thus were not home at the time; but the women—their mother, Margo, and Erig’s wife, Larissa—welcomed me, fed me, and—once satisfied as to my political loyalties—proceeded to regale me with hours of stories concerning the brothers’ exploits. They focused especially on the years 1990-91, when Azerbaijani special forces conducted search-and-seizure operations in an attempt to depopulate the countryside, thus driving Emil, Erig, and their activist-comrades into the surrounding mountains and forests. Shortly thereafter, KGB agents sought to flush the brothers out of hiding by arresting their 65-year-old father and taking him to the ill-reputed Shushi prison,⁸ where he was tortured and eventually died of stomach lacerations.

Such tales, harrowing as they were, made a remarkable impression; for they not only provided an important source of information and historical memory, but above all bound me, in a visceral way, more tightly to the struggle: The Karabakh story was no longer to be safely read, leisurely discussed or contemplated from afar; it was right here in front of me, brought to life in flesh and blood through tales that vividly and ceaselessly meshed together with my own growing corpus of lived experience.⁹ Later that summer, I would have comparable encounters with women elsewhere in the war-zone, where I learned of other listeners who had been similarly moved by such experiences.¹⁰

During that evening with Margo and Larissa, I also noticed that my excitement mirrored their own. Indeed,

there was not only vitality, but a deep—at times gut-wrenching—satisfaction these women seemed to derive from their own tellings. Reflecting back, I now wonder whether their enthusiasm contained an unspoken yearning for greater involvement, or whether the accumulated weight of tradition had so conditioned them that *this*—the very act of narration—was to be settled for as compensation for their largely auxiliary relationship to the struggle.

Later on, I became even more grateful for this encounter, as it proved very difficult to pry comparable tellings from the men. During the ensuing days, I managed to hold several substantial discussions with Erig, Emil, and several of their comrades from the struggle’s earliest days. But aside from some general references, at no time did they volunteer any detailed or personal observations concerning Azerbaijan’s search-and-seizure operations, their lives as fugitives, the tortures Emil’s father endured, or other such “blood and guts” experiences. A few times I attempted to provoke more detailed discussions and was met usually with silence, evasion, or even looks of mild disapproval. Clearly, there was more than mere modesty or reticence at work here, and at the time I surmised that these were sensitive matters they did not wish to discuss, perhaps out of some sense of protectiveness or propriety. And yet later that summer, as we experienced brief, intermittent moments of relaxation together, the anecdotes began to come forth—freely, and in all moods, sizes, and varieties. It then occurred to me that these men seemed more comfortable discussing nationalism in its “official” form—partisan politics, ideological debates, military strategy, geopolitics—during what they viewed as substantive encounters, and that “the rest”—the anecdotes, personal reflections, experiential narratives—occupied an informal, interstitial domain they would access only in the process of unwinding.

Meanwhile, the regular occupants of this domain—Margo, Larissa, and other women I encountered—took a different tack, feeling entirely free and unrestrained to discuss such experiences as if they were matters of record that deserved to be aired (at least among a sympathetic audience). Through such narrative exercises, then, these women may have served, in part, to nudge the sensitive social content of the struggle out into the open, from a private, informal domain to a semi-public, narrative domain. In fact, given their

structural location within the system, this was a conversion (and a conversation) these women were especially well-positioned to make. Indeed, it is no mere coincidence that my initial encounter with Margo and Larissa took place in their home, while Emil and Erig were off attending to secret-yet-official party business.

During the ensuing weeks of that summer, I encountered other significant “informal” roles played by women in the war-zone. One worth mentioning here concerns female villagers who “act up” during ceremonies mourning local fighters lost in the war. I was on hand for several such occasions, the most striking of which occurred in mid-July, several days after five young men had been killed by an Azeri raid near the southern front. The deceased all hailed from the village of Togh,¹¹ where fighting had been especially fierce and where the remaining population was already battle-toughened. The memorial rites took place near the village center and lasted for nearly the entire day. Consisting of a small dose of Armenian liturgy and a rather large dose of local custom, the services began with a three-hour vigil inside a makeshift church, in which only local adult females were allowed to participate. Those of us nearby, however, could hear the continuous drone of women alternately weeping, wailing, and chanting prayers and curses in equal measure.

The performative aspect of the mourning became heightened at midday, when each open casket was brought to the village center. There, in the open air, last rites were performed with immediate relatives surrounding the casket, and with most of Togh’s 700 remaining villagers in attendance. The experience was bloodcurdling. At first, widows, sisters, and mothers would stroke the faces of the deceased, alternately decrying their untimely deaths and pleading for them to return to life. Then, seemingly fueled by their own energies, the disconsolate moans and wails gradually grew into assertive, aggressive vows for retribution, which soon spread amongst the masses as if an electric shock had ignited a battle-cry. And what had begun as a somber, reflective, inward-looking occasion had been whipped up into something else—rebellious, violent, forward-looking, and ready for war—that I could not have anticipated beforehand.

As it unfolded, the day’s performance generated enormous power, once again seemingly moving the social content of the struggle from private into public

space. And yet it did so in contradictory fashion: On one hand, it appeared mildly subversive—in a creeping fashion, if you will—as women used seemingly traditional roles to blur the distinction between public and private, formal and informal, domesticated culture and highly charged politics. On the other hand, such practices served to accommodate perhaps even reinforce the very compartments that underpin a division of labor in which men and women occupy their respective, and not always equal, places.

I do not intend to resolve this contradiction here. My intent, rather, is to demonstrate that such practices—be they subversive, accommodating, or both—ultimately serve an ideological function in furthering Karabakh Armenians’ nationalist drive. This ideological function is not transparent, however; rather, it is part of a process whereby women’s relationships to men and the dynamics of the emerging nationalist struggle are mutually imbricated. To unearth this process, one must be prepared to look beyond the assembly halls and meeting rooms, beyond even the battlefields and trenches, and toward other spaces, other realms of experience which all-too-often are left neglected and unrecorded.

Challenging the Order

But this is only part of the story. For at nearly the same time, a few small but dedicated groups of young women departed from established practice and, against great odds, sought a fuller, more direct involvement in the armed struggle. The stories told by these women offer some especially penetrating insights into movement dynamics, as their experiences in many ways exemplify both the heady flux of nationalist mobilization as well as the retrenchments and reactions found in its aftermath.

Upon returning to Karabakh in 1995, I heard on several occasions of women’s battalions that had formed and achieved notoriety during the war effort. This piqued my interest, for while I knew of some notable cases where women had fought and even taken leadership positions in the struggle,¹² I had thought of these as isolated exceptions. Now things appeared differently, and I began to look for opportunities to learn more about such women.

As luck would have it, I did not have to look far. One August afternoon, as I was visiting a Stepanakert women’s benevolent group, a local journalist

approached me, asking if I wished to meet some other women who had actually fought in the war. Of course, I responded in the affirmative, and quickly we proceeded to arrange a meeting.

Soon thereafter, I met with four such women at one of their apartments in Stepanakert, Karabakh's capital. All in their 30's, the four—Anahit P., Anahit T., Gayaneh, and Margarita—preferred meeting in a group setting, rather than holding interviews individually. And as we struck an unhurried path through our evening conversation, it gradually became apparent that these women—in subtle but important ways—had experienced the movement somewhat differently than the men and, indeed, most other women I had interviewed. At times, I felt we were talking about the same Karabakh movement that I had always known, and at times the discussion morphed into something else, a view of nation and society that was more fluid, relational, and multiply-stranded.

After some preliminary courtesies, I explained my purpose in wanting to meet them, and proceeded with a series of questions I had used to introduce the subject with my other respondents. It soon became apparent, however, that they were hedging, uncomfortable at having to give general, macro-appraisals of national identity and consciousness. Consequently, with their encouragement, I soon discarded the structured interview format, and the subject at once became more free-flowing and conversational, with insights oozing through the stories, experiences, and opinions they had to offer. It was a discussion in which the group reigned supreme, as each respondent allowed the others to interrupt, to contradict, to speak on her behalf or complete her thoughts, while I was periodically called upon not only to ask questions, but to answer them as well.

It was a discussion, moreover, in which nationalism emerged not as some abstract notion, objectively defined, but as a flexible field involving numerous subjectivities, experiences, and positionalities that collide and collaborate in different ways. As such, nationalism became interwoven with a whole host of social relations, rather than seemingly standing above and beyond them, as my other (male) respondents would often indicate.

This was an important development for me. For up until this point, I had been inclined to see Karabakh Armenian nationalism in more-or-less "official" ways,

e.g. that the movement represented a sort of "coming-out party" in which national identity and expression moved from a liminal to a public state. But now this seemed only partly true: The coming-out party, while certainly experienced by all to some degree, was driven and defined mostly by men. Meanwhile, for women who sought to join in, like the four who sat before me, there was superimposed another "coming-out" experience, which began as anything but a party, as they struggled to assert their own presence as partners in the movement.

"Our goal never was to establish a 'women's brigade,'" recalled Margarita. "We simply wanted to help. The needs were so great, and we saw our boys under such pressure, falling one by one, that we wanted to do our fair share for the nation." The path to their fair share, however, was extremely circuitous. Originally entering the war effort as nurses in 1991,¹³ these women quickly grew impatient with being limited to mending clothes and caring for the injured, and within a year they were carrying guns and ammunition for various operations. As the fighting continued to intensify, so did their desire for integral participation. Following Armenians' May 1992 victory at the battle of Shushi—widely viewed as the turning point of the war—they became part of a growing number of women who were vocal about their desire to fight.

After appealing unsuccessfully to their local commanders, these women turned to Gen. Arkady Ter-Tadevosian (aka "Comandos"), a former Red Army officer who had been instrumental in early organizing efforts throughout Karabakh.¹⁴ Ter-Tadevosian agreed with their arguments and used his prestige to persuade the newly formed Shushi battalion to admit them to its fighting units as trainees. The women discussed their ensuing experiences as follows:¹⁵

Q: *When did you begin this activity?*

A: It was already after the mass abandonment of Martakert, in August of 1992. At that time, under Comandos's leadership, a general call was issued for the formation of a women's battalion; and any woman who wished to join could do so. Their logic was that a woman alone would experience great pressure, but that accompanied by female comrades, she would do much better. At that time, I very much wanted to join. We did everything—firing, sniping,

signaling, and more. They even taught us how to dig ditches.

Q: *And how was this accepted?*

A: At first, with difficulty; they [the men] would laugh. At the military training center, where we trained, we noticed that they weren't really paying attention to us, and this is just as we're supposed to be getting ready to go out and fight! We went and protested to our commander, saying "What are we doing sitting around here like this? There's not even food or coffee!" The next day, our immediate superior took us on a grueling march, which he seemed to have made purposely difficult so that we would regret having said what we said. We had to run how many kilometers? I forget. But imagine, from Karin Tak,¹⁶ we had to scale a certain promontory in Shushi within 8 minutes. But we pulled it off, and *he* ended up regretting it. After that, we began in earnest with firing practice, and practically all of our girls became strong snipers. One of our best girls, Margarita Sargsian, was among those who sacrificed their lives; she was even called in especially to assist in the battle of Taghlar. After that point, our girls' reputation in those parts was born. As it was, the Turks¹⁷ were already afraid of our unrestricted pursuit; they became even more so after she picked off two of their soldiers. And on another occasion, she picked off one of their tank operators, and they picked up and ran away.

Q: *If you had to recount a few memorable experiences to an outsider unfamiliar with the situation, what would you say?*

A: Some say that as women, we had reason to be afraid of entering and witnessing the war. Well, yes, we were afraid; there's no question about that. But we became familiar with every aspect—from how to shoot, to how not to shoot. But the overarching issue for us was truly that one issue: How to adapt to living under soldierly conditions, in wartime conditions, amidst so many men. But thank God I wasn't alone; I had other girls with me. At the beginning, we were 20 people, gathered together. At first, they [the men] were in our face about it; they couldn't understand why we were doing this. But eventually, the people understood that our desire was simply to help, as there were *so* many needs.

But at first, yes, we were afraid, and our initial group of 20 quickly dwindled to 13, as some people—people who are generally quite patriotic—began to express interest in tasks other than fighting. And then, after grueling training, only eight of us remained, and today there are but four of us.

Q: *Certainly these experiences left their impression upon your men, didn't they? I assume that these experiences were not superficial, but rather, penetrated their psyches?*

A: Of course. You know how it was? For example, when the men saw someone hurt, it no longer mattered if it was a man or a woman; we were now all in this together, as equals. There were even instances when one of our girls, Garineh Danielyan, was the first to lead the attack and some of the men would hesitate to follow. But she was a special case, for they [the Azeris] had killed her husband, and she left her infant child at home to come and exact revenge.

Q: *It seems that the war years were a time for opening up—to new experiences, new lessons, new ways of living.*

A: Yes, at times. Those who have participated in the struggle—you can feel it—have changed. You look upon them and you see that they've become different persons, and that you look upon them differently as well. And you can tell who's gone through the experience by how they deal with everyday matters. For example, our fighting boys would no longer tolerate petty abuses such as street crimes, whereas at one time they would ignore such things and just go on their merry way. A sensitivity, a sense of responsibility have developed. It's odd, but through war, you not only understand the meaning of death, but also the value of life.

Indeed, they recalled on several occasions that as women became mobilized as combatants, relationships between women and men began to change, generally for the better. Often a strong sense of comradesly loyalty would develop, and as stereotypes and other cultural barriers began to break down, the tense immobility that had once characterized these relationships was steadily replaced by a new sense of awareness, movement, creativity.¹⁸ Gender relations were thus broadened,

deepened, and solidified in new ways that brought vitality to the struggle.¹⁹ At the same time, this redefinition of social space implied changes for nationalism as well. For while these women were every bit as patriotic as their male counterparts (and would bristle at any suggestion to the contrary), it became clear that nationalism for them meant something more than defending tradition; it meant questioning, even “inventing” tradition where necessary.

(Meanwhile, this transformation played out much differently on the other side of the battle-lines. Whereas Armenian fighting men often experienced positive changes, their Azeri counterparts endured a different experience, one based on fear and surprise. Azerbaijani units—already faced with high rates of desertion—on several occasions became further demoralized upon witnessing an Armenian onslaught consisting of significant women’s participation. As further testament, Margarita told of having encountered Azeri POWs who would tell tales of legendary “French girls” who could pick off 30 Azeris before succumbing to return fire. She and her comrades laughed at these men, telling them who the real culprits were, but the prisoners refused to believe them capable of such feats.)

By raising the stakes of their involvement, these women also acquired considerable moral authority off the battlefield. Indeed, as news of their exploits spread via word-of-mouth, newspaper articles,²⁰ and their own growing circle of contacts, some civilians began questioning deep-seated popular beliefs regarding the roles and capabilities of women. As activist Anoush Ter-Taulian reports: “One woman who nearly died of a mortar blast, Garineh Danielyan, was taken to a nearby hospital for what would prove to be a life-saving operation. During the operation, the hospital staff was surprised to see that she was a girl. They gathered around, kissed her mother and said, ‘We didn’t believe girls could be so brave, but now Garineh has proved this.’”²¹

Through such stories, I came to view these women as salutary examples of the dynamic potential often associated with political struggle; of how, in the process of struggling to change life and change society, social agents themselves tend to change as well, often in unanticipated ways, as consciousness and material practices-on-the-ground press against one another in interesting, changing configurations. As we shall see elsewhere, this point was not always fully considered by

my other respondents as we discussed their respective views and involvements regarding nationalism and the Karabakh struggle. But for these women, such concerns were to be found front and center, clearly acknowledged and with no reservations.

The Morning After: Lessons of Demobilization²²

When they first set out to join the struggle, these women clearly were *not* seeking to transform gender relations *per se*. Their approach, rather, was straightforwardly pragmatic. Nevertheless, within a few short years their involvement—and that of others like them—had helped to generate pockets of momentum toward redefining the place of women in the struggle. Traditional roles, although certainly not replaced, were becoming accompanied by new and emerging roles as some women doggedly sought, won, and then exercised their right to make vital, pro-active contributions.

And yet, this momentum proved to be remarkably short-lived. By 1995, the heightened expectations of the early ‘90s were not simply unfulfilled; they had been replaced by an air of disappointment, even disillusionment, as women activists saw their modest gains rolled back with the onset of a new phase of reaction and retrenchment. Indeed, not only activists but women generally were now found amidst a process of demobilization that was part and parcel of larger structural adjustments, as Karabakh’s society lurched towards a “not war, not peace” condition that came to reign through the remainder of the decade.

The post-war experience has been one of severe duress and dislocation for many segments of Karabakh’s society. Perhaps none have felt these more acutely and more pervasively than women, who are often caught in a web of social and economic hardships that have been abetted by the simultaneous demasculinization/remasculinization of Karabakh’s political economy. On one hand, with several thousand men killed in the fighting, several thousand more currently serving in the military, and still others either injured, out of work, or abroad seeking their fortunes, many “war widows” and women with dependents have been pressed into double-duty, covering increasingly lopsided shares of production *and* social reproduction.²³ As Anahit T. succinctly put it, “The role of women has correspondingly changed; their burden has gotten

heavier. Before it was the husband; now *she* must worry about electricity, splitting wood, and so on.”

On the other hand, however, male supremacy has become powerfully resurgent, with gender conflicts and inequalities often lying at the source of new tensions and dislocations. For example, eyewitnesses report that in a depressed economy marked by severe unemployment,²⁴ women often come under pressure to vacate the paid labor force, as many jobs—even those ordinarily reserved for women (e.g. kitchen work)—have been increasingly claimed by men. Such pressures, whether expressed through petty harassment, intimidation, or more subtle forms of ideological or institutional control, have caused many women to resort to extra-ordinary measures; for example, peddling their bodies in order to retain positions,²⁵ or, more frequently, seeking their fortunes as itinerant laborers or “petty entrepreneurs” (*manr vajarakan*).²⁶

The latter cases are especially numerous, and I encountered such women frequently as I traveled to, from, and across Karabakh. These itinerants would typically leave their families for days, even weeks at a time, in order to scour the streets of Yerevan, even Moscow, for all sorts of sundry goods—vodka, light bulbs, cigarettes—that might be sold on the streets of Stepanakert. There were many noteworthy aspects to these encounters; perhaps the most remarkable for me was *not* the women’s depauperate state, forced mobility, or frequently ill-health, but rather, their *quiescence* in dealing with these. This does not entail painting all women with the same brush, as quiescence encompasses varying shades of experience, to be sure: At one extreme is the woman sitting beside me on a bus who, after an hour’s conversation, assumed we were friends and cheerfully related her recent travails in obtaining a cut-rate case of “Boris Yeltsin” vodka, all the while insisting on giving me bread, cheese, and fruit from her meager reserves. At the other extreme are the many women I would pass on Stepanakert’s main thoroughfare,²⁷ who sat uncomplainingly—not even sullenly, but in a resigned, matter-of-fact way—as their troughs of sunflower seeds or stray bottles of vodka remained untouched for hours on end. But whether cheerful or dull, lively or weary, all of these women seemed to have long since accepted that belt-tightening was a daily fact of life, and that poverty and hardship were matters not to be changed, but to be borne, coped with, endured.

In this regard, the women’s battalion members were among the more fortunate. At the time of our discussion, they were still employed by the military, and indicated that because of their substantial involvements, they now held greater opportunities than they did before the war began. And yet, the post-war realities gave cause for grave concern: Each of them viewed with trepidation their ability to make effective transitions to civilian life, openly wondering how and whether they could resume in their respective fields—Anahid P. as an electrician, Anahid T. as a silk production specialist, Margarita as a teacher of literature, and Gayaneh undecided. Indeed, in assessing the mid-‘90s as a chaotic time of shifting sands, they observed that the move from peace to war, even amidst upheaval, had been relatively straightforward, while the move back to peace had been complex, difficult, and filled with inertia—hardly a return to some stable, pre-existing condition. Gayaneh went even further, claiming that the post-war situation is so onerous, in so many ways, that the resumption of hostilities might actually present a more manageable problem:

There’s no question that if war were to resume today, the effort would gain new momentum. Remember that many of our boys who have been let go [from the military] have no other work and still live with the memories of war. Just as you have Vietnam veterans who live with their war memories until the end of their lives, so we have such people too. If, God forbid, the war restarts, they’ll go right back; they feel they have nothing left to lose. And the same for us, apparently.

While Gayaneh’s point emphasized mentalities of war, the argument is equally valid from an economic standpoint. Sources indicate that by war’s end, Karabakh’s modest industrial potential had been bulked up and heavily re-tooled toward military requirements: Military orders comprised over 30% of the output of electrotechnical plants. Stepanakert’s shoe factory and silk combine had begun turning out military supplies. The city’s condensation plant had begun repairing military optical and electronic equipment. Even a factory for agricultural machinery had been retooled to repair tanks.²⁸ By the mid-‘90s, however, even with continuing war-preparedness, this source of productive activity had begun to decline, leaving a depressed economy suspended between war and peace and without any clear development alternatives.²⁹ In such an

economic climate, the prospect of resuming hostilities might indeed appear attractive to some.

The women's battalion members apparently had these concerns in mind when they spoke of *limbo*—a sense of suspended animation that had come to prevail amongst the populace since the cease-fire. Although certainly related to the trauma of war,³⁰ such a condition goes beyond mere psychological disruption and toward material bases, reflecting a post-war transition-to-nowhere in which people harbor permanent expectancy over the arrival of national development, only to see said arrival strung out indefinitely, as the state, economy, and society fail to resume their prior functions.³¹

Such inertia applies also to life in the military, for although fighting preparedness remains and basic necessities are provided for, there are no longer the organic ties and clear-cut objectives that once fostered momentum toward developing social responsibility. As Margarita puts it,

It is true that in the past year [since cease-fire] peace has brought a different phase, where people have a chance to rethink their lives, to plan, to develop programs, etc. But there are also many who have become accustomed to a life of limbo, because it demands no special responsibilities from you. You come and go to your post; your food and water is provided; you come home for a day and have no responsibility toward your family. Many are like this. Some will come, bringing some money, and then return; it's something resembling the life of a gypsy.

Such comments came as no surprise, for the military is no longer what these women came to know during the heyday of the struggle. Many of the faces have changed, as erstwhile comrades have died, received discharges, or left Karabakh entirely, while the patriotic volunteers of yesteryear are increasingly replaced by conscripts and "professionals," many of whom are brought in from Armenia. Correspondingly, earlier emphases on spontaneity, participation, and movement-based ideology have been replaced by bureaucratic standardization and concerns for technical efficiency,³² while once-vital ties to the civilian population have withered as the army has become a machine unto itself, hierarchically organized and securely cordoned off. For these women as well as many others, much of the galvanizing social content of the struggle has thereby been drained away.

Indeed, while militarization certainly is not new to Karabakh, the *form* and *content* of militarization have changed decisively following the state's establishment of a professional army, which gradually replaced the numerous partisan units that had led the fighting until 1992-93. Foremost among these changes is the military's increasingly dominant and pervasive role in everyday life—as employer, police force, economic engine, political machine, and more—even as Karabakh continues to emphasize preparedness for a possible resumption of hostilities. Not surprisingly, this growing appetite for domestic power and authority has considerably affected Karabakh's societal development, as the military's heavy hand has not simply accompanied, but in many ways has *produced* the steadily mounting pressure upon women.

"We have lapsed into feudalism," a veteran observer once told me as he depicted Karabakh's post-war woes. He was not speaking literally, of course, but referring rather to the emergence of social practices that might be termed "medieval" in a pejorative sense. "When a general drives by and sees something he likes—a girl, a car, whatever—he simply takes it, by blackmail or brute force if necessary."³³

Indeed, more than once did I hear stories involving women who have been abused or preyed upon by emboldened military men, whose personal appetites have become unbridled since the cease-fire. According to numerous sources, the man chiefly responsible for these developments is Gen. Samvel Babayan, Karabakh's long-time Defense Minister and Commander-in-Chief (1994-2000), who has been credited with engendering a culture of permissiveness, license, and corruption in the military, in return for the fierce personal loyalty of his charges. Known for a lavish, ostentatious lifestyle and extensive mafia ties, Babayan himself is perhaps the most conspicuous example of such "feudal" behavior: Anoush Ter-Taulian, a diasporan Armenian living in Karabakh since 1994, tells of young women who have gained or retained posts in return for submitting to Babayan's advances, while others have been forcibly summoned to his newly-built mansion in the hills overlooking Stepanakert, facing severe punishment if they refuse his advances. In one case, an entire family from Martakert fled Karabakh to avoid the consequences of refusal.³⁴

All of this is possible because Babayan used Karabakh's military machine not simply to defeat the

Azeris, but to penetrate and grasp principal power spheres in Karabakh's economy, judiciary, and civilian administration.³⁵ Indeed, with the military aided by court systems and government ministries that routinely look the other way, a feeling of invincibility had readily spread not only throughout the military but among civilian men as well, many of whom have gained confidence in their ability to abuse women with impunity.³⁶

Herein lies an important irony. Babayan, although feared and loathed by many,³⁷ has also been a source of *Karabakhtsi* pride for the swagger and bravado he brought to his job. Indeed, his tough-talking machismo not only bolstered the morale of his fighters, but spoke to a newly assertive self-esteem among *Karabakhtsi* who had long harbored inferiority complexes characteristic of their colonized status. By the mid-'90s, however, Babayan's hubris had clearly become perverted, reflecting a gaze and a *modus operandi* that were being redirected internally, and inflicted especially upon women.

In the face of such pressures, just as with poverty, women have mostly chosen to acquiesce and internalize. As Ter-Taulian tells it:

On one occasion, one of the officers, Vartkes Arzoumanian, a dentist who was the head of a hospital, attempted to rape me. I am willing to address this issue in public because I know that violence against women is a big problem, and I know that most Armenian women, or Armenians in general, are afraid to discuss this issue. Even my own friends told me not to report the incident because nothing could be done about it and it would create more problems for me. They said, 'He will lie, blame you, and ruin your reputation.' " ³⁸

Such acquiescence extends even to the women's battalion members, who appeared pessimistic, even directionless, at a time when more resistant, politically engaged stances might have been expected. None of this is meant to imply indifference, of course: They made regular reference to the state's inability to provide for citizens' needs, and repeatedly criticized the authorities for behavior variously described as heavyhanded, predatory, disorganized, or simply unresponsive. But this was all couched within a view that saw not people, but the *state* as the prime agent of social change—indeed, as the repository of all social ills and cures—suspended above a populace assumed to be atomized

and reactive. Such a view³⁹ clearly overshadowed their occasional references to agency and empowerment.

Why such directionlessness? especially among women who had acted decisively and pro-actively only a few years before? Mainstream responses usually point to the generalized ravages of war, coupled with the new phase of poverty and uncertainty that has followed the cease-fire.⁴⁰ But while we must grant the significance of limbo and battle-fatigue following an intense armed conflict, there is nevertheless another, decisive element that helps to set the context for these factors: These and other women were being demobilized mainly because they were *not organized*, beyond perhaps carving a niche for themselves during the height of the war. Now that the war was over, where were the institutional ties, the social movements, where women *as women* could defend their rights? Nowhere to be found. Put differently, women's lack of organizing, even amongst those who had fought, left them weak and ill-prepared—institutionally and ideologically—to contest the lopsided power relations that had emerged since war's end. Like much else in Karabakh, they were left holding their past achievements as little more than sources of nostalgia.

In Karabakh's case, *nationalism* appears to have been the one force capable of mobilizing people's frustrations and desires for social change toward action. But once victory had been achieved and home rule restored, nationalism became seemingly untethered from "merely" social or economic issues, which became "just the way things are" on the domestic scene, i.e. sources of social discontent certainly, but not carrying enough force to generate movement. Thus, in a strange turnabout, nationalism became implicated not only in the popular rejection of oppression, but in the passive acceptance of it as well. Specifically in the case of gender, nationalism—once possessing some degree of liberatory potential—had become a hindrance for any tendencies toward equality. For with the "enemy" defined almost exclusively as Turks, with *intranational* oppression still a nascent phenomenon, and with internalized images of their men as "defenders of the fatherland," most women—often without overt pressure but through their own "consent"—would hold their tongues in the name of national order and cohesion at a time of perceived fragility. In explaining women's acquiescence, then, it is not enough to say simply that patriarchy is entrenched and that feminism has yet to

find fertile ground in Karabakh. Nor is it enough to say, as my respondents did, that after so many years of oppression *Karabakhtsis* were simply used to substandard living and thus inured to its deprivations. For similar arguments might have been used to apologize for continuing subordination to Azerbaijani occupation, and yet such accommodations were rejected on nationalist grounds.

In Karabakh, the very concept of domestic social movements, challenging entrenched power and yet with relative autonomy from the state, is only now beginning to emerge. Meanwhile, there continues to reign a fetishized, monolithic, "ungrateful" nationalism, which appears to subsume those *subnational* relations and identities, such as gender, that have served to constitute it, while failing to grant women a place as subjects worthy of political concern in their own right, in return for their loyalty and contributions. It is a nationalism, moreover, that continues to pose all questions in terms of "national development" and which avoids the formulation of any issue or program for action based on entities other than the state.⁴¹ It is in this context—one marked by the absence of sustained women's campaigns or education—that the weight of patriarchal tradition and resurgent male supremacy proves overwhelming. And it is yet another example of how women who do not organize *during* a struggle are not likely to be empowered afterward.

In the near term, it remains for women and their allies to struggle for a place within Karabakh's reigning nationalist discourse, perhaps in the process changing the terms upon which it is set. This is not as unrealistic as it may appear at first. For, at least in the case of my respondents, there was a recognition—at times implicit, but present nevertheless—that nationalism, even if full of abstractions, is not an immovable thing, but a field representing complex networks of social relations, including those implicating gender power, and that these relations are not given, but contestable.

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- ENDNOTES**
- ¹ "Nagorno-Karabakh" is a Russian term denoting "black gardens" or "black orchards." The term gained ascendancy during the 19th century, as Czarist Russia consolidated its hold on Transcaucasia.
- ² My research is based primarily on participant observation conducted during two extended trips to the region—once in 1993 during the height of the fighting, and again in 1995 after a ceasefire had been declared. My research efforts were embedded in a broader itinerary that included political journalism and solidarity work. Sources include diaries recording my personal experiences and observations, interviews with participants variously placed within the struggle, as well as various primary and secondary documents collected during and following these visits.
- ³ Mainstream definitions of nationalism may be found, for instance, in Gellner (1983). A prominent

critique of the mainstream, along with a renewed emphasis on nationalism-as-consciousness, may be found in Anderson (1983).

⁴ In exploring the nexus of nationalism, militarization, and gender, I have greatly benefited from the insightful works of Frantz Fanon (1959), Anne McClintock (1991), and especially Cynthia Enloe (1983, 1993).

⁵ Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (1989) suggest that women's relation to nationalism has assumed at least five major forms. Women may serve as 1) biological reproducers of national groups (biological mothers of people found within the nation's boundaries); 2) symbols and signifiers of national difference in male discourse (e.g. as depicted in art, literature, iconography); 3) transmitters and producers of the cultural narratives themselves (e.g. as teachers, mothers, storytellers); 4) reproducers of the social boundaries of the nation (through acceptance/rejection of customs, norms, divisions of labor); and 5) active participants in national movements (e.g. through armies, congresses, trade unions, community organizations). Of these five dimensions, the last three especially gain expression in the discussions below. Meanwhile, the second finds its way to the surface elsewhere in my work, where I deal with the gendered iconography of Karabakh Armenians' national motto—"We Are Our Mountains."

⁶ Videotaped interview conducted by Gegham Baghdasarian for *Horizon* television, Winter-Spring 1994.

⁷ As in many other militarized societies, women in Karabakh became accustomed to assisting the war effort while carrying on with numerous other tasks relating to social reproduction—e.g. raising families, private gardening, attending to personal needs of their husbands and relatives. Although attenuated somewhat by extended families and informal help networks, the burdens of such tasks are nonetheless considerable; and yet, many women regularly downplayed these burdens, attributing them to the generalized ravages of war.

⁸ With a history dating back to the czarist-era, Shushi prison has been known for being much more than a site of incarceration. According to numerous human rights observers, during 1990-91 Azerbaijan's

Interior Ministry used the prison to conduct interrogations, beatings, and methods of psychological disruption. In some cases, deaths of inmates have been identified as probable homicides, with victims marked by multiple bruises and other evidence of beatings. For more detailed descriptions, see the report "Human Rights Violations During Military Operations in Nagorno-Karabakh," published by the Memorial Society Human Rights Center, Moscow (1991); also Cox and Eibner (1993).

⁹ Such experiences also had a recentring effect, coming as they did at the culmination of my move ever-deeper into the heart of the struggle. This move may be tracked spatially (New York → Moscow → Yerevan → Karabakh → frontlines) as well as through my growing practical involvement.

¹⁰ Although space does not permit full consideration here, I must also note my intense encounter with Greta Avetisyan, a teacher of literature and widow of guerrilla leader Vigen Grigoryan, three months after Grigoryan died in a 1993 mine blast. In a 40-minute monologue, Avetisyan recounted her husband's activities in a manner that was highly theatrical, politically charged, and yet completely unforced and free of affectation. (This soliloquy would soon circulate widely, in abridged form, as part of a growing corpus of Karabakh resistance literature published by the *Pakine* literary monthly of Beirut; see Avetisyan-Grigoryan, 1994). Soon thereafter, I learned that other diasporan activists had also experienced moving encounters with Avetisyan, which in some cases have been similarly recorded. See for example Chamlian's (1993) memoir which appeared in the Armenian-language *Horizon* weekly of Montreal.

¹¹ Togh was one of the few villages of mixed Armenian-Azeri population during the Soviet era. A focal point of escalating tensions during 1990-91, Togh became an early site of Armenian guerrilla insurgency and an explosive battleground during ensuing, all-out hostilities.

¹² The most famous example is Zhanna Galstian, a leading actress at Stepanakert's Dramatic Theater, who left her profession to become a commander of early partisan units. A one-time leader in the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Galstian today is a Presidential Advisor and decorated war hero.

¹³ At the time, these four did not know each other. However, they and most other women fighters were from Shushi or Stepanakert—Karabakh's two largest population centers during the Soviet era. Conversely, Karabakh's countryside produced few female combatants, none of whom formed or joined separate women's battalions. This discrepancy may indicate a broader rural-urban distinction in women's participation, based on factors such as education, patriarchal custom, village (under)development, and the generally conservative leanings of the peasantry.

¹⁴ Often called "Dashnak Ako," Ter-Tadevosyan was an Afghan veteran who returned to Armenia in 1988 to join the self-determination movement. In 1989, he organized partisan units that fought first on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border and later in Karabakh. He was among the chief architects of the taking of Shushi in 1992, and is among a number of former Red Army professionals who lent their expertise to the Armenian effort. For more on Ter-Tadevosyan, see Tatevosyan (1996).

¹⁵ Given the "messy," multi-voiced nature of this conversation, I have assembled this lengthy passage essentially as a composite quotation, including remarks from all four respondents. Similarly, for the sake of clarity, some text fragments have been left out or gently paraphrased. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are English translations from the Armenian language (Eastern dialect).

¹⁶ Karin Tak (literally "beneath the rock") is a small village found at the base of a huge massif, upon which rests the city of Shushi.

¹⁷ Karabakh Armenians routinely refer to their antagonists not as "Azeris" (national identification), but rather as "Turks" (ethnic identification). Many Azeris, particularly in the countryside, also call themselves "Turks."

¹⁸ For more discussion of such transformations, see Fanon (1959, pp.99-102, 111-14); also Enloe (1983, pp.168-72).

¹⁹ I do not wish to overstate these changes, however, for they did not become widespread. Also, such changes were often acknowledged by men in gendered ways that signified the persistence of earlier habits of mind. For example, Garineh Danielyan, perhaps the most outstanding fighter from this women's battalion, was nicknamed "Rambo" by the

men she fought with. Similarly, on other occasions, I heard men refer to "*dghamartgayin aghcheegner*," ('brave women'), where "*dghamart*" is a specifically gendered term signifying a male warrior or courageous young man. While certainly conferred as terms of respect, these and other seemingly innocuous terms indicate an incomplete break with past gender relations.

²⁰ For example, see the April 7, 1995 issue of *Mardik* (published by the NKR Defense Ministry), which contains an article (p.2) discussing women's battalions. Several of my respondents were featured in that article.

²¹ See Ter-Taulian (2001). Originally from California, Anoush Ter-Taulian has spent the better part of seven years in Karabakh, addressing women's issues while working as an art instructor in the Martakert region.

²² "The morning after" is a metaphor drawn from Enloe (1993).

²³ Of course, extended families often help (grandparents, aunts, and uncles often live nearby or as part of the same household), as do small government allocations for families of deceased fighters. Even these allocations, however, are often in arrears.

²⁴ Although reliable statistics are hard to come by, such conditions are everywhere in evidence. In a February 2001 discussion with a trusted member of parliament, I learned that the Hadrut district's unemployment rate stood at close to 70%, and had been so for several years. Other sources indicate that the figures are not too different elsewhere, except for Stepanakert, where employment opportunities are slightly better.

²⁵ This is based on Ter-Taulian's personal observations, reported to me in New York, January 2001.

²⁶ Some, like Larissa, went even further and left Karabakh entirely. Having spent her college years in Baku and with her family hailing from Moldova, Larissa was essentially a "city-girl uprooted" due to having married Hadrut activist Erig Abrahamyan while the two were Baku Conservatory students. Once her husband was killed in 1994 fighting, Larissa felt there was nothing left to hold her to a remote outpost of southern Karabakh and, despite incurring the wrath of her in-laws, relocated with her two

children to Moldova, where she is now a schoolteacher.

²⁷ The thoroughfare is called “*Azadamardiknerou Boghoda*”—literally, “Freedom Fighters’ Boulevard.”

²⁸ Tatevosyan (1996, p.20).

²⁹ Indeed, state managers appear to have been not only incapable, but divided and reluctant over whether to forge ahead with economic reconversion, in part because of the signal this might send to Baku regarding Karabakh’s ongoing military readiness. For examples of internal debates over how to proceed with Karabakh’s economic development, see Alexandrian (1998).

³⁰ For discussions of post-traumatic stress syndrome and other war-related health issues in Karabakh, see Coudenhove (1996); also Tchilingirian (2000).

³¹ For an apt description of this phenomenon in the broader context of decolonization, see Ahmad (1980).

³² Such prevailing concerns are amply reflected in the newspaper *Mardik*, which routinely gives voice to Karabakh’s leading and lesser-known military figures. At the same time, Karabakh’s military presents numerous strengths in terms of fighting capabilities, which are dealt with substantially by Tatevosyan (1996, p.22) and others.

³³ From a conversation with Levon V., Stepanakert, February 2001.

³⁴ Based on a conversation with Anoush Ter-Taulian, New York, January 2001.

³⁵ Indeed, by the late 1990s, Babayan had become widely viewed as the most powerful man in Karabakh. He was undone, however, by several years of tense and bitter confrontation with President Arkady Ghukasyan, which culminated in an unsuccessful attempt on Ghukasyan’s life in March 2000. Soon thereafter, Babayan was charged with the crime, taken into custody, and after a lengthy, stormy trial, sentenced to 14 years in prison in February 2001.

³⁶ Certainly there are other contributing factors as well. For example, since the fall of the USSR there has been a steep rise in alcoholism among men, which has contributed to a host of societal ills, not least being the rising tide of abuse against women.

³⁷ Indeed, during my most recent visit (winter/spring 2001), I found that Babayan’s imprisonment had been

cause for widespread celebration amongst numerous fractions of the populace.

³⁸ From Ter-Taulian (2001)

³⁹ Such a view is not very different from those of my male respondents, indicating a (significantly) common attitude toward the functioning of state and society.

⁴⁰ See e.g. Hughes (1998)

⁴¹ This problem receives thorough and relevant treatment in James Ferguson’s *The Anti-Politics Machine: “Development,” Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (1990). Although Ferguson’s critical focus is on the culture surrounding international development agency practices, his discussion of how underdeveloped countries tend to fetishize the nation-state resonates well with my argument here.