

Why do The Winners of a War Become Angry?  
Identity Crisis in The Aftermath of The Second Nagorno-  
Karabakh War

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Submitted to  
Central European University  
Department of International Relations

*In partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Master of Arts  
in International Relations*

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Word Count: 10,510

Vienna, Austria 2021

## ABSTRACT

Despite winning the second Nagorno Karabakh war and liberating the occupied territories and restoring the territorial integrity of the country, Azerbaijanis are angered and experiencing “peace anxiety”. Bahar Rumelili’s definition of “peace anxiety” is where conflict resolution does not bring up peace to individuals, rather it unleashes anxieties in varying degrees and ways by disrupting the old routines and habits people developed during conflicts. In this research project, I analyze the ontological (in)security of the Azerbaijani identity in the postwar period. The literature on ontological security situates the security of identity in routinized social relationships that generate a basic trust system. I question how the peace deal challenges the old routines that Azerbaijanis are strongly attached to. To address this question, I conduct a discursive analysis of Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev’s speeches after the peace deal was signed in November 2020. The notion of “peace anxiety” enables me to study these speeches and explain that the President’s separatist political narrative aims to focus on old routines that constitute the core of the Azerbaijani identity. In fact, Aliyev himself experiences anxiety and fails to address the new reality via his belligerent speeches. The failure of deconstructing the enmity relationship between the Armenian and Azerbaijani identities poses a challenge for future prospects of peace and the possibility of coexistence.

## **DEDICATION**

*In loving memory of Aqil and Azad.*

*Rest in peace!*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor Xymena Kurowska for her guidance, patience, and time throughout this process. I have learned a lot from you during these two years and enjoyed working with you.

Thanks, mom, dad, Garanfil, and Isa for being my family! Especially, I cannot thank enough to my mom, Sheyda. Studying abroad for a master's degree has been a dream for me. Without her love, care, and support I could not learn how to be independent and brave enough to finish my studies. Thank you for believing in me and telling me to be strong! I love you all!

Throughout my studies and professional experiences, Orkhan Aliyev had a specific influence on me. Thank you for encouraging me in my first year of undergraduate studies to follow my dreams and fight for them. His guidance, experiences, and valuable insights have always been helpful!

I would like to thank Promise Frank Ejiofor for encouraging me to apply to the Central European University to pursue my master's degree here. Your knowledge, wisdom, and life philosophy have been inspiring for me since I met you. Thank you!

I owe special thanks to the Model UN Azerbaijan Community. Because of the people I have known from this community I have learned about world politics, gained new friends, and expanded my knowledge. Special thanks to the Ministry of Youth and Sports, UNDP Azerbaijan office, ADA University, and Azer Abasaliyev for three wonderful years full of MUN conferences.

Finally, I want to thank all of my friends that I have changed during these two years because of them. Their support, love, patience, and care made me become who I am today. Special thanks to Alia Flanigan, Andgela Bodroza, Aygun Ahmadova, Aysel Kazimova, Aytaj Ahmadova, Batoul Belal, Brandon Benny, Emma Bihan-Poudec, Farida Valiyeva, Ismayil Suleymanov, Rauf Mahmudzade, Sabina Abbasova, Vali Babayev and Zeynab Nasibova. I have found a family in your friendships. Thank you for bearing with me during this process!

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## Introduction

Why do the winners in international conflict remain angry at those they have defeated? The three-decades-long simmering conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno Karabakh (NK) territory ended with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan signing the peace deal brokered by Russia in November 2020 after a war lasting 44 days.<sup>1</sup> When the truce was achieved, Azerbaijanis were content with the results of the war as they were dancing, celebrating, and congratulating each other for this was a historical victory for them.<sup>2</sup> Presumably, the liberation of occupied lands should have brought positive emotions to Azerbaijanis as seen from their cheering and celebrations, yet anger is noticeably high because both civilians and military officers experienced not only physical injury but also overwhelming mental and emotional exhaustion during the war.

However, this happiness did not last long. Eventually, soldiers came back from the front lines with mental and physical injuries, and people started realizing what is waiting for them in near future: a peaceful neighborly relationship with Armenia. Since the NK conflict was the only reason for enmity, now there is no direct reason for animosity. Nevertheless, securing physical security is not enough at this phase of the post-conflict period. While it would be expected to be satisfied with the achieved physical security, it is more than that: identity security should be guaranteed, too. Therefore, being stuck in anger and the entrenched relationship of enmity dismisses the territorial regains. Understanding this lingering anger will affect any possibility for the reconciliation process and possible coexistence in the future. In spite of the victory, the discourse is still belligerent.

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<sup>1</sup> Colm Quinn, 2020, “Will a Russian-Brokered Deal End the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict?,” *Foreign Policy*, last modified November 10, 2020, accessed January 27, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/11/10/russia-nagorno-karabakh-armenia-azerbaijan-conflict-end/>.

<sup>2</sup> As seen as an Azerbaijani living in Baku during the war.

The puzzle of this research paper is why do Azerbaijanis feel anxiety over peace despite winning the war. Over the years, Armenian and Azerbaijani identities have been distinct due to fewer interaction levels. Effectively, the relationship between these states has influenced their identities. The more they found themselves attached to and trapped in the NK conflict, the more their identities have become rigid and less open to change their attitudes toward each other. This means they either avoided or had no opportunity to have any kind of contact or dialogues at the grassroots level. Since they never experienced any kind of social, economic, or cultural contact, they rely on their emotions. Especially this can be observed in the aftermath of the war that despite territorial gains Azerbaijanis still feel angry.

This anger is very distinct among families who experienced losses, internally displaced people (IDP) whose IDP status and benefits are at risk of being taken away, and even soldiers who were direct victims of the war.<sup>3</sup> From this, my research question was *how does the peace deal challenge old routines?* This research question is linked to the opening question of why the winners of a war remain angry despite the victory and territorial gains. Such a victory constitutes a challenge to the established rigid Azerbaijani identity and triggers “peace anxiety” which makes the prospects of peaceful coexistence with Armenia difficult. The case of the second NK war will enable me to reflect on the way the peace deal affects the identity itself and the future relationship between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The research question will be addressed through a discourse analysis of President Aliyev’s speeches after the peace deal.

As a preliminary explanation of why this might be the case, I use the literature on Ontological Security to propose that the idea of coexistence with Armenians threatens the self-identity of Azerbaijanis, and continued anger serves to freeze the enmity. By employing the Ontological Security theory, I discuss Azerbaijanis’ identity insecurity and their attachment to anger in the post-war situation. Instead of being jubilant, Azerbaijanis feel threatened that their

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<sup>3</sup> As seen as an Azerbaijani living in Baku during the war.

identity that was mainly shaped by the NK conflict and perception of Armenia as an enemy country will be changed. The unknown future aspects between the two nations cause fear and anxiety which leads to a state of anger. Hereby, Ontological Security helps to explain this existential anxiety in the victorious post-war period.

Specifically, I utilize the works of Jennifer Mitzen and Brent J. Steele to reconstruct what ontological security entails. Mitzen argues that individuals create cognitive and behavioral certainties by establishing routines in order to feel secure in their identities or selves.<sup>4</sup> Nation-states routinize their behaviors in relation to other actors and get attached to those relationships. The stability of social relationships, either peaceful or conflictual, helps the actor to sustain the ontological security of the identity. Secondly, I explore the notion of “peace anxiety” coined by Bahar Rumelili where she argues that conflict resolution produces anxiety and undermines the shared expectations and understandings between two or more conflicting parties.<sup>5</sup> Finally, I address the literature on emotions to reflect on the emotional changes in the reformulation of the Azerbaijani identity in the postwar situation and its impact on future relations between these states. I refer to the articles and book chapters by Andrew Ross, Regina Heller and Dirk Lindebaum, and Yiannis Gabriel. Their explanation of anger with specific case studies allowed me to grasp the impact of such a strong emotion on international conflicts.

My contribution to the IR literature by conducting this research study will be how emotions in the aftermath of an ethnic conflict shape the rigid identity of a nation. Emotions are not only feelings, but they also have extra subjective dimensions. Therefore, they do affect the behavior of actors and influence social routines. Andrew Ross argues that emotional

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<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Mitzen, 2006, “Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma,” *European Journal of International Relations*, 12 (3), 341–70.

<sup>5</sup> Bahar Rumelili, ed. 2015, “Conflict Resolution and Ontological Security: Peace Anxieties,” *PRIO New Security Studies*, London; New York: Routledge, 1-206.



circulations may either support an existing identity or give rise to a new one.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, I'm conducting this research to analyze how Azerbaijani identity is being threatened after a victorious war. With the case study of the second NK war, I aim to contribute to the role of anxiety in ontological security, the role of emotions in IR, and how certain emotions affect prospects of peace.

This research will be constructed in the following order. Chapter 1 focuses on existing literature and building my main theoretical framework to examine my research questions in context. Chapter 2 lays out my research methodology and the context of the NK conflict. Here I will explore the historical background of the conflict, the emotional legacy of the first NK war, and why Azerbaijanis are angry with the conflict resolution. Chapter 3 will solely be dedicated to the case of the NK war where I analyze the President's speeches from November 2020 until May 15, 2021.

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew A. G. Ross, 2014, "Mixed Emotions: Beyond Fear and Hatred in International Conflict," Chicago and London: *University of Chicago Press*, 1-207.

## CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The chapter aims to explain the theoretical framework used for this research project. After introducing the theory of Ontological Security, I describe the relationship between anger and anxiety and how ontological security explains them.

### **a. Ontological Security**

To explain the anger behind Azerbaijan's victory in the second NK war, I construct my framework on the premises of ontological security and scholarly work on emotions, specifically anger and anxiety. Considering that security is the primary object of this research work, I will build a theoretical framework by analyzing how anger is linked to ontological security.

Humans feel secure when their physical selves face no danger or threat. In addition to this, individuals need to feel ontologically secure, too, otherwise, their identities will be threatened by consequences of instabilities or conflicts. Mitzen in the 'Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma' article refers to ontological security as a routinized social relation that helps generate a habitual basic trust system between individuals.<sup>7</sup> Mitzen explains why states seek ontological security like individuals. Since the territory of a state has a spatial boundary, this cannot be considered as its body: "state's body is the aggregate of its individual members' bodies."<sup>8</sup> When states seek ontological security it is because their individual members need it. She further justifies the rationale behind states' ontological security seeking by arguing that in order to secure the identities of individuals, a state should be cognitively stable.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Mitzen, "Ontological Security," 361.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 351.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 352.

Being ontologically secure, in addition, to physically secure, assures the individual or actor to understand their rational actions and know to be themselves. Ontological security explains how identities get attached to certain routines. Since these routines become a part of an individual's daily life, they serve as a key factor in the constitution and maintenance of identity and a sense of secure identity. Moreover, insecurity of identity stems from deep uncertainties that affect the actor's behavior and cognition. Thus, establishing and repeating routines allow actors to achieve ontological security.

Mitzen clarifies that there are flexible and rigid types of attachments. While the former generates healthy reflexive routines and enables actors to pursue "sociation, development, and self-esteem", the latter implies any disruption to routines will create anxiety and even reproduce physical threat.<sup>10</sup> When the ontological needs are not met, there exists a physical security dilemma that obstructs cooperation.

On the same note, Steele refers to ontological security as being.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, he writes in his 'Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-identity and the IR State' book that the notion of the self (identity) depends on our perception of the other. Thus, the self/other nexus constitutes the basis of the state identity. Here he argues that emotions connect individuals to the nation-state, therefore, "citizen's existential experience can be completed through the State".<sup>12</sup> Regardless of emotions, emotional circulations affect everyday routines and habits. Andrew Ross defines circulations of affect as "a conscious or unconscious transmission of emotion within a social environment" in his 'Mixed Emotions: Beyond Fear and Hatred in International Conflict' book.<sup>13</sup> Ross argues that individuals generate their identities by participating in community rituals and sharing common emotions. Therefore,

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<sup>10</sup> Mitzen, "Ontological Security," 350.

<sup>11</sup> Brent J. Steele, 2008, "Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State," *Routledge*, 1-208.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Ross, "Mixed Emotions," 39.

one's attachment to particular routines stems from socialization and affective circulations that make up the ontologically secure identities.

When it comes to defining what emotions affect ontological security, I refer to Steele's argument that while the situations that threaten the identity of the state produce anxiety, situations that put the survival of the state in danger generate fear. Consequently, anxiety is the source of insecurity in the ontological security conception because the anxious state of mind motivates agents to keep up with their habitual routines.<sup>14</sup> Considering both Steele's and Mitzen's views on ontological security, I argue that the disruption of routines produces insecurity and anxiety that makes the Being doubt his/her identity and further be exposed to other emotions. The release of these emotions diminishes the weight of the identities and causes either generating new routines or supporting the existing/old ones vis-à-vis identities. I will apply this main theoretical framework to explain the "peace anxiety" demonstrated via President Aliyev's speeches in the aftermath of the second NK war. My argument is that winning a war was not the end of the conflict for Azerbaijan, rather the conflict within the Self has started after the victory. The return of certain territories to Azerbaijan leads the identity to experience anxiety because of the old way of relating to the Armenian identity. Since the old routines are perturbed, the Azerbaijani identity is not ready for a new way of relating to Armenia. As a result, the Azerbaijani identity reacts with anger to the established security identity because of peace anxiety. In the next part, I explain the role of anxiety in international relations and the notion of 'peace anxieties'.

### **b. Anxiety and Ontological Security**

Although anxiety leads to ontological insecurity, these two terms cannot be used interchangeably. Simply anxiety is "a sense of the mood of unease, nervousness, or discomfort,

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<sup>14</sup> Steele, "Ontological Security," 52, 61.

associated with uncertainty and oriented toward the future”.<sup>15</sup> Kinnvall and Mitzen in their ‘Anxiety, Fear, and Ontological Security in World Politics: Thinking with and beyond Giddens’ article discuss that “anxiety is characterized by multifinality, admitting to a range of emotions, including excitement and anticipation, and a variety of behaviors, from compulsive repetition, to acting out, to paralysis, to entrepreneurship”.<sup>16</sup> When individuals feel uncertainty, they become anxious, hence, fearful, in the face of existential threats. Especially, when states design national or international security agendas, they aim to tackle threats to minimize any risks threatening the survival of populations. However, fear and anxiety are two different terms. Kinnvall and Mitzen examine that fear has a specific object and requires urgency to respond, on the other hand, anxiety is independent of the actual threat object and is not temporal. Since it is the Self that experiences this anxiety, the authors argue that the self and anxiety are at the core of ontological security.<sup>17</sup> When the actors do not feel their actions are stable and continuous in time, they feel insecure. That is when they seek ontological security.

While there is no perfect form of ontological security because humans will always find themselves in a state of anxiety, this emotion plays a significant role in understanding who we are. In this sense, Bahar Rumelili also discusses the difference between fear and anxiety in her ‘Conflict Resolution and Ontological Security’ book that anxiety is “a generalized state of emotions” while fear is “a response to a specific threat”.<sup>18</sup> She further argues that actors with anxieties make critical and free choices, thus, anxiety has an undeniable role in conflict resolutions and peace processes. While she builds up her ontological security framework, she adds that ontological security combines not only routines, habits, but also a feeling of biographical continuity and its relevance to other people. Thus, the anxious state perturbs the

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<sup>15</sup> Catarina Kinnvall, and Jennifer Mitzen, 2020, “Anxiety, Fear, and Ontological Security in World Politics: Thinking with and beyond Giddens,” *International Theory*, 12 (2), 240–56.

<sup>16</sup> Kinnvall and Mitzen, “Anxiety,” 241.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>18</sup> Rumelili, “Conflict Resolution,” 12.

continuity of the self and causes chaos. Containing anxieties through various institutional mechanisms decreases the likelihood of the generation of ontological insecurity.<sup>19</sup>

Rumelili views ontological insecurity from the lenses of anxieties. According to her, it is not an absolute and extreme state, rather a relative one, so when it is impossible to contain anxieties, then they do affect social and political processes significantly. However, she sees the positive potential of this emotion in post-conflict situations where anxiety generates a new identity. Henceforth, she argues that existential anxieties (death, meaninglessness, and condemnation) can be contained with the help of conflicts. The crucial point of her argument is that when individuals do not feel peaceful after conflict resolution, they experience varying degrees of because the old routines and habits they developed during conflicts are disrupted. She defines this kind of anxiety as ‘peace anxiety’.

It is important to note that Rumelili’s understanding of anxiety shows us that there is a longing for returning to routines and habits that made up the conflicts and a provision for actors to make changes independently and freely.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, identity-making is based on the social and political narratives produced by states. In this regard, narratives and meaning-making processes generate ontological security and insecurity for certain societal groups, especially in cases of conflicts. Taking that into consideration conflicts connect securitization processes and identity constitution. When the Self experiences the object of fear, it distinguishes itself from the Other and establishes the enemy and friend concepts. Although stability is a key for the survival of the identity, securitization is not necessary. Instead of containing the anxiety without securitizing, it helps to prevent conflicts. In the book, Rumelili further discusses the importance of territories as a signifier of national identity and she concludes that disputes over territories do not carry weight for ontological security.<sup>21</sup> For this reason, Azerbaijani identity

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>20</sup> Rumelili, “Conflict Resolution,” 13.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 18.

is experiencing ontological insecurity despite the territorial gains in the war, thus, Rumelili's 'peace anxiety' framework perfectly explains the feeling of anger in the post-conflict period in Azerbaijan. Especially, considering that Azerbaijani identity has been attached to the NK conflict for a long time and perceived Armenia as an enemy, the stereotypical beliefs about the enemy help Azerbaijanis to make sense of their identities.<sup>22</sup> This specific aspect of "peace anxiety" is embedded in President's speeches when he talks about stereotypical characteristics of Armenians. This shows that Aliyev himself is anxious about the peace now, that he does not know how to deconstruct the Azerbaijani identity in the face of a new reality. The next section connects anger and anxiety and explains anger through ontological security.

### **c. Anger and Anxiety**

Howard Kassinove defines anger as "a negative feeling that is typically associated with hostile thoughts, physiological arousal, and maladaptive behaviors".<sup>23</sup> When someone feels threatened, disrespected, or neglected, this emotion arouses. In the same token, Heller in 'More Rigor to Emotions! A Comparative, Qualitative Content Analysis of Anger in Russian Foreign Policy' chapter explains the role of anger in international relations as a feeling stemming from "frustration over failed verification of a positively distinctive identity".<sup>24</sup> She refers to Kassinove's work and explains that anger has two facets: emotional experience and angry reactions. It is usually perceived that anger is aggressive, however, not all anger transforms into aggression. Rather it triggers certain responses – action tendencies – which obstruct the desire for cooperation and partnership and encourages competition.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, individuals whose anger emotions are triggered tend to make decisions impulsively, be biased and overlook

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<sup>22</sup> Rumelili, "Conflict Resolution," 20.

<sup>23</sup> American Psychological Association, 2012, "Anger: How to recognize and deal with a common emotion." [Press release], accessed April 30, 2021, <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2012/05/anger>.

<sup>24</sup> Regina Heller, 2018, "More Rigor to Emotions! A Comparative, Qualitative Content Analysis of Anger in Russian Foreign Policy," Chapter in *Researching Emotions in International Relations: Methodological Perspectives on the Emotional Turn*, 75-99.

<sup>25</sup> Heller, "More Rigor," 78-80.

information. Since anger is a bodily human experience, individuals can feel this emotion at a state level. Thus, this shared emotion can generate collective identities which are sustained by shared habits and routines. Through this emotional language, the states can pursue their political and social narratives and preserve their identity.

On the other hand, anger has the potential to disrupt the social order. In this regard, Lindebaum and Gabriel in the ‘Anger and Organization Studies: From Social Disorder to Moral Order’ article differentiates anger as a trait and a state. While anger as an individual disorder occurs temporally in time, it is an overt expression to reflect the power of different actors at the organizational and social levels.<sup>26</sup> The latter type of anger can affect the behaviors of actors, impede cooperation and stimulate competition. The authors discuss different causes of anger, but the anger in response to moral violations offers a better explanation for the NK case. Moral values are the main values and interests of the Self, hence, any threats to those moral values make individuals express anger. Especially, situations that make individuals uncomfortable generate powerful emotions such as anger and anxiety. Analyzing these two emotions shows that anxiety and anger are linked to each other through fear.

Returning to Rumelili’s work, she argues that the Self gets fearful when its body and identity are threatened. When the object of threat is nowhere, there exists anxiety.<sup>27</sup> Thus, anxiety occurs because there is uncertainty, and it is of nothingness. Since it is a generalized state of emotions, several emotions can make up anxiety. When the identity is anxious, uncertain of consequences of actions, unable to draw conclusions, then certain emotions are unleashed, and anger is one of those emotions. Eventually, anxiety can become anger in extreme circumstances, for example when humans feel that their physical and ontological securities are in danger. In the case of NK, the Azerbaijani identity is experiencing the same

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<sup>26</sup> Dirk Lindebaum and Yiannis Gabriel, 2016, “Anger and Organization Studies: From Social Disorder to Moral Order,” *Organization Studies*, 37 (7), 903–18.

<sup>27</sup> Rumelili, “Conflict Resolution,” 12.



emotion. Azerbaijanis feel angry with the results of the war and fearful of future prospects which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

## CHAPTER 2. RESEARCH STRATEGY AND CONTEXT

This chapter explains the methodology used for the research of this topic. First, I explain the aim of the project by addressing how the Azerbaijani identity has changed in relation to the anger emotion. Then I describe my primary source and the contribution to the International Relations literature.

The research aims to reveal the changing process of Azerbaijani identity in the aftermath of the second NK war. Historically Armenians and Azerbaijanis have lived together, although not always in peace. Under Soviet rule, Armenia and Azerbaijan had no other choice but to sustain good neighborly relations. However, this has changed once Armenia started invading NK and surrounding regions after the USSR collapsed. Since then both nations perceive each other as enemies. Such a long-lasting enmity relationship made both of them be attached to their identity. My main aim is to understand how this war shaped the perceptions about Armenians, especially exploring the idea of living together with them in the liberated territories.

In my research, I look into the speeches of President Aliyev and employ discourse analysis. For videos, I used officially published videos of the President's speeches in the regions and events. Although texts of speeches could be found in English on the Official website of the President of Azerbaijan Republic, I chose to use the original video format of the speeches for transparency purposes and cited the exact minutes and seconds of each video. By doing so I eliminated the probability of translation errors and misinterpretations.

For discourse analysis, I use Lene Hansen's "basic discourse" concept where a particular historical text corresponds to the core of the discourse. Simply "basic discourses" should speak to different policy options. Therefore, analyzing actors' policy options allows us

to understand why and how certain discourses are dominant over others.<sup>28</sup> I explain how this “basic discourse” concept works in the context of NK.

When the war was over in early November, Azerbaijan and Armenia signed a peace deal that Armenian forces will withdraw from certain adjacent regions in NK over the next few weeks (specific dates mentioned in the deal).<sup>29</sup> Six days later signing the peace deal, President Aliyev and the First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva visited Jabrayil and Fuzuli regions where he gave a speech.<sup>30</sup> A month later, on December 24<sup>th</sup>, they visited liberated Gubadli and Zangilan cities. Usually, in his visits, the President drives a militarily equipped car while he talks about the view of those cities. He describes the way the cities, historical and cultural sites are destroyed and emphasizes that the world needs to see this.

Moreover, he insults Armenians as savages that destroyed Azerbaijani lands, occupied and claimed that these are their own lands. In one episode he says: “Enough is enough. They need to go and live at their homes.”<sup>31</sup> When addressing the nation, he specifically touches upon the historical importance of the liberated lands, pays his regards to the fallen soldiers (usually names a few soldiers), and congratulates the nation for such a historical victory. In addition to his other points, the President does not hesitate to mention the war crimes committed by the Armenian forces and the illegal resettlement of Armenians in the region for decades.<sup>32</sup>

My main goal in analyzing his speeches after the war is to point at the continuing narrative of a separation between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Since the majority of the lands

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<sup>28</sup> Kevin C. Dunn, and Iver B. Neumann, 2016, “Undertaking Discourse Analysis for Social Research,” *ANN ARBOR*: University of Michigan Press, 1-16.

<sup>29</sup> BBC News, 2020, “Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia Sign Nagorno-Karabakh Peace Deal,” last modified November 10, 2020, accessed April 9, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54882564>.

<sup>30</sup> President.az, 2020, “Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva Visited Liberated from Occupation Fuzuli and Jabrayil Districts, as Well as Fuzuli and Jabrayil Cities,” Official website of President of Azerbaijan Republic – NEWS: Events, last modified November 16, 2020, accessed May 15, 2021, <https://en.president.az/articles/46840>.

<sup>31</sup> President.az, “Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva Visited Gubadli and Zangilan Districts,” Official website of President of Azerbaijan Republic – NEWS: Events, last modified December 23, 2020, accessed May 16, 2021, <https://en.president.az/articles/49394>, 12:00 – 12:11.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 18:54 – 19:06.

are liberated, – only Stepanakert remains under the control of the Armenian government – there is a serious possibility for Armenians and Azerbaijanis to live together in the future. Once the lands are cleared out of mines, reconstruction of cities is completed, IDPs will be returned to reside in those cities. This will be a fresh beginning for both nations to start living together. If the current narrative does not aim to reach the goal of sowing the seeds of peace and reconciliation for the future, then the idea of living together will produce anxiety in the nation. Especially, the notion of “peace anxiety” will rise due to the actor’s, in this case, President Aliyev’s, unchanging narrative for peace.<sup>33</sup>

This rigidity in being reluctant to change indicates that a peaceful future after almost three-decades-long conflict threatens the self-identity of Azerbaijan. In this regard, Roxana Gabriela Andrei argues that with a sudden change in the course of peace negotiations, actors find it difficult to change their narratives and self-images.<sup>34</sup> In the case of NK, analyzing President Aliyev’s speeches will be the most helpful because his narrative for peace with Armenians has not changed since the war began. In one of his speeches, he even mentions that signing the deal, liberating NK is the brightest victory in the history of Azerbaijan, and the nation owes this victory to the power of the “iron fist”.<sup>35</sup>

Conducting a discourse analysis will allow me to explore the Azerbaijani national identity in the post-war context. Specifically selecting the President’s speeches further enables me to demonstrate how his style of communication shapes the political narrative on NK and any future relations with Armenians. I believe the site of those speeches signifies critical importance for my research due to their historicity and political meaning. Aliyev’s statements in official visits become influential representations. The words he uses to address, describe and threaten Armenians are my key elements in this discourse analysis.

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<sup>33</sup> Roxana Gabriela Andrei, 2019, “Nagorno-Karabakh: Why Do Peace Processes Fail ‘From the Inside’?,” *Conflict Studies Quarterly*, no. 27 (April), 21–38.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>35</sup> President.az. “Gubadli and Zangilan,” 59:16 – 59:25

The following sections describe the historical background of the NK conflict and the development of the war in the 1990s, mediation efforts, and finally the eruption of the second war. In addition to the history of the conflict, I am analyzing the emotional legacy of the first war in the early 1990s, its impact on the second war in September-November 2020, and reasons why a victorious nation is angry in the postwar period.

### **a. Historical Background**

The dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) gave rise to tensions in the South Caucasus region in the 1990s. Even before the Soviet Union collapsed, ethnic Armenian residents of then the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) which was created in 1923 within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) started demanding the emancipation of the NKAO from Soviet Azerbaijan.<sup>36</sup> When Armenia and Azerbaijan both declared independence in 1991, the regional clashes over the territory became a full-scale war. The international community recognized their independence in early 1992, which acknowledged NK as part of Azerbaijan as the territory was within their border.

Since ethnic Armenians residing in NK wanted to assert themselves as an independent entity, they took the matter into their hands. When almost 100,000 ethnic Armenians in NK declared the independence of the NK Republic on September 2, 1991, they were fully aware of the fact that they had a claim to a territory of an independent Republic.<sup>37</sup> Hereby, Thomas de Waal writes that the internationalization of the conflict brought new parties to the negotiation table. Although Boris Yeltsin, then president of the Russian Federation, attempted brokering a peace agreement, the shooting of an Azerbaijani helicopter in 1991 by Armenian fighters caused anger in Azerbaijan and further exacerbated the situation.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The International Crisis Group, 2021, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Visual Explainer," last modified May 7, 2021, accessed May 19, 2021, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/content/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-visual-explainer>.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas de Waal, 2013, "Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War," *New York University Press*, 1-337.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 161-162.

The occupation of lands started in early 1992 and Armenians had already gained control of the majority of territories since Azerbaijanis fled by mid-1992.<sup>39</sup> Despite the irregularity of the conflict and improvisations, Armenians managed to expand their control further in 1993. Waal describes how Karabakh Armenians were armed: taking over the weapons from the Soviet regiments and seizing ammunition stores and armored vehicles of the police regiments. In contrast, the Azerbaijani forces were disorganized and outnumbered.<sup>40</sup> One of the worst events of the war during 1992-1993 was the Khojaly massacre on February 26, 1992. With the help of the Soviet 366<sup>th</sup> Motorized Infantry Regiment, armed Armenian forces murdered hundreds of Azerbaijani men, women, and children fleeing the city “across snow-covered mountain passes.”<sup>41</sup> In the first year of the occupation, Azerbaijanis did not expect that Armenians would expel them from their homes and make them suffer in cold forests and mountains.

If it was not for the Azerbaijan Television (AZTV) cameraman Chingiz Mustafayev, neither Azerbaijani officials and citizens nor the international community would be aware of this tragedy. Mustafayev visited the site of the massacre on the following days and shined a light on this tragedy by bringing it to the attention of the international media and community.<sup>42</sup> In his book, Waal introduced the Armenian military leader, Serzh Sargsyan’s account of this massacre: “... Before Khojaly, the Azerbaijanis thought that they were joking with us, they thought that the Armenians were people who could not raise their hand against the civilian population. We were able to break that [stereotype]. And that’s what happened...”<sup>43</sup> Sarkisian then became the President of Armenia in 2008 and reigned until 2018.

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<sup>39</sup> Patricia Carley, 1998, “A United States Institute of Peace Roundtable Report,” *United States Institute of Peace*. (25), Washington D.C. <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW25-Nagorno-Karabakh.PDF>.

<sup>40</sup> Waal, “Black Garden,” 167.

<sup>41</sup> Reuters, 1992, “Massacre by Armenians Being Reported,” *The New York Times*, last modified March 3, 1992, accessed May 19, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/03/world/massacre-by-armenians-being-reported.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Justice for Khojaly, 2021, “Chingiz Mustafayev,” accessed May 19, 2021, <https://justiceforkhojaly.org/content/chingiz-mustafayev-0>.

<sup>43</sup> Waal, “Black Garden,” 172.

Among the mediators, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has become one of the key players in this conflict since 1993 and formulated the Minsk Group consisting of co-chairs from the United States of America, France, and Russia.<sup>44</sup> Regardless of negotiations between the conflicting parties, Russia brokered a ceasefire between them in 1994 in Bishkek. The Bishkek Protocol, signed by both Armenia and Azerbaijan, left NK in Azerbaijan and because of this, peace was not achieved. The Protocol determined a “line of contact” which is highly militarized separated Armenian and Azerbaijani forces in the NK territory.<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, the OSCE Minsk Group proposed basic principles for a peaceful settlement of the NK conflict in 2007, established the Madrid Principles, and updated it in 2009 to encourage Serzh Sargsyan and Ilham Aliyev, respectively Armenian and Azerbaijani heads of states, to negotiate. The Madrid Principles called the return of territories surrounding NK to Azerbaijan and guarantee of international security for peacekeeping operation among other principles.<sup>46</sup> Despite the ceasefire protocol, Armenia and Azerbaijan came closer to having a war in a violent flare-up in April 2016. The four-day war resulted in at least 200 casualties which increased tensions, demonstrated the unwillingness of the state leaders to negotiate and the fragility of conflict resolution efforts. The stalemate in the NK conflict prevented the sides to resolve the status of adjacent territories, displaced IDPs, deployment of international peacekeepers, and the monitoring process.<sup>47</sup>

The last border clash between the two, before the second NK war, occurred in July 2020 as both sides accused each other of starting the fight. While the Armenian side shelled the

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<sup>44</sup> Carley, “Roundtable Report,” 3.

<sup>45</sup> Erin Blakemore, 2021, “How the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Has Been Shaped by Past Empires,” *National Geographic*, last modified May 4, 2021, accessed May 19, 2021, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/how-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-shaped-by-past-empires>.

<sup>46</sup> ANI Armenian Research Center, 2016, “Madrid Principles - Full Text,” *Aniarc*, last modified December 28, 2016, accessed May 18, 2021, <http://www.aniarc.am/2016/04/11/madrid-principles-full-text/>.

<sup>47</sup> The International Crisis Group, 2017, “Nagorno-Karabakh's Gathering War Clouds,” *Europe Report* 244, last modified August 11, 2017, accessed May 18, 2021, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/nagorno-karabakh-azerbaijan/244-nagorno-karabakhs-gathering-war-clouds>.

Tovuz district with mortars and howitzers, the Azerbaijani side threatened to strike Armenia's nuclear power plant Metsamor.<sup>48</sup> After almost two months, the sides started a full-on war that lasted for nearly six weeks and ended with a Russian-brokered deal in November 2020. After 26 years of deadlock, unresolved issues, and unsettled frozen conflict, the war became a determinant factor in the history of the NK conflict. The deal included clauses that Madrid Principles could not achieve in 13 years: Azerbaijan gained control of strategically and historically important towns and some adjacent territories and Russia established a peacekeeping mission in NK which remains outside Azerbaijan's control.<sup>49</sup> Regardless of the success of this ceasefire, the future governance of the NK, specifically the portion where ethnic Armenians are still residing and it's outside of Azerbaijan's control, is under question among other concerns such as the coexistence of Armenians and Azerbaijanis, reconciliation, peacebuilding processes, and regional partnership in political, economic and socio-cultural matters.

## **b. Emotional Legacy of The NK Conflict**

The emotions that built up during this decades-long conflict stem from the historical events that occurred during the first war. Waal (2005) writes in 'The Nagorny Karabakh Conflict: origins, dynamics and misperceptions' article that national narratives generated fears and insecurities in Armenians and Azerbaijanis.<sup>50</sup> Their shared history contains enough massacres, pogroms, violence against each other, and losses. While each suffered enough throughout clashes, the emotional legacy of the NK conflict needs to be remembered for

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<sup>48</sup> Paul Stronski, 2020, "Behind the Flare-Up Along Armenia-Azerbaijan Border," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, July 22, 2020, accessed May 18, 2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/07/22/behind-flare-up-along-armenia-azerbaijan-border-pub-82345>.

<sup>49</sup> The International Crisis Group, 2021, "Improving Prospects for Peace after the Nagorno-Karabakh War," last modified January 11, 2021, accessed May 16, 2021, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/nagorno-karabakh-conflict/b91-improving-prospects-peace-after-nagorno-karabakh-war>.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas De Waal and Laurence Broers (ed), 2005, "The limits of leadership Elites and societies in the Nagorny Karabakh peace process," *Conciliation Resources Accord* (17), London, accessed May 18, 2021, [https://rc-services-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/The limits of leadership Elites and societies in the Nagorny Karabakh peace process Accord Issue 17.pdf](https://rc-services-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/The%20limits%20of%20leadership%20Elites%20and%20societies%20in%20the%20Nagorny%20Karabakh%20peace%20process%20Accord%20Issue%2017.pdf)



comprehending the next sections of this chapter. The conflict became violent when the pogroms took place in February 1988 in Sumgait, an industrial city in Azerbaijan. Waal (2005) describes the emotional setting of that period as “a depressed and polluted town with a mixed ethnic community”, “confused or silent” town leadership, “silence” from Moscow authorities, and “a series of angry demonstrations” after the killing of two Azerbaijanis in Karabakh.<sup>51</sup>

Throughout Armenia’s step-by-step occupation of the NK region and surrounding adjacent territories, the residents of towns and villages have been forced to leave their homes, they have fought and died to protect their lands. Chingiz Mustafayev captured the emotional load of this conflict when he filmed the victims of the Khojaly massacre. That video shooting airs on national TV channels every year to commemorate the victims of the Khojaly massacre. Despite the graphic content of the video, children, teenagers, and adults have been exposed to violent content. This media coverage generates powerful emotions such as hate, anger, revenge, sadness, and resentment.

The border escalations, that occurred until the second NK war, generated strong reactions and sentiments that triggered people to demand action from the government. For example, the nationalist spirit was high during the April clashes of 2016. The International Crisis Group reported that while seven percent of all soldiers and civilians have been killed or wounded in border clashes between 2016 and 2018, this number doubled in the next two years to 2020.<sup>52</sup> The emotional toll of this conflict has been mounting for almost three decades given the suffering and misery of the Azerbaijanis.

During the second war, I observed mixed emotions because people were celebrating every single victory and grieving for the fallen or wounded soldiers and civilians. The Azerbaijani

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<sup>51</sup> Waal, “Black Garden,” 15.

<sup>52</sup> The International Crisis Group, 2020, “Preventing a Bloody Harvest on the Armenia-Azerbaijan State Border,” *Europe Report* 259, July 24, 2020, accessed May 18, 2021, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/nagorno-karabakh-conflict/259-preventing-bloody-harvest-armenia-azerbaijan-state-border>.

government shaped the political and social narratives in a way that it also cultivated strong emotions throughout and in the aftermath of the war. The speeches of President Aliyev especially used very powerful emotional language that spoke to the core of the Azerbaijani identity. This war was about to end the emotional attachment of Azerbaijanis to the NK conflict. Consequently, all the misery and suffering had to end, bring joy along with the ‘liberated’ territories, and satisfy people’s years-long demands for the lost territories. Nevertheless, victorious Azerbaijanis are not fully content with the results of the war; in fact, they experience peace anxiety now.<sup>53</sup> Revisiting Rumelili’s work, despite the territorial gains, the physical and ontological security of Azerbaijani identity feels threatened more due to the possibility of coexistence.<sup>54</sup> The emotions that make up the peace anxiety are complex; hence, joy and fear emotions can easily transform into anger in this case.

### **c. Angry and Victorious**

During the 44-day long military operations in NK, Azerbaijan did not yield and kept moving forward. Every time a new city or several villages were liberated, the president tweeted and informed the nation. Being in the country during the war allowed me to observe the situation in my neighborhood. After such tweets, people would fire fireworks, play songs and sing in their balconies, and sometimes chant “Karabakh is Azerbaijan” which became a national motto during the war. This was also thought to be in response to Nikol Pashinyan’s declaration of “Artsakh is Armenia” in 2019 during his visit to Artsakh/Nagorno Karabakh.<sup>55</sup> Observation of this social setting shows that winning this war is crucially important for everyone because the nationalistic spirit was high, and people expected a victory at the end.

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<sup>53</sup> As observed with family and friends while living in Baku during the NK war

<sup>54</sup> Rumelili, “Conflict Resolution”.

<sup>55</sup> Carlotta Gall, and Anton Troianovski, 2020, “After Nagorno-Karabakh War, Trauma, Tragedy and Devastation,” *NYTimes*, last modified December 11, 2020, accessed May 17, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/11/world/europe/nagorno-karabakh-armenia-azerbaijan.html>.

When Azerbaijanis claimed victory, the capital city Baku chanted war spirited songs and Azerbaijani flags were being waved everywhere. However, not everyone shared this happiness and was dissatisfied with the results of the war. There were certain groups of people who were not content with the war and its outcomes. They were angry either at the government for declaring war, or Armenians for invading NK and making them fight for it now. I categorized these groups of people roughly into 4 groups. The first group is the families of the direct victims of the war. Soldiers were not the only victims as civilians of the missile-attacked cities were impacted as well. They are rightfully angry because their loved ones have died for the lands regardless of their origin or the current status of life.

The second group is IDPs who enjoyed certain benefits and privileges. The cause of their anger comes from the possibility of losing IDP status, returning to liberated lands where they once had homes and having to start their lives from scratch (losing their current jobs and social benefits). The third group is people who called themselves “No-Warist”.<sup>56</sup> In the initial days of the war, these people protested against the government and demanded to stop the war and achieve peace through dialogues. Their reasoning is humanitarian-based that the cost of this war is the loss of human lives. The fourth and final group is the people, especially the soldiers, who started experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after the war. The PTSD cases started appearing when several soldiers took their lives.<sup>57</sup>

Those 44 days became a painful memory because the constant feeling of fear left people miserable. According to the report provided by the International Committee of The Red Cross (ICRC), destroyed homes, schools, and hospitals, missing or detained family members, and adjusting to a new way of life during the war left psychological and physical damage on

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<sup>56</sup> Bahruz Samadov, 2020, “Perspectives: Azerbaijan's Peace Activists Face Harassment, and a Reckoning,” *Eurasianet*, last modified November 20, 2020, accessed May 20, 2021, <https://eurasianet.org/perspectives-azerbaijans-peace-activists-face-harassment-and-a-reckoning>.

<sup>57</sup> Habib Muntazir, *Twitter*, last modified February 22, 2021, 4:05 PM. <https://twitter.com/muntezir/status/1363867440443232264>

people.<sup>58</sup> The intensity of fighting and unexpected attacks made people live in basements. Although winning the war was the key objective, ending the violence was another goal to stop the threat and provide security for the victims from both sides.

From the perspective of Azerbaijanis, the results of this war would determine the future of NK. Since the Azerbaijani side intended to end the occupation of twenty percent of the country which covers NK and seven surrounding regions, the key actors behind this war were well aware of two interrelated factors. First, Russia, as a major regional player and mediator, will initiate a humanitarian ceasefire or bring Armenia and Azerbaijan to the negotiation table to end the war. Second, if Russia intervenes, then the discussion of coexistence will arise.

The big image here is that once Azerbaijanis and Armenians start living together, they will communicate and interact with each other. This lingering anger will pave its way to a partnership and peaceful coexistence in NK. Nevertheless, in this instance, anger leads to anxiety, more specifically to “peace anxiety”. The Azerbaijani identity that was attached to the NK conflict is exposed to change. The idea of partnership with the “former” enemy threatens this so long perceived self-identity. Consequently, the Azerbaijani identity faces two options: embrace a new identity or reinstall previous narratives. While Azerbaijanis do not wish to fight with Armenians, they also discourage them from daydreaming about Karabakh from now on.<sup>59</sup> At first, it seems Azerbaijanis are happy that the war is over as they are reunited with their lost territories and even ready to live together with Armenians. However, in reality, this lingering anger takes a new form in the face of neglect and damage done to infrastructure in the NK region. The formulation of this anger is also due to President Aliyev’s political narrative on cultivating disgust and anger in Azerbaijanis against Armenia to show that Azerbaijan has liberated its lands from the vandals.

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<sup>58</sup> International Committee of The Red Cross, 2021, “Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: The Price Being Paid,” last modified February 12, 2021, accessed May 17, 2021, <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-price-being-paid>.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 3. CASE STUDY OF THE SECOND NK WAR

This chapter introduces a discourse analysis of President Aliyev's speeches from mid-November to mid-May on his visits to liberated territories, military parade, the opening ceremony of the Military Trophies Park, and the recent Khari Bulbul Music Festival in Shusha city. Exploring this primary source will allow me to answer my research question *'How does the peace deal challenge the old routines?* Further, I will elaborate on the impact of this new identity on the future relationship of Azerbaijanis and Armenians.

Before, the Azerbaijani identity felt secure in the routinized enmity relationship with Armenians. Now, it feels insecure due to the sudden change of circumstances. While the existence of the Azerbaijani identity has been built on the idea of NK conflict, the change of reality makes the President resist the new reality. In his speeches, President Aliyev defends the anachronistic reality and continues building a narrative of belittling the enemy by using phrases such as 'dogs' or 'chasing them like dogs'. This narrative furthers the feeling of "peace anxiety" among Azerbaijani since the context and meaning of those speeches increase the chance of being attached to old routines rather than adopting new ones. Since the President was the only prominent and popular figure during the war because of nationalist spirited speeches, I chose to analyze his speeches and grouped them into three categories based on their relevance to the discussed matter. First, he gave speeches in Aghdam, Fuzuli, Jabrayil, Gubadli, and Zangilan, liberated cities between November and April. Second, he spoke in the Military Parade held in December and at the opening ceremony of Military Trophies Park in April. Third, he spoke during his visits to Shusha city in January and March, and at the opening ceremony of the Kharibulbul Music Festival in May.

### a. Visits To Aghdam, Fuzuli, Jabrayil, Gubadli, And Zangilan

When President Aliyev paid visits to liberated cities, he always gave speeches in front of soldiers who participated in military operations in those cities. Analyzing his speeches

demonstrates that he touches upon key overarching themes – insulting Armenians, destruction of the infrastructure, future aspects of reconstructions, Azerbaijan’s military advantage, and economic power – in addition to specific details. His first visit was six days after the Capitulation Act was signed to Fuzuli and Jabrayil on November 16, 2020. He proudly talks about the bravery, heroism, and professionalism of the Azerbaijani army in this specific operation. He does not hesitate to brag about how the Azerbaijani soldiers destroyed the myth about Azerbaijani troops’ incapability of fighting on a battlefield that was created by the Armenian authorities after losing territories in the 1990s.<sup>60</sup> By bolstering this key point, he claims that Azerbaijan taught a lesson to the Armenian criminals.

Furthermore, he ridicules the military power of Armenia by calling Armenians derogatory phrases such as ‘barbarians’, ‘vandals’, and ‘wild tribes’, because they have demolished the historical and cultural monuments in these cities.<sup>61</sup> As he talks about the Armenian vandalism such as arson, cutting trees before leaving towns and villages, cutting off the electricity lines, and looted buildings, his speech aims to show the negative characteristics of the enemy.<sup>62</sup> He says the damage done by Armenians to the main infrastructure such as houses, schools, and hospitals is calculated, and reconstruction works are going to start.<sup>63</sup> By reminding Azerbaijanis of the Armenian vandalism he aims to lift nationalist spirits which embodied the core of Azerbaijani identity during the war. Although nationalism helps to contain anxiety,<sup>64</sup> it unleashed “peace anxiety” in the case of NK because of hesitations to coexist in the future.

Especially, his use of hands, uneasiness and wagging a finger and specifically waving his fist in the air (referring to the “iron fist” expression) shows the sentimentality of his

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<sup>60</sup> President.az, “Fuzuli and Jabrayil,” 14:44 – 14:49.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 9:51-10:00.

<sup>62</sup> Rumelili, “Ontological Security”.

<sup>63</sup> President.az, “Fuzuli and Jabrayil,” 40:12-40:16.

<sup>64</sup> Rumelili, “Ontological Security,” 15.

speech.<sup>65</sup> By doing so, he can generate certain emotions such as disgust, hate, anger, and grief in the audience. Especially, when talking about how Armenia was forced to sign the capitulation act because they could not resist the Azerbaijani army, happiness and pride can be sensed from his tone. Before he finishes the speech, he honors the fallen soldiers, martyrs, and calls the nation not to forget this occupation. Once again touching upon the sentimental notions he aims to cultivate emotions that affect how Azerbaijanis will comprehend Armenians in the future. Steele argues that when the honor is recognized and praised, it gains meaning in the formulation of identity.<sup>66</sup>

The President's first-ever speech from liberated territories signals that he does not want Azerbaijanis to forget the suffering and misery they went through over the years. By disowning Pashinyan, he disrespects the enemy and signifies that military solution was the only option since the political solution of the conflict was nonexistent. In his next visits, we can see almost the same overarching themes of disrespecting the enemy, calling Armenians by names, talking about the heroism of the Azerbaijani army, destruction of cities, and the power of Azerbaijan in current years. For example, he addresses the four United Nations Security Council Resolutions in which the international community did not refer to Armenians as 'occupant forces' but rather as 'Armenian troops'.<sup>67</sup>

Creating a legal basis for the resolution of this conflict was crucial; therefore, President Aliyev remarks about how he worked hard to inform the international community about this injustice and misinformation. He angrily talks about how the Armenian lobby deprived Azerbaijan of humanitarian aid from the United States.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, he claims the country's

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<sup>65</sup> President.az, "Fuzuli and Jabrayil," 14:47 – 15:01.

<sup>66</sup> Steele, "Ontological Security," 39-40.

<sup>67</sup> President.az, 2020, "Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva Visited Liberated from Occupation Aghdam City," Official website of President of Azerbaijan Republic – NEWS: Events, last modified November 23, 2020, accessed May 19, 2021, <https://en.president.az/articles/47685>. 5:01 – 5:12.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 6:12 – 6:22.

victory in the information warfare that Azerbaijan managed to inform the world community about the campaign for ‘Justice for Khojaly’.<sup>69</sup>

To further generate disgust in Azerbaijanis, he does not hesitate to question Armenian heroism and refers to Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan, the second and the third president of Armenia, as ‘rats’.<sup>70</sup> Aliyev understands that by disrespecting and disowning Armenian leaders, he can further increase his popularity by claiming victory over a weak enemy. Creating stereotypical enemy images allows him to contribute to the intensification of the situation after the war. Despite the victory in the conflict, Aliyev manages to generate anxiety by specifically mentioning the destruction of historical and cultural sites and drawing attention to the multiculturalism and tolerance of Azerbaijan when it comes to sharing a safe space with various religions and cultures. For example, he emphasizes the hypocrisy and silence of international organizations on cultural heritage. He exclaims,

Now some are raising the issue of the religious heritage of the Armenian people in the liberated lands. So why has no one raised the issue of our national and religious heritage? ... We have repeatedly appealed to UNESCO for 30 years, we have repeatedly stated that our mosques have been destroyed, our historical monuments have been destroyed, our historical monuments have been Armenianized, has a mission been sent once? ... As soon as the war ended, they started to protect the monuments of the Armenian people. ... we protect the monuments of all nations... But look, see, there is a mosque here, UNESCO, come here, come see. Council of Europe, do not remain silent...!<sup>71</sup>

By publicly shaming the international community, Aliyev emphasizes how renowned international organizations shut their eyes to the realities of Azerbaijan in the occupied territories. Throughout his speeches, he continuously repeats the old narratives that do not correspond to the new reality of the conflict.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 7:00 – 7:10.

<sup>70</sup> President.az, “Aghdam City,” 22:43 – 23:47.

<sup>71</sup> President.az, 2020, “Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva Visited Gubadli and Zangilan Districts,” Official website of President of Azerbaijan Republic – NEWS: Events, last modified December 23, 2020, accessed May 20, 2021, <https://en.president.az/articles/49394>, 1:05:48 – 1:07:10.



The double standards of powerful countries cause anger and feelings of injustice to Azerbaijanis. That's why in his visit to Gubadli and Zangilan, the President brings examples of pro-Armenian states such as Belgium, the Netherlands, and France that their parliaments adopted laws and policies against the interests of Azerbaijan in this conflict.<sup>72</sup> Expressing the injustice Azerbaijan has faced for decades empowers his voice and affects Azerbaijanis' view of Armenians in the post-war period. By reminding the failure of recognition of injustices done to Azerbaijanis, he triggers strong sentiments in people and triggers anger.<sup>73</sup> He subtly announces his future political narrative of a separation between these nations, although he claims that Armenians residing in the Azerbaijani territories will be treated as citizens of Azerbaijan.<sup>74</sup> Since the emotions are both facilitators and blockers of the socialization process,<sup>75</sup> Aliyev's use of strong emotions allows him to continue this separatist narrative.

#### **b. Military Parade, Trophies, Dehumanization...**

Aliyev's speech on the military parade that was dedicated to the victory in the second NK war was significant in many ways. First of all, he condemns the Armenian occupation of the historical Azerbaijani territories and shows his gratitude to Turkey, more specifically, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, for his unconditional support during the war. This particular moment illustrates that Azerbaijani identity is connected to Turkish identity because of their brotherly relations. The friendship of Presidents Aliyev and Erdogan plays a significant role in this association. Moreover, the military support of Erdogan during the war increased the popularity of Turkey among many Azerbaijanis. For example, people were hanging Turkish flags along with Azerbaijani flags. Based on this political narrative, Azerbaijani identity

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 17:03 – 17:17.

<sup>73</sup> Heller, "More Rigor."

<sup>74</sup> President.az, "Fuzuli and Jabrayil Cities," 17:31 – 17:39.

<sup>75</sup> Ross, "Mixed Emotions," 40.

naturally feels more attached and related to the Turkish one because of the cultural and national closeness.<sup>76</sup>

Moreover, the President highlights the increase of nationalist spirit in the country during the war.<sup>77</sup> NK is an inseparable part of Azerbaijan; therefore, Aliyev targets illegal activities and criminal acts committed by Armenians in the NK region. He claims the “settlement of Armenians brought from abroad in our historical lands is a war crime, contrary to international conventions.”<sup>78</sup> The central point of this statement is that even though Armenians invaded those territories, they did not have enough inhabitants to settle. Thus, they had to prove to the world that occupation of those lands was legitimate because ethnic Armenians needed a place to live in NK. Another key factor that determines the goal of this statement is in his perspective of their true nature. Hence, Azerbaijanis will know who their true enemies are. Instead of cultivating peaceful relations between Armenians and Azerbaijanis and generating a positive perspective for future neighborly relations, Aliyev’s speeches generate negative sentiments towards the other which inspire the Azerbaijani identity to sustain its pre-war routines in relation to the Armenian identity.<sup>79</sup> We can see this narrative in his speech given at the opening ceremony of the Military Trophies Park.

President participated in the opening ceremony of the Military Trophy Park in Baku in April 2021 where helmets of the fallen Armenian soldiers and mannequins of servicemen are displayed.<sup>80</sup> Thus, Azerbaijani identity is still built on the premises of the dehumanization of Armenians. The president’s continuing narrative of separation of Armenians and Azerbaijanis further sows the seeds of animosity and leaves no space for any reconciliation or peaceful

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<sup>76</sup> Steele, “Ontological Security.”

<sup>77</sup> President.az, 2020, “Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the Victory Parade Dedicated to Victory in the Patriotic War,” Official website of President of Azerbaijan Republic – NEWS: Speeches, last modified December 10, 2020, accessed May 20, 2021, <https://en.president.az/articles/48793>, 14:27 – 14:37.

<sup>78</sup> President.az, “Patriotic War,” 8:50 – 9:00.

<sup>79</sup> Ross, “Mixed Emotions,” 47.

<sup>80</sup> Bahruz Samadov, 2021, “Perspectives: Azerbaijan's Authoritarianism and Baku's ‘Military Trophies Park,’” *Eurasianet*, last modified April 16, 2021, accessed May 17, 2021, <https://eurasianet.org/perspectives-azerbaijans-authoritarianism-and-bakus-military-trophies-park>.

relations between the two. Moreover, the presentation of destroyed military equipment and taken as trophy appliances demonstrates that if once Azerbaijan's military power was outnumbered, today it exceeds the enemy's power and can demolish it. This show of trophies also demonstrates that justice finally prevailed, and Azerbaijan got the revenge of innocent people who died in Khojaly and the soldiers who fell in the first and second NK war.

In contrast to his previous speeches, Aliyev acknowledges the energy independence of the country vis-à-vis economic stability and development for the first time. Azerbaijan is an oil and gas exporter country; hence, Azerbaijan purchased and advanced its military equipment due to its wealth gained from oil and gas pipelines. Thus, economic stability is a must to win a war. In his speech, President Aliyev admits that he wanted to bring down Armenia economically and he achieved it as he refers to excluding Armenia from any regional energy projects and depriving of regional economic benefits.<sup>81</sup> By bolstering Azerbaijan's economic power, President indicates that restoring the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan was the completion of the existence of Azerbaijani identity since NK constituted the core of this identity.

### **c. Cultural Capital of Azerbaijan**

Shusha is a historically and culturally significant city for Azerbaijanis. The first time Aliyev paid a visit to the city, he met the military personnel in January 2021. Similar to his speeches in other cities, he praised the bravery of soldiers; however, this time he was prouder. Liberating Shusha was not easy since it is located on steep rocks and historically it was considered as an undefeatable castle. Thus, its occupation was more painful for the nation. While speaking, Aliyev gets more emotional when he refers to Armenians as 'disgusting',

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<sup>81</sup> President.az, 2021, "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the Opening of Military Trophy Park in Baku," Official website of President of Azerbaijan Republic – NEWS: Speeches, last modified April 12, 2021, accessed May 20, 2021, <https://en.president.az/articles/51083>, 28:38 – 28:47.

‘arrogant’, and ‘rats’.<sup>82</sup> Once again he stereotypes the image of the enemy and cultivates “peace anxiety” in Azerbaijanis to refrain from getting attached to new routines and reformulating their identities.<sup>83</sup>

The Kharibulbul Music Festival used to be held in Shusha before the occupation, for which Aliyev highlighted its cultural significance in the opening ceremony on May 12, 2021. Since this event was dedicated to the martyrs who fell in the second NK war, he delivered a speech that mainly addressed the heroism and bravery of Azerbaijanis. Repeating the ‘capitulation act’ numerous times in his speech explains that Azerbaijanis should be proud because the dream of ‘liberating Shusha’ is real. The national dignity of Azerbaijanis is protected, and justice is restored.<sup>84</sup> A specific mention of the national dignity and pride shows that winning in this war was a matter of honor for Azerbaijanis.<sup>85</sup> Aliyev’s plans for Shusha signifies that by reconstructing the city, rebuilding mosques and historical sites he wants to bring Azerbaijanis back to their cultural, religious, and national roots.<sup>86</sup>

The political speeches of President Aliyev throughout his visits to cities and presence in events show that despite his peaceful intentions, he continues his separatist narrative by constantly revisiting enemy images, honoring the martyrs, and assuring Azerbaijanis about the reconstruction of destroyed cultural and historical sites by Armenians. Whether he does this consciously and unconsciously, his speeches show that the current Azerbaijani regime is not ready to face the new phase of the conflict and still desires to fight Armenians. The existence of the Armenian minority in NK forecasts that when the Azerbaijani IDPs return their homes, they will share this space. To peacefully coexist with Armenians, Azerbaijan needs to

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<sup>82</sup> President.az, 2021, “Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the Meeting with the Servicemen in Shusha,” Official website of President of Azerbaijan Republic – NEWS: Speeches, last modified January 15, 2021, accessed May 20, 2021, <https://en.president.az/articles/50226>, 4:59 – 5:10.

<sup>83</sup> Rumelili, “Ontological Security,” 19.

<sup>84</sup> President.az, 2021, “Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the Opening of ‘Kharibulbul’ Festival in Shusha,” Official website of President of Azerbaijan Republic – NEWS: Speeches, last modified May 12, 2021, accessed May 21, 2021, <https://en.president.az/articles/51466>, 10:55 – 11:02.

<sup>85</sup> Steele, “Ontological Security”.

<sup>86</sup> President.az, “Kharibulbul festival in Shusha,” 10:40 – 10:49.

deconstruct the enmity relationship between them, but the regime is not ready for this. The separation between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in official public speeches compromises the possibility of such coexistence. He constantly emphasizes the victory in the war, but in fact, he does not want peace. Instead, the President further generates anger by returning to the dark sides of history, repeating negative characteristics about Armenians, and promising a brighter future for NK without fully acknowledging peace with Armenians in his belligerent speeches. Since triggering anger emotions in individuals through emotional language can disrupt the social order,<sup>87</sup> these speeches cause stimulation of anxiety that slows down the formulation of the new identity process and disturbs any peace initiatives.

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<sup>87</sup> Lindebaum and Gabriel, “Anger.”

## CONCLUSION

Self and anxiety are at the core of ontological security.<sup>88</sup> When the actors do not feel their actions are stable and continuous in time, they feel insecure. Although there is no perfect form of ontological security because humans will always find themselves in a state of anxiety, this emotion plays a significant role in understanding who we are. Eventually, anxiety can become anger in extreme circumstances; for example, when humans feel that their physical and ontological securities are in danger. This research project aimed to analyze how the Azerbaijani identity is being shaped in the aftermath of the second NK war. I addressed the “How the peace deal affects the formulation of the new identity of Azerbaijanis?” research question by analyzing President Aliyev’s speeches on the narrative of separatism between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. The discourse analysis of those speeches also allowed me to reflect on the reason why a winner of a war remains angry after defeating the other party in an international conflict.

This research aimed to contribute to the ontological security studies and emotional discourse analysis in international relations. Specifically, how emotions shape rigid identities in peacetime.<sup>89</sup> The case of the second NK war helps to understand the ontological insecurity and anger and anxiety after the peace deal was signed. In this case study, ontological security cannot be separated from physical security because one affects the other. Since the peace deal ended the war and presented an opportunity for Azerbaijanis and Armenians, the possibility of coexisting presents several challenges to the Azerbaijani identity. These challenges stem from previous experiences and stereotypes that Armenians are unreliable, liars, traitors, and greedy. For almost three decades, both sides of the conflict lived with such descriptions of the other, which now constitutes the core of their beings.

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<sup>88</sup> Kinnvall and Mitzen, “Anxiety.”

<sup>89</sup> Ross, “Mixed Emotions.”

Relying on past experiences, the future raises doubt about whether the “enemy” can be trusted and befriended. Such reservations generate anxiety and feeling of anger because the self does not want to risk its security. Henceforth, ontological (in)security helps explaining that the Azerbaijani identity’s feeling of anger is valid due to given historical background and lived experiences. Therefore, the existence of anger and the constant feeling of being threatened do not allow the Azerbaijani identity to move on and reconcile the relationship with the Armenian identity.

By being present in Baku, Azerbaijan I observed the situation firsthand and analyzed how likely Azerbaijanis favored coexisting with Armenians after the peace deal. Since I could not conduct interviews for ethical reasons, I had to do a discourse analysis of the President’s speeches within a certain time framework. To eliminate such a limitation for future research, one needs to consider studying anxiety experienced by the different strata of the society that are affected by the war such as IDPs, direct victims, soldiers, and civilians with PTSD cases. In this project, I have focused on the “peace anxiety” demonstrated by Aliyev in his speeches, however, this situation triggers different anxieties in other actors in the Azerbaijani society. Therefore, field-based research coupled with interviewing and observing those actors is needed. Another limitation of this research is the analysis of only the Azerbaijani identity’s ontological (in)security. That’s why it is important to analyze how the peace deal challenged the Armenian identity. This war was emotionally exhaustive not only for Azerbaijanis but also for Armenians. The research of emotions other than anger, such as grief, trauma, fear, hate, and resentment in the context of the NK conflict will be a valuable contribution to the literature on emotions. Interlinking it to ontological security will further expand the scope of the research on international conflicts, peace and security, and identity politics.

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