

# WAR, UNCERTAINTY OF THE FUTURE AND PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE



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# METHODOLOGY

The research reveals the perceptions of persons displaced due to the second Karabakh war on the concepts of war and peace, peaceful coexistence in the region, their future and the future of Karabakh.<sup>1</sup>

The study is an attempt to understand:

1. The relationship between war and socioeconomic context.
2. Retrospective reflections on the causes and expectations of war.
3. Perceptions of the future and the possibility of peaceful coexistence in the region.

Regarding the research questions as guidelines, we conducted 70 in-depth interviews with residents of Hadrut, Shushi, Kelbajar and Lachin regions, who were displaced as a result of the war and settled in three provinces of Armenia (Kotayk, Ararat, Syunik) and Yerevan. The interviews were conducted in October-December 2021.

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1. Toponyms are the subject of political controversy in the context of the Karabakh conflict (Sotieva, 2021). Moreover, in aggravated war and post-war situations, states and more nationalist segments of society politicize the choice of place name even further, sometimes making it another tool for public shaming, moral pressure and allegations of insufficient patriotism. Prior to the conflict, some towns and villages in Karabakh were known by both Armenian and Azeri names (such as the village of Karintak / Dashalti (Broers, 2019)), while after the First Karabakh War, the conflicting parties developed mutually exclusive place names and used the media to introduce them into public discourse. Just like in our previous research titled "A Retrospective: Voices on War and Peace", we use the name "Karabakh" here. According to the impression we have got from our research and observations, it is the most common form among the society, although in recent years and especially after the war in 2020, the use of "Artsakh" has become widespread. We preferred the toponyms Kelbajar and Lachin, although the Shahumyan and Kashatagh forms are also used. Nevertheless, when quoting directly from the interviews, we remained faithful to the forms used by the interviewees (*Arpy Manusyan-Ed.*).

# TABLE 1: Sampling<sup>2</sup>

	Hadrut		Shushi		Kelbajar		Lachin		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
<b>Ararat</b>										
14-18									0	0
19-35	1	1						1	1	2
36-50	1						1	1	2	1
51 and older	1			1	1	1	2		4	2
<b>Yerevan</b>										
14-18	1	2							1	2
19-35	2	2	1	1		1	2	1	5	5
36-50	3	3	2	1			1	1	6	5
51 and older	2	2	1	1	1	1			4	4
<b>Syunik</b>										
14-18							2		2	0
19-35		1					2	2	2	3
36-50	1						1	2	2	2
51 and older							1	2	1	2
<b>Kotayk</b>										
14-18						1			0	1
19-35	1	1	1	1				1	2	3
36-50		1			1	1	1		2	2
51 and older	1							1	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>

Although this analysis does not theorize people's perceptions, it seeks to localize and frame them in broader sociopolitical contexts.

From this point of view, we position our work within public sociology, perceiving the latter as a crucial scope to formulate, study and communi-

2. The sampling was done on the basis of the statistics received from the relevant state agencies according to the regional, gender and age distribution criteria. During the war, 98,000 Karabakh Armenians moved to Armenia, of which about 38,000 - displaced persons. According to official sources, as of December 2021, more than 117,455 people lived in Karabakh. Official data shows that more than 20,000 displaced persons continue to live in Armenia. Source: *2021 Report on the Implementation Process and Results of the 2021-2026 Program of the Government of the Republic of Armenia*.

cate to the public the most important social issues, a scope that expands the scientific boundaries of sociology and stimulates public debate on those issues.

Sociological studies on public interest and from the viewpoint of public interest subordinated to wars, social injustices, power and large capital are much needed today, and public sociology is an opportunity to formulate, reflect on and discuss sensitive and complex sociopolitical issues.

The research idea, the design, the formulation of concepts and research questions, as well as data analysis have inevitably been influenced by our research perspectives, as well as political and ideological views and approaches. As researchers, we realize that although the issues we have formulated are of public and political urgency and importance, they first and foremost stem from our research interests. This circumstance required extra effort for self-reflection and open-mindedness to delve into people's experiences and attitudes in order to properly identify them. Moreover, people's attitudes and perceptions on the research questions can be influenced both by a specific period and by transformations and crises taking place in the country, the region and the broader geopolitical context. In this regard, against the backdrop of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the expansion of imperialist policies and discourse, the increased militarization and the crisis of the liberal world order, as well as instability in the region, it is a major research challenge to conduct comprehensive analyses that would encompass rapid developments and transformations.

This study is the logical continuation of the research study "A retrospective: Voices on war and peace" published in 2021.<sup>3</sup>

Taking into account the sensitivity of the displaced persons about the research topic and the war trauma, we received a written consent from the research participants for all the interviews and video recordings.

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**3.** The research was conducted in 2018-2019 in the border and non-border communities of Armenia, as well as in Karabakh and brings to light the issues of the relationship between war, peace and human rights and their perception in the pre-war context.

When quoting from the interviews, we have tried to avoid interfering in the language used and editing to the extent possible.

The research consists of 3 sections and a summary:

| **The social face of war**

| **The [un]expected war**

| **Fragmentary perceptions of the future and peaceful coexistence**

| **Summary**





# THE SOCIAL FACE OF WAR

The escalation in April 2016 accentuated the link between war and social injustice, social insecurity and poverty in both Armenia and Azerbaijan. According to a study by HCAV, only 17 of the families of 61 Armenian servicemen killed during the 2016 clashes had a permanent financial income based on the salary of 1 employee: 12 in institutions funded from the state budget, 5 in the private sector, which, however, is not enough to meet the financial needs of the family. Fourteen families did not have an employed family member at all, including 6 families whose source of income were old age or disability pensions, and one family whose only source of income was a family allowance. The other 30 families survived on migrant work and non-permanent jobs.<sup>4</sup>

*"We call them heroes in Armenia. They call them martyrs in Azerbaijan. One lived in a stone house with an earthen floor and no roof, the other lived in a mud hut with a dirty floor and a tarpaulin roof."<sup>5</sup> Most of the soldiers killed in Armenia and Azerbaijan as a result of the escalation in 2016 had one thing in common. They were from socially vulnerable families. Protests started in Azerbaijan after the second Karabakh war. Those who fought in the war were asking the authorities why the sons of poor families serve in the army, while the children of the rich avoid military service in one way or another.*

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4. Sadikyan, A. (2016). *On the circumstances of the death of servicemen killed during the hostilities in April 2016 and the social security situation of their families*. HCAV. Retrieved from [shorturl.at/npMU0](http://shorturl.at/npMU0):

5. Grigoryan, M., Alibayli, V. (2016, May 11). *The Poor are the First to Fight in Nagorno Karabakh*. Retrieved from <https://eurasianet.org/poor-are-first-fight-nagorno-karabakh>.

Agharagim Ismayilov, 24, who was wounded in the Ghubatlu region during the recent war, told RFE/RL that most of those who went to war were from socially vulnerable families. *“Why were we wounded and none of them went to war? We are the ones to have suffered, the fatalities and veterans are from our ranks, none of them is there.”*<sup>6</sup>

However, it is not enough to say that mainly vulnerable segments of society fight in wars. Wars also tend to impoverish people. In the first place, wars impoverish the inhabitants of the war zone, the vulnerable and defenseless groups and the society in general. Both in the short and long term, people who have lost their livelihoods and houses as a result of the war find themselves in socioeconomic [reproducible] dependence on the state, various charities, entrepreneurs.

*“... We are used to considering poverty as a very material thing, and even talks that poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon end with discussions about the availability of services, be it education, health or other services. No less important is a person’s vulnerability to possible risks and lack of protection against those risks. And in that sense war impoverishes all of us, the lack of a peaceful situation places our society on a layer of vulnerability that arbitrarily puts each of us at risk.”*<sup>7</sup>

Inequalities grow and become more visible in the years following violent conflicts and wars. In war-torn regions and countries, farmers often lose access to land and the market. The war economy and war entrepreneurs use the compromised security environment, gaining control of the changed market, thus capitalizing on the war and its consequences. At the same time, many war-affected communities find themselves in poverty, losing contact with the market and the economy, and the towns and villag-

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6. Sargsyan, T. (2022, January 18). *Azerbaijani soldiers who fought in the 44-day war and were wounded complain about social injustice*. Retrieved from <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31660121.html>

7. Andreasyan, Zh. (2019, June 28). *War and poverty. Section 1*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IsmnUv6i72s>

es in the war zone and adjacent to it face the risk of robberies and looting. However, we seldom talk about the face of the war, which degrades human dignity, deepens social injustices, inequality and poverty.

“... When we went to live there, the looting still continued, the train tracks were cut, taken away, and sold, a huge amount of stones was being loaded, buildings were being demolished, stones were being sent for sale, reinforcements were being demolished for sale, water pipelines were being dismantled for sale, everyone was only thinking of getting rich.” **A displaced man aged 35-50**

Moreover, wars and post-war episodes are characterized by the growth of households headed by the elderly and women (Goodhand, 2001).

One of the significant but neglected components of [multidimensional] poverty in societies living in protracted and real wars is the sense of the insignificance of one's own voice, the sense that the citizen can not influence social and political processes that have a direct and immediate impact on their life.<sup>8</sup>

The feeling of powerlessness is directly interlinked with alienation from politics. Displaced persons living in socially vulnerable conditions and barely making both ends meet often have a sense of the insignificance of their own voice, and consider making judgments on different political issues beyond their capacity or power, attributing the function only to political scientists, politicians, authorities, representatives of superpowers, etc. The war further enhanced people's perceptions of their own insignificance. Feelings of heightened helplessness, inability to change anything, and the occasional feeling of being unheard are expressed on individual as well as societal and [geo]political levels. Not only are the citizens perceived as politically powerless, but also the role of Armenia in terms of its political agency is hardly ever touched upon in the context of conflict resolution. It

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8. epress.am. (2019, November 25). *Right, poverty, shame and noise*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1IQdMpxGs>

is also due to the poor socioeconomic situation that the displaced people have vague insights into what to do next, how to rediscover ways to organize their lives.

Reflections on the political agendas of the United States, Russia and Turkey lead to the belief that the resolution of the conflict depends neither on Armenia nor on Azerbaijan, and is subject to hegemonic geopolitical interests.

# NOTHING DEPENDS ON US

*"Today the solution to the Karabakh issue is solely in the hands of Putin, America and France. They can resolve it, but they do not do it either."*

**A displaced man aged 36-50**

*"I am a very insignificant person to say what should be done eventually. I can not say. It should be decided by political scientists. What can we decide?"*

**A displaced woman aged 51-75**

*"...When we are hired, we have seniors, they in turn have seniors, who already know who to apply to, so that those borders are protected, so that there is a peace treaty, and so that we feel we live in a safe country."*

**A displaced woman aged 19-35**

*"There was nothing that would depend on us at that moment."*

**A displaced man aged 36-50**

*"What are we? We are commoners, farmers. We were doing our jobs. Who could ever think that Azerbaijan would start a war again?"*

**A displaced man aged 51-75**

*"What is in the hands of the people? People are like sheep. They go where they are driven to. The seniors have to find common ground with*

*each other in order for the situation to be good. What can we do if they do not do it? What do I have in hand, or what do you have in hand? Nothing.”* **A displaced man aged 51-75**

Most of the persons displaced as a result of the second Karabakh war have found themselves in a difficult socioeconomic situation. Most of them have lost their livelihood, jobs and businesses. They live in rented accommodation, in a relative's house, in a shelter provided by a benefactor or the state. The biggest need of the displaced persons is housing. In the absence of permanent work and home, people consider that they do not live life, but merely survive.

Although it is generally considered shameful to talk about poverty, our research shows that people living in poverty and uncertainty as a result of war speak openly about their actual social situation. Some of the displaced persons expect state compensation for the house only, while the most vulnerable also expect continuity of social assistance, which, however, enhances their dependence on various support programs.

# HOW TO GET BY?

*"Now we are in a situation where we do not know whether we have moved or are displaced persons, whether we are refugees or migrants."*

**A displaced man aged 51-75**

*"How shall I put it? I do not believe in anyone, neither do I believe in myself. Do I exist or do I not?"*

**A displaced man aged 35-50**

*"They should have warned us. We would have taken our property with us, like they did in Lachin. At least we would have been able to get by with that stuff. Now we have to buy everything. Whatever you see in this house now belongs to someone else. I have nothing, nothing at all. Starting from the plate to the most important things, all is subject to buying."*

**A displaced woman aged 19-35**

*"They say this much help has come from abroad. What have they given us so far? Yes, there are people who say they have been given money, but why is it not equal? Why did I not get anything, and another person benefited from everything? Why haven't they distributed it equally?"*

**A displaced woman aged 19-35**

*"We are in this apartment with the children. It is our acquaintance's apartment. We do not pay any money. Nobody in the family has a main job. We are lucky, at least my son-in-law has a temporary job. He also lost everything in Kashatagh."*

**A displaced woman aged 36-50**

*"We had moved there with nothing. And the country was not in a good situation either. We moved there and worked hard. At that time the*



children were small. My son, the youngest child was in his first grade, and my daughter was in the fifth grade. Well, at the beginning the situation there was not good, then there were advantages every year. There was no electricity in our village, Kashatagh, when we moved there. There were no marshrutkas [Russian vans used for public transport-Translator] there. People would go to Lachin on foot. Thank God, in recent years the marshrutkas, the electricity, everything was there. It was very good. We worked, created our livelihood... Then the war came. Then I got sick. I have been blind for two years already. The children had already grown up. They built it with their hard work and suffering, and we gave it to the Turks and came here." **A displaced man aged 36-50**

"We did not have a house here [in Armenia]. We went to live there. We lived there for 21 years, we created a home there with everything, virtually everything. Now we have come here. One day we stay at my sister's house, a month here, a month there. How long can we carry on like this?" **A displaced woman aged 51-75**

The research also brings to light the differences that exist between those displaced from the Hadrut and Shushi regions and those displaced from the Kelbajar and Lachin regions. The former residents of Hadrut and Shushi enjoyed a safer socioeconomic environment and social capital in Karabakh, while those who moved from different regions of Armenia to Kelbajar and Lachin regions were representatives of socially vulnerable groups from the start. Those who moved there voluntarily or based on the resettlement offer by the Armenian and Karabakh authorities and the incentive of state support put years of effort and energy to build a life in Karabakh. As a result of the war, they lost the prospect of having a secure life in both Karabakh and Armenia. At the same time, there is little reflection among the people on the issue that the Azerbaijanis, who were displaced from the Kelbajar and Lachin regions as a result of the first Karabakh war and lost their property, have gone through a similar loss and pain.

As paradoxical as it may seem, the feeling of injustice of one's own loss does not expand the possibilities of empathizing with the loss of the Azerbaijanis, even when people have memories of the Azerbaijani houses still standing in the mid-nineties. The Karabakh conflict, which is accompanied by escalations and wars, has severed ties between the conflicting societies and deepened mutual hostility. Over the course of these years, divergent stories and memories of the conflict have been developed and produced in Armenia, Karabakh, and Azerbaijan. In a symbolic and non-symbolic sense, the policies of ownership of "land" and "house" have distorted people's memories of neighborhood and common space. However, there is a deep understanding among the people that the occupied lands (interestingly, mostly Fizuli, Aghdam and Jabrail are perceived as such, they were not resettled, and there was no connection with the land) did not belong to the "ordinary people". Judgments about the further enrichment of the wealthy at the expense of the occupied lands reveal the great socioeconomic abyss that exists between the "ordinary people" affected by the Karabakh wars and the Karabakh and Armenian authorities, oligarchs and businessmen who capitalized on the war.

# WHOSE WERE THE “LANDS”?

*“For example, there are people who now say we should have given the lands in time. I do not know, I can not say what my opinion would be, but who used those lands for years? Did ordinary working people use them? No, of course not. Several people used them. It was thousands of hectares of land used by several people.”* **A displaced man aged 36-50**

*“Not that anyone lived in Fizuli. Only the rich lived in Fizuli, who were able to take hectares of land, and cultivate grain for their business, or I do not know what else they did there. Not that the people used that land, no one lived in that land.”* **A displaced man aged 19-35**

*“I was sure that one day the war would start. Because Fizuli, Aghdam were not ours. We had robbed, robbed, and robbed for 30 years. Until recently, it was from there that they brought soil and stones to build houses. It was clear that one day they would get their lands back. But I have the same feeling. Hadrut is the only land where there was no Turkish cemetery in the city. Just like they took what was theirs, so may we take ours, even if it takes 30 years.”* **A displaced girl aged 14-18**

*“They took [us] there, saying residents were needed there. If those lands were sold, why did you take our people there? Ninety percent of Armenia had created a livelihood there. Today they say, we are building houses in Askeran, come and live there. What shall I rely on to go and live there? Who shall I rely on? Turks enter and leave Askeran.”* **A displaced man aged 36-50**



# THE [UN]EXPECTED WAR

The war was both expected and unexpected. The internal talks about protracted war, which were formulated within the framework of the judgment that “the war will happen one day”, on the one hand, and the seemingly conflicting thought of failing to believe and imagine the possibility of a large-scale war, on the other hand, lived side by side for years. Although the displaced persons perceived the protracted war as likely, when retrospectively reflecting on their own positions, they insisted that they did not expect a large-scale, long-lasting war that would result in a defeat. In a broad sense, the likelihood of war was considered, but in terms of abstract victory.

War being perceived as both real and unlikely is, among other reasons, largely due to years of lack of substantive discussions and public dialogue on the Karabakh conflict and its possible resolutions, articulation of the dominant narrative of the “victorious” state by the media, marginalization of critical thought questioning the dominant discourses, and the war routine prevailing in Karabakh.

Although in a broad sense there was no significant public debate about the possible war, its socioeconomic and [geo]political implications, in practice the lives of the people living in Karabakh were adapted to the state of protracted and expected war. Moreover, the anticipation of war, expelled from the public sphere, but present in interpersonal conversations and practical life, was not filled with reflections on the force of violence, defeat, and consequences. Under the prevailing ideology of a “victorious” state, expecting a war did not mean expecting a defeat.

*"...We have always been under the target of the enemy, we have always expected that there could be a war. But that there would be such a war and with such losses ... That we would have so many fatalities and lose the lands as well, no one was expecting it."* **A displaced woman aged 19-35**

*"We were all waiting for the war to happen one day. But that we should fight, not give land. We were anticipating war, we knew that the Turks would not put up with it... But we did not expect that they could sign and we would leave."* **A displaced man aged 51-75**

*"We were all expecting this war, but we just did not imagine that it would start like this. The adults in Hadrut always said that there would definitely be a war, but so soon and so large-scale? Yes, we imagined that there would be a war, there would be some loss of territories. But that there would be so many losses... I could not have imagined in my life that I might not go back to Hadrut."* **A displaced girl aged 14-18**

*"...There were warnings, but no one imagined that it would start on this scale. The scale was not as scary as the realization that we are so weak... Not that we are weak, but we do not have weapons. We were strong, we are still strong, the arsenal was probably weak."* **A displaced man aged 36-50**

*"...We lived in peace, we could not imagine... We always expected, every moment, that there would be a war, but I would never have imagined such a thing, that I would lose my native village, or that we would have so many fatalities, my brother too. I would not have thought about such a thing, but it happened."* **A displaced woman aged 19-35**

*"We did not expect it at all. Even when we heard the news, we did not believe that there was a war, until, say, October 8, or 9... The war seemed to heat up intensively at that time. We did not expect that massive thing. They started it on a large scale. Something different... It was completely different. There had been no such thing, there had been no such war at all. None of us expected it, and until the end we hoped that we would definitely go back from here."* **A displaced woman aged 19-35**

*"...Of course we did not imagine that we could lose this way. Indeed, so many people and so many territories... And it is not over yet."* **A displaced man aged 36-50**

*"It was a surprise, we did not expect a war. We lived and worked in peace. Our Berdzor was flourishing day by day, it was getting better. There was employment, there was a new hospital, a new police station was being built, we were building a college, it was left unfinished. We had two schools, a kindergarten, a museum. In a nutshell, we had everything, we had a music school."* **A displaced woman aged 51-75**

Just like our previous study "A retrospective: Voices on War and Peace", interviews with displaced persons within the framework of this study, show that the escalation in April 2016 had a significant impact on the perception and interpretation of the war, as well as its articulation.<sup>9</sup> The first Karabakh war, formulated and declared as a victory, and remain-

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**9.** During one of the conversations about the Karabakh conflict, as well as the Russian invasion of Ukraine since February 24, 2022 and the ongoing war, researcher, social anthropologist Eviya Hovhannisyan was reflecting on the criteria by which we define a violent conflict as a war. Do we define it in terms of duration, human and territorial losses, violence, weapons used? Is the "April escalation" a political euphemism or is the formulation "2016 [four-day] war" an exaggeration when we look at it from the perspective of the second Karabakh war, which lasted 44 days and took the lives of thousands of people? In the context of the ongoing conflict, the formulation, analysis and textualization of issues of war and peace require a continuous effort to refine the language used. After all, public attitudes and perceptions, as well as their analysis, are greatly influenced by the process of naming phenomena in one way or another (*Arpy Manusyan-Ed.*).

ing in the seemingly distant past, is largely a vague recollection even for the segments of the public who had a direct relation with it, and the relatively recent escalation on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border in April 2016 became the point of reference through which the war is formulated and interpreted. Perceived as a real war, on the one hand, it had exacerbated the expectation and risk of the coming war, and on the other hand, it had formed a public expectation in which war was imagined only as a short occurrence, with the prospect of a few days long clashes and “small losses”. In one sense, it was a surprise, and in another sense, the predictable war was imagined as short-lived clashes, a quick settlement through negotiations or mediation of superpowers (particularly Russia), but not as such a drastic change of the status quo. And in the situation of an already ongoing war, the desire and the thought to stop it as soon as possible went like a scarlet thread through almost all our interviews.

*“...The April war lasted 4 days, right?” When this war started, we thought it would last a few days... We were cherishing that hope when leaving, almost everyone cherished that hope. On the last day, when they said they had captured Ishkhanadzor, we said no, it is a lie, we will go, we will take it back, we will go to our homes again. We did not believe it was theirs, we still do not believe it.”* **A displaced boy aged 14-18**

Both the escalation in April 2016 and the first Karabakh war were perceived in terms of the peaceful or relatively peaceful years that followed, and amid the lack of in-depth, extensive and comprehensive debate on the Karabakh war and defeat, people’s judgments were largely driven by everyday conversations, various conspiracy theories, and media speculation. In the context of widespread pessimism, the everyday conversations around “they say” in different social environments mitigated the uncertainty of the future to a certain extent, becoming a source of searching for unanswered questions: “They say the Russians will give back Shushi”, “they say Hadrut will be ours soon...”

In addition to the April war, references to the first Karabakh war and frequent references to the past not only assess the years following the 1992-



1994 war as peaceful, but also imagine a victory that did not take place, building their judgements on previous experience: if in 1994 the Armenian side was able to win, then victory was possible in 2020 as well. Why didn't this war happen before? How did the former authorities manage to avoid it? Why couldn't we win if we had won then? How could we have lost Shushi?<sup>10</sup> However, these arguments and political questions that did have well-founded answers, were formulated under the prevailing knowledge and mythical narratives about the Karabakh conflict as questions that could not be answered, that were inaccessible to the public, and in terms of failing and losing the achievements of the "powerful historical past".

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**10.** The political narrative of Shushi being an impregnable fortress already existed during the first Karabakh war. As a result of the first Karabakh war, after Shushi passed to the Armenian side, a public and political narrative spread in Azerbaijan (just like in Armenia after the 2020 war), looking for internal traitors who sold the city and "handed it over without a fight". This mirror narrative is built around the long cultivated narrative in both societies that Shushi is one of the pillars of Armenian and Azerbaijani identity. The study of the social, cultural and political roots of this narrative of identity is a necessity both in Armenia and in Azerbaijan. I am grateful to sociologist Sergey Rumyantsev for an interesting talk on this issue (*Arpy Manusyan-Ed.*).

# WE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE LIKE THE APRIL WAR

*"We thought it would be like the four-day war, it will calm down, it will end, but we saw that this was nothing like the four-day war." **A displaced man aged 36-50***

*"... We also took almost nothing, because we thought we would leave for a few days, we thought it would be like April war, ten days ..."*  
**A displaced woman aged 19-35**

*"We thought it would take 4 days like during the April battles, that it would end. Otherwise we would at least have taken our clothes. We ran away completely naked. This was a nightmare..." **A displaced man aged 36-50***

*"Well, we imagined that it might last three, four, five days like the April war, and that would be the end of it. Then, when we started evacuating women and children, I said, no, this will not end well, and it really didn't. In the end, they gave all of Hadrut, Shushi and Karvachar as well."*  
**A displaced man aged 51-75**

*"It seemed to me in the first days of the war that it would end soon, it would end because we had showed our strength during the four-day*

war. And not that I doubted the strength of the army or the soldier or our strength.” **A displaced woman aged 51-75**

Many displaced persons explained their judgements on the impossibility and unlikelihood of such an outcome of the war with the economic and financial investments that had been made in Karabakh for years, especially in the territories subject to return under negotiations. Other factors contributing to the judgement were the belief that the April 2016 escalation was quickly stopped with the intervention of Russia and “Russia will not allow a war”. The question of whether the state should implement resettlement programs or invest resources was regularly asked in a context that predetermined war.

Although the Armenian authorities have consistently insisted that they have not implemented mass resettlement programs, it should be noted that over the years, by implementing other assistance programs, many (especially the socially vulnerable) had been encouraged to move and settle in the territories surrounding NKAO.

As a result of these ostensibly indirect resettlement and social assistance policies, many people who had settled in Kelbajar, Lachin and other areas since the late 1990s did not only live with the belief that war was unlikely, but also had rooted all aspects and spheres (personal, family and public, socioeconomic, educational and cultural) of their lives in those regions.

*“We lived there without worries. We did not think at all that one day those lands would not be ours. So many people had moved there since 1996. Young families moved there, invested all their energy, built houses, created jobs, established orchards, created everything. They could have stayed here, achieved something here and avoided losing what they had created. In fact, they lost their health, the home they created by the sweat of their brow, and their livelihood.”* **A displaced woman aged 36-50**

Talks about the causes of war or the ways to avoid it eventually led to the distinction between our and their “lands.” By and large, the Karabakh conflict had been brought down to an issue of “land”. Moreover, the issue of land ownership was thought of in a complicated knot. First of all, it referred to the local rich and oligarchs, who had usurped the occupied [arable] lands, in fact, “their” lands. The idea of handing over lands without fatalities was, of course, a dominant thought. It is difficult to deny the possibility of a peaceful solution to the conflict after experiencing the horrors of war. However, some of the people who settled in the regions adjacent to the NKAO were not sure that they would accept the policy of conceding territories. However, at present the inevitable “what if” reflection more than a year after the war considers it acceptable to have handed over the territories under negotiations to Azerbaijan, especially under the prospect of preserving the sensitively perceived Hadrut and Shushi, as well as having no casualties.

# THEY SHOULD HAVE GIVEN THEIR LANDS TO THEM, AND OUR LANDS WOULD REMAIN OURS

*"I would like this war not to have happened, to remain as it was. Even if they gave them their territories, our lands would remain ours. I wish it had been solved that way, but without casualties." **A displaced woman aged 36-50***

*"The war was supposed to happen one day, but in that way? I do not know... Hadrut... Or if they were to return Jabrayil, which was previously Azerbaijani, they should have returned it, and what was Armenian could be left to the Armenians." **A displaced man aged 19-35***

*"But we already knew that we were losing. And the question of the 5 regions was raised: Jabrail, Horadiz, Aghdam, Ghubatlu... I think we should have returned them. It is true that those territories were occupied at the cost of the blood of my father's friends, uncles, relatives, but in this case it turned out that we either had to give it or have nothing. And we got nothing." **A displaced woman aged 19-35***

*"I do not know why that war started, but it should not have started. I mean, when it started, they should have given the lands from the very beginning, rather than take the young people and dump them in front of the enemy."* **A displaced man aged 19-35**

*"The situation should not have been constantly escalated. They had been considering themselves a defeated state since 1994. They were considered a defeated state and for 30 years they had constantly declared that they were like this, they were like that. They should have thought a bit objectively that we do not have the financial and economic opportunities that Azerbaijan enjoys. And there the people protested, demanded results from the head of the state. They were humiliated, and they wanted to go to the places where they once lived. The places that are not theirs, but both Armenians and Azerbaijanis lived there because it was the USSR."* **A displaced man aged 19-35**

The Karabakh tangle brings to light the fragmented public perceptions on the issue. The drive to avoid war at all costs, to resolve the conflict peacefully, and the idea of arming and returning "lands" (particularly Hadrut and Shushi) by force of war in the near future live side by side in harmonious contradiction. In the meantime, reflections on arming and "becoming stronger" do not necessarily lead to plans for war. The importance of making the army stronger and replenishing it with modern weapons was also emphasized from the perspective of the policy of "restraining the enemy". Thus, in the past, not having enough weapons and failing to make the army stronger, was, in the words of the people, one of the reasons for the 2020 war.

The war led to the search for its causes and defeat, the questioning of the negotiation process, the discourse of questioning "landowners". However, the limited public knowledge about the conflict, the prevailing political and social narratives, the inability to generate public knowledge on complex and sensitive issues in the political sphere have led to the situation where, in seeking explanations for the aforementioned issues, the public

groups perhaps most affected by the war tend to immerse themselves in conspiracy theories or ideas of a romanticized future, which are mostly in the realm of human desires and aspirations. Despite reflections on the balance of power, the systemic problems in the army, and institutional corruption, judgments about “sold lands” are also widespread among the displaced persons. In this context, the defeat in the war is often seen as the result of treason and secret deals concluded by the former and current authorities.





# FRAGMENTARY PERCEPTIONS OF THE FUTURE AND PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

War also disrupts social environments and relationships. People miss the former social life. Life in Armenia is mostly unusual and foreign to people displaced from Shushi, Hadrut, Kelbajar and Lachin. The loss of one's "own corner" has social and cultural layers. In the new post-war situation in Armenia, the displaced persons mainly perceive their status as something temporary, and in the attitudes towards one's own life, the thoughts of "making both ends meet" and "surviving" prevail. The long-term planning of the future is pushed to the sidelines. We can say that hopeful or optimistic attitudes towards the future are a unique occurrence. Pessimistic views of the future, such as "we do not live, we just breathe, but life is not about that", generally prevail. Displaced persons living in different provinces of Armenia, particularly those engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry in Karabakh, find it difficult to adapt, especially to urban life. In this difficult and painful process of adaptation, many are in the process of constantly retrieving memories of their previous lives.

The consequences and experience of war confine people to thinking exclusively about the short-term solution of everyday issues, and limit the

possibility for a broader vision of the future. The unpredictability of the situation affects all spheres of life.

However, people of different age groups have differing ideas about the future. No matter how much middle-aged or elderly people are concerned about the uncertainty of the future, they do not view it as something that depends on them. The steps to overcome the uncertainties of the future are quite noticeable among the displaced young people, who try to make the future public life in Karabakh possible through their work and capacity building in Armenia. School-age youth have a strong desire to get a good education. Meanwhile, some of them are forced to combine education and work to help their families, war having forced them to live with increased everyday worries.

The social and moral pressures on women to become mothers and have children are especially intensified in the aftermath of wars. Our research also highlights the tendency of girls to emphasize the importance of having children in the future, which is both an expression of public pressure and a means of surviving personal tragedy and loss.

# WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT TOMORROW WILL BRING US

*"...The word future has vanished. What is future? That's how I [think]... Maybe I am desperate, that is why I say that, but there is no one around who would give me hope, and tell me, you know, do this or that, and it will be good. They say, we are alive today, but we do not know about tomorrow. Everyone speaks like that today." **A displaced man aged 36-50***

*"You're like a stranger now, and strangers we are, indeed. I can not say it is dear to me. I may stay for years and it might become dear to me, but now I feel like a stranger. No familiar people, a city strange to us, that much." **A displaced woman aged 19-35***

*"I do not make plans at all now, because I do not know what tomorrow will bring. Roughly speaking, we just make both ends meet. We are facing an uncertain situation, we do not know what will happen to us tomorrow. That's why we are silently waiting for what they will decide. Anyway, they are going to do what they will decide." **A displaced man aged 19-35***

*“What is future? I do not see a future. In the current situation, at the current pace, I do not see a future. What future are we talking about if things are getting worse day by day? They already want to take pieces of territory from Armenia...”* **A displaced man aged 36-50**

*“What future can there be? What future can there be in the current situation? Where there are high mountains, there are their military posts.”* **A displaced woman aged 36-50**

# I HAVE THE FEELING I AM NOT A CHILD ANYMORE

*"In fact, I do not rely on anyone. I have already started to participate in a number of trainings organized by NGOs. I will improve my knowledge and later I will open my own NGO and organize events in Artsakh. I will make people's daily lives more interesting. I will make everyone forget about leaving Artsakh, because if everyone leaves, they will actually do what our enemy wants. And I do not want it to happen, because we have fought so much for it. I am struggling now in my mind, that we should go back."* **A displaced girl aged 14-18**

*"I have plans, I want to graduate, work in my profession and have a lot of children. And I want to have a son, and name him after my brother."* **A displaced girl aged 14-18**

*"Before the war, I was a child. Now I feel I am not a child anymore. Before the war I thought I would become a famous actress, I would come to Hadrut, go on stage, and everyone would see me, the great success I achieved... Not anymore... I want, for example, to work in the UN Office and protect children's rights violated during the war, because I do not want there to be more children like me."* **A displaced girl aged 14-18**

*“Well, I think the state will probably give some money for education. He said that all the people of Kashatagh who have come should get education in order to have professions, to work somewhere, to create their own. I do not know, maybe I do not have any demands from them. If they could arrange some way for me to learn hairdressing, it would be good.”* **A displaced boy aged 14-18**

*“I have no plans for the future. I just try to ease my family’s worries, needs, and earn money to cover daily expenses to some extent. But I [do not have] the big goals I had before the war... I was supposed to get engaged on October 15, everything was ready for that, but it didn’t happen. ...But I do not want my child to have the feelings I had. So is it worth starting a family now, when you are not even sure about your own safety?”* **A displaced woman aged 19-35**

Social insecurity makes it even more unrealistic to imagine the future. For displaced people, key to overcoming the uncertainty of the future is home and the idea of a home, which has both material and non-material connotations. People who have become more vulnerable and poorer as a result of the war do not attach much importance to the location of their future home, while others consider the issue of home in direct relation to returning to Karabakh - a return to the lost home in Karabakh. In this context, Karabakh or home are identified with one’s own place of residence, community. This is much more pronounced in the attitudes of the people displaced from Hadrut. They are the ones who predominantly rule out the return to Karabakh without Hadrut returning to the Armenian control.

House-to-house relocations, living in shelters provided by the state or charities, or the homes of relatives and acquaintances not only put the displaced persons in constant dependence but also deepen the layers of uncertainty and unpredictability, prevent people from solving employment-related issues in the long run. Disturbed social stability and social problems obscure the notions of both individual and public and political future.

# FUTURE IS FIRST OF ALL HOME

*"They constantly lie to people. Occasionally they say they will give them a house, then they say they will give money, then they say they will give a house in Yerevan, then they say they will give a house in Karabakh, then they do not give it, they say they will give money. There were monthly payments, they cut them too. Now they are not giving anything."*

**A displaced boy aged 14-18**

*"An acceptable option for me would be everyone to go home, not to live on rent for the rest of their lives. Go to their homes, even if they are destroyed, even if they are burnt, give them to those people, and let each person rebuild their house from scratch, and stay close to their soil and water."*

**A displaced man aged 36-50**

*"I would like a high-rise building to be built in Goris, and apartments be provided to those people, including my sons. First of all, because now we need Goris to have a large population as a border [city]. This will be a major cause for people who have resettled here not to leave again. We and our government need people to live here and keep this border strong."*

**A displaced woman aged 51-70**

*"Future is first and foremost having a house and a roof, a profession, a job. Future is first of all home and peace."*

**A displaced man aged 19-35**

*"It [home] must be there for us to start living in peace. ... There should be work, peace in our country, so that people can live peacefully with their work."* **A displaced woman aged 36-50**

*"There are both housing problems and difficult social conditions. We are facing major everyday problems. But we hope that in time everything will be settled and we will return to our homes. Because home is not just four walls and a roof."* **A displaced man aged 51-70**

*"Without my village, Karabakh does not exist for me. If they say they are giving back my village, I will go tomorrow ... But I am not going to move to Karabakh anymore. What have I seen? Why should my children see it?"* **A displaced man aged 36-50**

*"The Hadrut residents were born there, they grew up there. How can they emotionally handle going to [Karabakh] now, even if they give them a palace? For example, I will not go. I have said and I will say it again - even if they provide me with a wonderful house, I will not go to Karabakh, even though I loved that country so much."* **A displaced woman aged 51-75**

The belief that the Karabakh issue will not be resolved in the short term in the post-war context, makes displaced persons consider living far from Armenia and Karabakh. On the other hand, the feelings of aggravated alienation, vulnerability and loss call into question the prospect of regaining stability abroad, forming social ties and environments.

Having a future in Karabakh is defined by the settlement of the Karabakh issue. Despite the horrors of war and the declared desire for peace, the vast majority of displaced persons see the settlement of the issue in arming Armenia and Karabakh, or, as they put it, getting stronger. The popular slogan "power begets right" guides people's perceptions of a "powerful army".



CRRC-Armenia's Public Opinion Poll on Armenia's Priorities (2021) shows that 35% of Armenians prefer "unification of Artsakh with Armenia", 35% prefer "independence for Artsakh", and 19% prefer granting Artsakh a special status within Russia.<sup>11,12</sup>

According to our research, the issue of returning to Karabakh and residing there is being discussed in the context of clarifying the status of Karabakh. *"The future of Karabakh is the recognition of the status, even if only in the territories that are now under Armenian control", "Well, if it becomes independent, I think Karabakh will live..."*

The displaced persons do not consider it acceptable to return to their communities if they are under the control of Azerbaijan, neither do they consider it acceptable for Karabakh to be part of Azerbaijan with any status.

Imagining the future of Karabakh by bringing back "lands" goes like a scarlet thread through almost all the interviews. These desires, the judgments about returning territories by force, are subjected to self-reflection when the horror of war is recalled.

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**11.** CRRC. (2021). *Public Opinion Poll on Armenia's Priorities*. Retrieved from [https://www.crrc.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/REPORT\\_2021\\_ARM\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.crrc.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/REPORT_2021_ARM_FINAL.pdf).

**12.** As important as public opinion polls are in looking for different trends in public sentiment, it is crucial to keep in mind that the questions they formulate and the generated answers in politically sensitive contexts are largely subject to political and social demand. In this regard, people do not give political answers to political questions. Rather, they articulate preferences and desires. This situation is especially evident when, as Bourdieu points out, people did not have the need and time to think about these issues before the research, they did not gather in-depth knowledge about them (Bourdieu, 2019).

# A FUTURE FAR FROM KARABAKH

*"I, a young boy, am thinking of starting a family and I do not want to live outside Artsakh. I want to go and live in Artsakh. But who is going to ensure my safety? Peacekeeping forces? I do not even trust the border protected by the Armenians, let alone the border protected by the Russians."* **A displaced man aged 19-35**

*"I imagined my future in a completely different way, within the borders of Armenia. ... And now I'm thinking about leaving abroad."* **A displaced girl aged 14-18**

*"They offer us to go and live in Karabakh. My father does not agree, he says I go to Yerablur<sup>13</sup> every day. Now if I go to Karabakh, how am I going to visit [Yerablur]? I will not leave my child, and go and live there."* **A displaced woman aged 19-35**

*"I do not think we will go back to Hadrut, because the village of Mets Tagher in Hadrut has been razed to the ground... Even if we go there, what shall we rely on when building a house and living there if there is to be another war?"* **A displaced woman aged 19-35**

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**13.** Yerablur or Yerablur Military Pantheon is a military cemetery located on a hilltop in the outskirts of Yerevan, Armenia. Since 1988, Yerablur has become the burial place of Armenian soldiers who lost their lives during the Karabakh conflict (*Translator*).

# TODAY IT IS NOT SAFE IN ARMENIA EITHER

*"I have no plan to stay in Armenia. True, neither do I have any plan to go to Russia or abroad. My brain dictates me, for example, not to imagine it here, but, rather, imagine it in Russia, think about Russia. And Russia alone always comes to my mind, I do not know why." A displaced woman aged 19-35*

*"No, I do not feel safe in Armenia. If you go to a third country, it is uncertain there as well. Can you live without your country, without your native language, your air and water or you cannot? Is there a guarantee that it is safe and secure there?" A displaced woman aged 19-35*

*"I am not able to put up with the idea that we are permanently going to live in Armenia. I think that by some means, both by using our persistence and the help of the Minsk Group, we must definitely go back to our country. Our future is in Karabakh, we have no future in Armenia." A displaced woman aged 51-75*

*"People in Armenia do not have confidence in the future. How can the people of Karabakh have one? Armenia always used to state that it is the guarantor of Karabakh's security." A displaced woman aged 51-75*

*"I have thought about returning again, living in Artsakh, but I do not see peace there either, that is why I am afraid. I am not psychologically ready, I am not ready to move my children, my wife there to live there again. The factor of lack of peace is more discernable there. The same goes for Syunik." A displaced man aged 19-35*

# THE LANDS WILL BE OURS AGAIN, WE MUST ARM

*"I do not know whether there will be war again or [the issue will be solved] by signing something, but I feel that the land will be ours again. They will go again, and we will go to live on our land. I think so, I do not know. A year has passed since the war, but I have not lost hope that we will go there again."*

**A displaced woman aged 19-35**

*"The war with Azerbaijan will definitely happen. We must have weapons, weapons."*

**A displaced man aged 51-70**

*"Let them bring it back through diplomatic means, because I have already seen the war. Not that I do not want to see it, I do not want others to see it."*

**A displaced man aged 19-35**

*"...If the 7 regions are recaptured, Ishkhanadzor is recaptured, I will go. Even if my parents do not go, I will go. I like living there, but we can not adapt to Stepanakert."*

**A displaced boy aged 14-18**

*"I have a better idea of the future of Karabakh. Karabakh will definitely be ours again. I am sure. "Even if it takes 20, 30 years, Karabakh will definitely be ours again."*

**A displaced woman aged 19-35**

*"Maybe Hadrut and Shushi should definitely be returned. The originally Armenian territories will be returned and life will continue as it was. Our diplomats must present to the international community that these are the original Armenian territories, the culture was developing, there was life, everything was good."* **A displaced girl aged 14-18**

# AT LEAST THEY SHOULD GIVE STATUS TO KARABAKH

*"I only imagine the future of Karabakh in one way, within the Republic of Armenia. Karabakh should have the territory of the NKAO and become part of the Republic of Armenia, become a province of Armenia."*

**A displaced boy aged 14-18**

*"It should probably [join] Russia. It was with a single stroke of a pen that they recognized Karabakh as an Azerbaijani territory. I think that now as well it is an issue of a stroke of a pen. Maybe they will give it to Russians, it will remain like that or it will disappear altogether."*

**A displaced girl aged 14-18**

*"The only way to resolve the issue is for Karabakh to be recognized internationally, both by Armenia and the whole world. There is no other option. Neither the Russians, nor the Azerbaijanis will solve this issue, nor will Armenia be able to solve this issue."*

**A displaced man aged 19-35**

*"At least they should give status to Karabakh... Now we do not have a refugee status... We have no status, we are people hanging in the air."*

**A displaced woman aged 36-50**

*"Perhaps we will always be at war because of the settlement of the Karabakh issue, because no country leader states that Karabakh is independent. It seems to me that unless they decide on the independence of Karabakh, there will always be wars."* **A displaced boy aged 14-18**

*"At the moment, my son is still serving in the army. He will finish it in January. We decided to take a house there. My child does not agree. He says, mom, do you understand that the war will start, you will find yourselves in a deadlock? The road to Kelbajar is not open for you to run away. Lachin is in their hands."* **A displaced woman aged 35-50**

# TO LIVE UNDER THE THREAT OF WAR

*"... You may go out in the morning, something will fall on you from above, and welcome to Karabakh."* **A displaced man aged 36-50**

*"Even after the war, there is that tension. True, we sleep now, but in our psychology we do not sleep. We are constantly afraid that war will start again. Where will we go then?"* **A displaced woman aged 19-35**

*"...Now one wakes up and thinks, I survived today as well. There may be [war] in the afternoon, or may be after midnight."* **A displaced man aged 36-50**

The second Karabakh war had a devastating effect on public perceptions of peace and peaceful coexistence in the region. It is important to emphasize that the region is not perceived as a political and geographical unit, where the political, historical, cultural and socioeconomic relations of Armenia as a subject develop with other states. The region is generally perceived as a hostile environment in which Armenia is "surrounded on four sides by adversaries." This situation of the victim and the oppressed is interpreted as a reality that either has no prospect of correction or change or does not exist, or no political role is attributed to Armenia in changing it. Under these conditions, the possibility of peace and peaceful coexistence leads to the idea of peace without Azerbaijan and Turkey. Peace and peaceful coexistence is seen not in the region, with a given regional country, but without them.



Moreover, our research in 2018-2019 in the border and non-border regions of Armenia, as well as in Karabakh, showed that the prospects for peace and peaceful coexistence are dim, but are discernable in public positions. However, the war had a devastating effect on these prospects. On the one hand, peace is desirable, and on the other hand, unimaginable after the disaster of the war. People want peace, but they do not imagine how it is possible *"after this"*.

The displaced persons from Hadrut and Shushi regions have a more radical position on the issue of peace and peaceful coexistence, considering reconciliation or neighborly relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey in the region almost unthinkable. The issue of peace is depicted only in the case of the return of those two regions through political means or new war.

As painful as it is, the feelings of injustice and humiliation, loss of dignity and homeland that reside in people (they are often manipulated and exacerbated by those who represent different political interests, journalists, public intellectuals) make possible the idea of a new war, which will be revanchist, and through which it will be possible to *"bring back the lands"*, *"bring back home"*.

The attitudes of people towards peace and war, reality, the future and their own desires are eclectic and fragmentary. Such fragmentary perceptions and attitudes caused by different cultural layers are present in almost all interviews, showing people's intricate and mixed ideas and feelings on these complex issues. Vague notions of peace are in the realm of the distant future. The prevailing idea is that only as a result of the change of generations will peaceful coexistence in the region be possible. Thoughts on the need for a peace treaty, although very rare, are discernable in the study.

# PEACE IS POSSIBLE WITHOUT NEIGHBORS

*"We have 4 neighboring states, but I will probably imagine [peace] only with Iran. Russia is not reliable for me either... The Armenian nation, the Armenian soldier was suffering at the border, no one went to help. But I never imagine all of that with Turkey and Azerbaijan, because I want to hear bad news about them as soon as possible. In any case, it is an enemy state for me, and an enemy will it remain."* **A displaced man aged 19-35**

*"I would like to live like before, but these are ideas, dreams. It may happen, but I do not know whether we will be alive then or not, how many years it will take."* **A displaced man aged 36-50**

*"No, it is not possible. They have to return something, a few districts, so that we can live in peace. For example, Shushi. Shushi, Karvachar must be returned, the Lachin road which connects with Armenia, must be returned."* **A displaced woman aged 51-75**

*"... I would rather die than live in such peace. I live with shame, dear, I live with shame that I gave up land, I gave up home."* **A displaced man aged 51-75**

*"Well, my father participated in the war, his friends were killed. I cannot talk to any Azerbaijani."* **A displaced boy aged 14-18**

*"They are constantly pushing us towards peace with the Turks. But the Turk has instilled hatred towards us among his children for 30 years, that the Armenian is our enemy, we must slaughter the Armenian, we must kill the Armenian. How do you think we can live with the Turks? This is not the former Turk, not the former Armenian. They have completely changed now. They will use every opportunity to kill us."*

**A displaced woman aged 36-50**

*"They are our centuries-old enemies, it is in our blood, in our genetic code. A 2-year-old child already knows the word enemy. My grandmother and my family saw war and suffered in the hands of the Turks. How can we hold diplomatic talks with the Turks now, come to an agreement and live with them?"*

**A displaced woman aged 51-75**

*"It was physically possible for Armenians and Azeris to live together, but it would not last long, it would lead to war again, if not between states, then a civil war between religions."*

**A displaced girl aged 14-18**

*"I once said during a conversation that they do not get along with the Armenians, or maybe the Armenians do not get along with anyone. What state or nation should live with the Armenians so that we get along together? Generally speaking, we cannot live well with any nation, because we always put ourselves above everyone. We always look down on others. "Even now."*

**A displaced man aged 19-35**

*"If the Russians shoot off from here... They are the ones who mess up everything. They make the two sides fight, and then they are always here as mediators. The Russians' nose must be broken so that they do not take any risks and come here. And they must help this cause from outside. The Soviet Union collapsed in the 90s, then America started giving money to Russia for it to be predictable, but they "ate" [the*

money] and become the same again – an evil for the world. I don't think the people of Azerbaijan want to be in constant war. There are different nationalities there who are dissatisfied with all this. "Everything is for Aliyev's government. Why on earth would the people need it? They have a big country. Why would they need this Karabakh?" **A displaced woman aged 51-75**



# SUMMARY

Significant transformations and crises in political and social structures affect public perceptions of the social and political future. In this sense, the future is both a reality and an opportunity. It is a break from the present, but largely depends on it and crosses its boundaries (Delanty, 2020). Especially in the modern world, thinking about the future and imagining it is one of the most important aspects of building a social world. The future can be understood as a vision of opportunities or uncertainties, a break from the present or its continuation. The study of future projections does not mean that they will happen (Mische, 2009), but it is important to understand how the often uncertain perceptions of the future affect social and political processes of the present. At the same time, it is necessary to examine and get a deep understanding of the crises, social uncertainties and dynamic transformations of political and social structures that affect public perceptions of the future.

The concept of both social and political future became key to understanding the social upheavals in Armenia and Karabakh after the Second Karabakh War. The outcome of the war exacerbated the experience of political and social insecurity, of an uncertain future. *“Everyone was talking about unpredictability, but especially those living in Karabakh, in the former border areas, and the displaced persons mentioned that they experienced high levels of anxiety every day.”<sup>14</sup>*

In the context of sociopolitical uncertainty and security disruption, the attitudes of public groups that have been most affected by the war have become more radical. Their attitudes are also greatly influenced by the socioeconomic insecurity and poverty brought about by the war, which

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14. Sotieva, L. (2021). *Collective Wounds: Societal trauma and the Karabakh conflict*. Independent Peace Associates.

have led to the alienation of people from public and political processes, difficulties in making long-term plans for the future.

In the context of the predominance of pessimistic approaches to the future as a prospect for opportunities, the formulations of peace, peaceful coexistence, war, regional processes and the state of affairs in the region, as well as own desires, are fragmented. The opposing ideas of *“there is nothing better than peace”* and *“the lands lost due to the war should be returned”* often belong to the same person. On the one hand, pessimistic scenarios for the future are based on the experience of war, and on the other hand, are fueled by the media and political groups that exploit public sentiment. “They say there will be a war”, “they write that Syunik will be handed over”, “Azerbaijanis have entered Yerevan”... These social fears exacerbate feelings of insecurity and uncertainty about the future.

Such fragmentary perceptions and attitudes resulting from different cultural layers are present in almost all interviews, showing people’s intricate and mixed ideas about these complex issues. At the same time we can notice the political reasons for those fragmentary perceptions. Often those two opposing discourses are nurtured by those in power and are used as needed depending on the political interest and expediency.

Ideas of arming for peace are influenced by the political thinking and rhetoric “you want peace, prepare for war” that has been predominant for years and has rarely been questioned and criticized. The thought “you want peace, prepare for peace” has not found its place in Armenian public and political, academic, social science and humanitarian thought.

Vague notions of peace are in the realm of the distant future. The prevailing position is that only as a result of the change of generations will peaceful coexistence in the region be possible. Judgments about the need for a peace treaty are very rare, but are discernable in the study.

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