



**THE REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
SOCIAL SCIENCES UNIVERSITY OF ANKARA
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF NEWS REPORTS:
THE CASE OF NAGORNO KARABAKH CONFLICT -2020**

Master's Thesis

LEYLA TARVERDIYEVA

Peace and Conflict Studies

August 2023



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Program

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*“My humanity is bound up in yours,
for we can only be human together” Desmond Tutu*

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the conflict reporting dynamics in news articles from Armenian and Azerbaijani media outlets concerning the protracted Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, using the socio-cognitive approach of critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 2006). Analyzing 24 articles from both the term of conflict's apex and the following peace negotiation phase, the study identifies discernible disparities in discursive structures influenced by political ideologies. Merging quantitative and qualitative analytical dimensions, the findings illuminate interesting trends: the conflict's zenith witnessed the predominant employment of populism, authority, and polarization as discursive tools. However, the post-conflict narrative, especially in the Azerbaijani media, exhibits a more marked inclination towards lexicalization, national self-glorification, and vagueness strategies compared to their Armenian counterparts. On a broader semantic level, the analysis helps to underscore a collective media tendency in both nations towards negative other-representation. However, post-conflict narratives in Azerbaijani media, possibly emanating from their perceived triumph in the conflict, seem to accentuate positive self-representations. The resultant insights are discussed within the academic realms of Critical Discourse Analysis, paradigms of conflict reporting, and the theory of transformative peacebuilding (Fairclough, 1995; Wolfsfeld, 2004; Lederach, 1997).

Keywords: *conflict reporting, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, discourse analysis, socio-cognitive approach, media discourse.*

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, eleştirel söylem analizinin (van Dijk, 2006) sosyo-bilişsel yaklaşımını esas alarak, uzun süren Dağlık Karabağ ihtilafına ilişkin Ermeni ve Azerbaycan medya organlarından çıkan haber makalelerindeki çatışma raporlama dinamiklerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çatışmanın zirve yaptığı dönemi, barış müzakeresi aşamasını ve onu takip eden barış görüşmeleri süreçlerini kapsamakta olan 24 haber makalesi analize tabi kılınarak, siyasi ideolojilerden etkilenen söylemsel yapılarda gözlemlenebilir farklılıklar tespit edilmektedir. Niceliksel ve niteliksel analitik boyutları birleştiren bulgular, ilginç yönelimleri göstermektedir: çatışmanın zirve yaptığı dönemde, söylemsel araçlar olarak popülizm, otorite ve kutuplaşmanın baskın şekilde kullanıldığı gözlenilmektedir. Özellikle Azerbaycan mediasındaki çatışma sonrası anlatım, Ermeni mediasındaki muadillerine kıyasla sözcükselleşmeye (lexicalization), ulusal öz-yüceltme (national self-glorification) ve belirsizlik (vagueness) stratejilerine daha belirgin bir eğilim göstermektedir. Daha geniş olarak, anlamsal bir düzeyde, analiz, her iki ülkede de olumsuz öteki-temsiline yönelik kolektif bir medya eğiliminin altını çizmektedir. Bununla birlikte, Azerbaycan mediasında muhtemelen algılanan zaferlerden kaynaklanan çatışma sonrası anlatılar, olumlu öz-temsilleri de yüksek oranda ön plana çıkarmaktadır. Ortaya çıkan bulgular, Eleştirel Söylem Analizinin akademik alanları, çatışma raporlama paradigmaları ve barış çalışmaları disiplini içinde tartışılmaktadır. (Fairclough, 1995; Wolfsfeld, 2004).

Anahtar kelimeler: *çatışma haberciliği, Dağlık Karabağ çatışması, söylem analizi, sosyo-bilişsel yaklaşım, medya söylemleri.*

CHAPTER I

1. INTRODUCTION

Conflict reporting plays a crucial role in shaping public perspectives and responses, influencing the trajectory from initial hostilities to lasting peace-building processes. Media narratives can either fuel conflict or aid in reconciliation, indicating their significant influence on societal attitudes. Given the consequential nature of these narratives, rigorous analysis is paramount. Therefore, adopting a scholarly unique position to critically evaluate these narratives fosters a more nuanced understanding of conflicts. In that regard, this study embarks on an investigation of such narratives within the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that erupted into full-scale war in 2020. By employing van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach (2006), this research seeks to provide insights into the discursive strategies deployed by media organizations on both sides of the dispute to further understand the correlation between sustainable peacebuilding and the media tools.

The Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, between Armenia and Azerbaijan, has roots that reach back to the Soviet era, but in late September 2020, it escalated into a six-week war. Resulting in significant casualties and extensive displacement, the conflict ended in November 2020 with a Russian-brokered ceasefire that substantially altered the geopolitical status of the region (International Crisis Group, 2021; King, 2021). This intense conflict period and the ensuing peace process were extensively mediated through the press in both countries, shaping public perceptions and controlling the narrative around the conflict.

Within this context, the work of van Dijk becomes instrumental in illuminating how ideologies have been inscribed in discourse and how they have perpetuated social realities and dynamics of the long-standing conflict by the media outlets of both Armenia and Azerbaijan. It is worth noting that his theoretical and methodological contributions to CDA have provided valuable tools for researchers in fields such as linguistics, media studies,

sociology, psychology, and others, fostering a deeper and interdisciplinary understanding of the intricate interplay between discourse, cognition, and society (Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

Additionally, the analysis will provide valuable insights into the complexities of conflict reporting and peace building process. In theory, it is devised that an impartial and a comprehensive conflict reporting can provide a holistic picture of the conflict, capturing diverse narratives and highlighting the nuances of the situation conflict context (Lederach, 1997). This understanding is central to Galtung's (1969b) theory of Positive Peace, that underscores the importance of addressing the root causes of conflict and fostering understanding among conflicting parties. Therefore, through the findings of this study, it is aimed to deepen our understanding on deployment of the linguistic strategies in conflict reports and shed light on through which way media narratives can either perpetuate or challenge prevailing ideologies and political dynamics in the processes of reconciliation and peace building.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has often been examined through a strategic and geopolitical lens, with the psychosocial aspects receiving relatively less attention. Many academic studies conducted on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have primarily concentrated on its political, and historical underpinnings. Moreover, both countries, engaged in the conflict, have employed various international law concepts in their pursuit of justice and rights within the global arena. Azerbaijan has consistently asserted its legal right over the territory according to established international law. On the other hand, Armenia has taken an unwavering stance, unequivocally stating that the region rightfully belongs to the Armenian people, effectively dismissing Azerbaijan's claims. Therefore, the conflict has long been dominated by discourse centered on notions of enemies, war, historical traumas, etc. (Ergun, 2022).

However, the Second Karabakh War, culminating in a peace agreement, presented a unique opportunity for both countries to seek compromise and forge peace after nearly three decades of conflict. Hence, the concept of 'peace' has never been as tangible for both nations.

Suitably, the thesis seeks to, first of all, provide a conceptual framework on the psycho-social factors that influenced the existing discourse in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, emphasizing how these discourses become deeply embedded in the social memory through various institutions and organizations. Secondly, the news reports from both countries are examined via the employment of critical discourse analysis. Lastly, in this newfound era of peace, it has also become essential to examine whether the prevailing discourses and narratives in both countries have shifted during the transition from conflict to peace process.

The objective is to bring a novel perspective to the field of peace and conflict research by employing critical discourse analysis as a method to understand the 2020 Karabakh war and following peace negotiations through media representations. This has been intended to achieve by investigating the discursive strategies employed by media outlets of both states via the socio-cognitive approach (Van Dijk, 2006) of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

3. RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS

Leveraging the multidisciplinary socio-cognitive approach to discourse analysis as the methodological underpinning, this research aspires to unravel the extent of ideological disparity between the warring factions by scrutinizing the employment of discursive strategies at both micro and macro levels. Given the paucity of research at the intersection of CDA and conflict reportage, this analysis reveals the opportunity to broaden the scope of CDS, particularly within the realm of conflict reporting analysis (Richardson, 2007; Fowler, 1991).

Thus, by utilizing the socio-cognitive approach to discourse analysis, it is intended to delve into the intricate interplay of ideological and cognitive associations binding war, nationalist ideology, and news coverage. The objective is to illuminate the complex ways in which

discourse shapes and mirrors impact the social and political realities during the four phases of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh dispute.

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of how discursive elements reflect the ideological positions of the conflicting parties during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in 2020, the following research inquiries have been structured:

RQ1: What discursive strategies at both micro-level and macro-level have been employed in the news reports of the two conflict-engaged nations, and which categories have been salient within their respective contexts?

RQ2: Does the political climate's transition from conflict to peace lead to discernible modifications in the utilization and distribution of both micro and macro strategies within the media reports?

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research paper intends to provide an explanatory analysis of news coverage of the Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020 using a comparative lens for enhanced insight within the theoretical framework of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS). Based on the tenets of socio-cognitive theory, van Dijk's (2000) method underscores the significance of mental operations and societal context in the formulation and interpretation of dominant political discourse.

By depleting the concepts of 'enemy image', collective traumas, Othering process and violence and political discourse, the researcher framed the conceptual boundaries of the analysis prior to discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis has become a widely utilized method in numerous social science fields. This method empowers researchers to comprehend not only positions but also the origins of ideologies and actions. Despite its prevalent use in recent times, discourse analysis is among those research methods that have been explored so extensively that finding a universally accepted approach is challenging (Ismayilzada, 2021). It would be incorrect to argue the superiority of one method over another. However, the socio-cognitive method is deemed suitable for analyzing news reports to offer a multidisciplinary perspective. This approach enabled us to reveal complex processes through which the media outlets of Armenia and Azerbaijan constructed and disseminated specific narratives possessing a social and cognitive dimension during the different phases of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. In other words, the implemented socio-cognitive approach underscores the intersection of social and cognitive structures, thereby shedding light on how media discourses are not only derived from social and political practices but also shaped and maintained through a cognitive process. (Van Dijk, 2014). Furthermore, this socio-cognitive approach accentuates how media discourse influences the formation of mental models and social representations, thus shaping collective memory and public opinion about the conflict (Van Dijk, 2008).

Notwithstanding, media becomes a pivotal tool in a wartime context, particularly in fostering nationalist ideologies, as it shapes the narrative around the conflict and molds the public

perception of "us" versus "them." News reports, therefore, can reinforce dominant ideologies, including nationalism, and ethnic animosity through their selective representation of events, discursive strategies, and framing of conflict narratives. For this reason, news articles constitute the data of the research.

Consequently, this method is believed to illuminate the function of media discourse as more than a passive conveyor of events; rather, it stands as an active constructor of social realities and a conduit for propagating nationalist ideologies during periods of conflict (Van Dijk, 2009).

The analysis has been conducted on the basis of macro and micro-level ideological discourse categories. Each category comprises an evaluation of linguistic and cognitive elements utilized in the investigation of changing power balances between the warring parties and ideological leanings within the texts and talks in news reports.

By integrating micro-level textual analysis with macro-level (semantic) social and cognitive insights, this study aims to enrich the broader understanding of media discourses of opposing parties throughout the trajectory of conflict.

The news articles of multiple media outlets from both countries comprise the data of this research. The data has been accessed and gathered from online websites / archives of the media platforms. Hence data is secondary qualitative in nature. The collected data has been analyzed through macro and micro categories formulated within socio-cognitive account. Yet, the research results have been demonstrated with both categorical and numerical style and discussed in conjunction with the theoretical framework, thereby enhancing the relevance of our study to the existing academic landscape.

5. THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis comprises five chapters, each providing a particular aspect of the study case. By presenting the phenomenon in-subject and laying out the structure of the chapters, Chapter I establishes the framework for the thesis. In Chapter II, detailed information is presented on the historical background, conceptual frameworks, and theoretical foundations of the work. Before delving into theoretical discussions and applied discourse analysis, the researcher provides a conceptual framework. This framework helps readers grasp an understanding on concepts such as 'enemy image,' collective traumas, and the process of 'othering.' Additionally, the chapter outlines the establishment of the dominant discourse of violence and concludes with the formation of political discourses in both countries. In Chapter III, the analysis that forms the backbone of the research is explained. The subchapters within Chapter III focus on the sources of data, the process of data collection, the foundation of the four distinctive terms used in the research, the coding procedure, coding strategies, and the coding schema. Chapter IV presents and analyzes the research findings, concluding with a discussion section. It begins with a periodic analysis of findings from both sides, supporting the results qualitatively with samples and presenting statistical indications in tables. In the discussion part, the dominant trends and prevalent strategies employed by news agencies of both states are evaluated in accordance with the changing political landscape and developments regarding the conflict. Chapter V concludes the research, identifying possible prospects for future studies where the phenomenon can be thoroughly addressed. The chapter is wrapped up with subchapters: references and appendices.

CHAPTER II

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. The Developments till The First Karabakh War

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, with roots deeply embedded in historical, geopolitical, and ethnic dimensions, has continued to be a primary point of contention between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

The Nagorno-Karabakh region, nestled between Azerbaijan's rivers of Kura and Aras and to the east of Armenia's Lake Sevan, spans approximately 4,388 km² of mountainous terrain. It is often referred to as Mountainous Karabakh, a nomenclature derived from its geographical attributes. However, the broader region of Karabakh covers around 18,000 km² (Azer,2013).

The onset of the modern iteration of the Karabakh War in 2020, the roots of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh can be traced back to the early 19th century (Walsh, 2021). Historically, Nagorno-Karabakh was inhabited by a mosaic of ethnicities and religions, reflecting the broader tapestry of the Caucasus. However, following the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, both Armenia and Azerbaijan, upon acquiring their independence, found themselves ensnared in a complex web of territorial disputes over the region. The new geopolitical dynamics brought age-old tensions to the fore.

Armenian claims to the region often hinge on the presence of ancient church ruins, purportedly as evidence of their historical ties. While some historians acknowledge Armenian habitation in Nagorno-Karabakh since the 4th century under the "Kingdom of Great Armenia", it's essential to understand the transient nature of empires and dominations in this area (Azer,2013). The architectural features of the churches in question have been linked to the Albans, believed to be the region's initial inhabitants (Cornell, 1999). Hence,

any assertion of unbroken Armenian sovereignty based on these ruins, has been proved to be groundless.

Over successive centuries, the Nagorno-Karabakh region has been under the sway of various empires and powers, from 'the Christian Albans to the Arabs, Mongols, Safavid Iran, and the Turks'. The very name 'Karabakh' is an amalgamation of Turkish and Persian, exemplifying the diverse influences and dominions that have shaped the region's history (Azer, 2013).

Dating back to the 11th century, the region saw the dominance of the Seljuk Turks. A significant political figure of this era, Hasan Celal Davla, from the Seljuk dynasty, established the Jalali Dynasty during the 13th century. This dynasty, with its legacy of art and culture, managed to persist even after the Mongol invasions led by Timur Leng. Subsequently, due to the familial connections between the Jalalians and the Ottomans, the region became strategically vital during the Ottoman Empire's expeditions (Azer, 2013).

Furthermore, the 15th and 16th centuries saw the region under the governance of various Turkmen rulers, resulting in the creation of Khanates. Notably, the Karabakh Khanate was established in 1747 by Panah Ali Khan from the Javanshir Tribe. Shusha, originally named Panahabad in honor of its founder, flourished into a cultural and political hub under the leadership of his son, Ibrahim Halil Khan (Azer, 2013).

However, the geopolitical dynamics of the region underwent a transformation with the onset of Russian Tsarist ambitions. Following the decline of the Safavid dynasty in the mid-18th century, Karabakh emerged as one of several semi-independent khanates that piqued Russian interest. Consequently, by 1805, after the treaty signed on May 14, the Karabakh Khanate was incorporated into the Russian Empire, a move formalized in the 1813 Treaty of Gulistan with Iran (Atkin, 1993).

The Russian Empire, eager to consolidate its hold on these newly acquired territories, viewed the local Turkish-origin community with suspicion. Russian conquest and subsequent colonization efforts as part of its administrative strategy in the South Caucasus at the

beginning of the 19th century involved resettling Armenian populations in the region. In a bid to secure its rule, the empire orchestrated demographic changes, capitalizing on victories against both Iran and the Ottoman Empire. The Treaty of Turkmenchay (1828) and the subsequent Treaty of Adrianople paved the way for large-scale migrations of Christian Armenians into these territories. Consequently, approximately 130,000 Armenians relocated from Iran and the Ottoman Empire to present-day Armenian territories, with a significant focus on Yerevan and Karabakh (Azer, 2013; Suny, 1993). This maneuver, fostered by Russian colonialist policy, profoundly altered the pre-existing demographic balance and laid the foundation for subsequent tensions, which manifested more evidently in the early 20th century (Smith, 1999).

In that respect, it is necessary to examine the population data, which indicates that while the 1823 Russian military census documented a 91% Muslim majority in Karabakh, the demographics shifted by the late 19th century after migration, resulting in Muslims comprising 64.8% and Armenians 34.8%. By 1886, Armenians constituted 58% of the population in the Shusha District (De Waal, 2003). Consequently, the demographic balance tilted, underscoring the potency of Russia's colonial strategy, which facilitated Armenian immigration coupled with the mass departure of Muslims (Walsh, 2021).

Throughout the Russian dominance era, simmering tensions between Azeri Turks and Armenians continually escalated. These tensions reached a zenith around the 1905 Russian Revolution (Walsh, 2021). The upsurge of Armenian nationalism in the late 19th century only aggravated matters, resulting in outbreaks of inter-communal violence across Baku, Karabakh, Ganja, Erivan, and other regions during 1905 -1906 (Smith, 2001).

The seismic impacts of the Great War in 1914 led to the disintegration of Tsarist Russia and the eventual collapse of the Ottoman Empire paved the way for the birth of nation-states in the region and triggered the mass migration of approximately less than a half million Armenian residents of the Ottoman Empire in accordance with the Relocation Law of 1915. While many Armenians in these territories have been transferred to Ottoman territories

remaining outside the battleground, a major portion of the Armenian population emigrated to Russia. According to presumptions, approximately 420.000 Armenians have migrated to Russia in this period (Azer, 2013).

By May 1918, the founding of the Republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia set the territorial dispute over Karabakh within a broader inter-state framework. Despite Karabakh's initial incorporation into the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan, Armenia soon asserted territorial rights, leading to intensified military skirmishes between Azeri Turks and Armenians in the region (De Waal, 2003).

In this tumultuous setting, the Caucasus Islamic Army, led by Nuri Pasha and comprising a significant Azerbaijani contingent, stepped in during September 1918. They defended the nascent Azerbaijani republic against a coalition of British imperialists, Russian Soviets, and Armenian nationalists. However, with the Ottomans' defeat in the war, British forces under General Thomson entered Azerbaijan, recognizing Karabakh as an Azerbaijani territory. By August 1919, Thomson managed to secure Armenian acquiescence to Azerbaijani authority in Karabakh and subsequently handed control back to the Baku government. Still, this brief British stint from 1919 to 1920 left the national borders unresolved (Suny, 1993).

Henceforth, the Armenian government, under Dashnak influence, persisted in their militaristic endeavors for the Nagorno-Karabakh and Zangezur territories (Walsh, 2021). In March 1920, following an assault by Armenian forces on Karabakh, Azerbaijani troops were redirected, leaving the state's northern frontier vulnerable. This strategic shift facilitated the Red Army's entrance into the Southern Caucasus. Consequently, the territorial demarcation in the region was orchestrated by the triumphant Bolsheviks and the conflict that only was concluded with the Red Army's takeover of the Southern Caucasus in 1920 (Bournoutian, 2002; Walsh, 2021).

Amidst a series of deliberations between 1921 and 1923 aimed at diffusing tensions, Nagorno-Karabakh was conferred an autonomous status in 1923. Although its sovereignty

was retained within Azerbaijan, it was officially designated as the "Autonomous Nagorno-Karabakh Region" in November 1924. This status was later reaffirmed by the 1936 constitution of Soviet Russia, renaming it the "Autonomous Nagorno-Karabakh Region" (NKAR) (Azer, 2013).

Following the conquest of the Bolsheviks, a territorial delineation in the region was imposed, carving out the mountainous portion of Karabakh from Azerbaijan and the adjacent provinces to form the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO). This decision was influenced by Stalin, who ensured that the boundary encapsulated a significant portion of the Armenian populace within this autonomous region (Cornell, 1999). In particular, between 1948 and 1953, with Kremlin backing, a significant wave of deportations occurred, and these expatriations drastically altered the region's political landscape (Askerov, 2020). By 1988, the Azerbaijani populace within the NKAO had dwindled to less than 20% following mass deportations from Armenia (Swietochowski, 1995). Primarily, key Muslim areas such as Shusha and Aghdam were also incorporated within this delineation due to their geographical and economic significance. This created an Armenian-dominated enclave within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. While this autonomy allowed for Armenian ascendancy within the NKAO, it also sowed seeds for future violent conflict (Walsh, 2021).

This suppression of the underlying conflict created a false sense of stability within the Transcaucasian region as a result of the Soviet Union's efforts (Smith, 2001). However, as time passed, the unresolved national issues resurfaced, leading to renewed tensions and conflicts between ethnic inhabitants in the following years.

In the backdrop of General Secretary Gorbachev's transformative policies of Perestroika and Glasnost during the late 1980s, the Armenian populace of both the Nagorno Karabakh region and the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic began campaigning for 'Miatsum', or right for self-determination called for the unification of Soviet Armenia with the Nagorno Karabakh region of Soviet Azerbaijan (Efegil & Kasimli, 2015). Hence, this period witnessed a rejuvenation of Armenian nationalism, propelling the region into the First Karabakh War.

Armenia's strategic pivot towards self-determination was influenced by its burgeoning resonance within the international community, reflecting a global shift in political sentiment (Askerov & Maykov, 2015).

In 1988, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resurfaced and escalated rapidly, exacerbated by the Gorbachev administration's inability to gauge the potentially detrimental effects of the dispute, not just on local inhabitants but also on the territorial integrity of the Soviet Union itself (Askerov, 2020). The Kremlin's initial vacillating stance underscored its vain hope for the conflict's natural de-escalation. Such hesitancy played a role in transforming what began as a nonviolent dispute into a full-blown conflict, as Azerbaijanis resisted Armenian demands for territorial transfer (Askerov et. Al, 2015).

During the same period, Armenia's parliament adopted several legislative acts seeking to assert control over Karabakh. For example, in June 1988, the Armenian SSR Supreme Soviet approved NKAO's request to unify with Armenia (Masih and Krikorian). Subsequently, in December 1989, the Armenian Parliament decreed unification with NKAO and included the Shaumyan and Khanlar districts (Baguirov, 1998). In a significant move, the Karabakh Soviet of the NKAO declared its unilateral secession from Azerbaijan in July 1988 (Walsh, 2021). Bolstered by a robust and influential diaspora in many Western nations, Armenians progressively focused on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, organizing protests that eventually descended into violence. The climax of this escalation was witnessed in the latter half of 1988, when Armenian paramilitaries orchestrated widespread ethnic cleansing of Azerbaijanis, resulting in significant casualties and numerous villages being vacated (Azer, 2013).

Amidst escalating tensions, the Moscow administration resorted to an exceptional measure on 25 July 1990, opting to dissolve the armed forces of both nations, a decision not stipulated in the Soviet constitution (Azer, 2013). While the Armenians maintained a clear objective during the 1988-90 timeline, the Azerbaijanis were marred by confusion, much of it stemming from Gorbachev's ambiguous policies (Walsh, 2021). By mid-1990, Armenians

were already consolidating a national army in anticipation of the Soviet Union's impending disintegration, a preparation that outpaced the Azerbaijanis by roughly eighteen months. Baku's faith in the Soviet Union to safeguard its territorial and civilian interests in Karabakh became increasingly misplaced, especially as the Soviet Union commenced its decline in late 1991.

In March 1991, despite Gorbachev had already officially recognized Nagorno-Karabakh as a part of Azerbaijan and urged the involved parties to engage in negotiations, the conflict escalated further. By May 1991, Armenian forces, having become adept at paramilitary operations, executed a series of terrorist attacks. One such incident involved the bombing of trains in Baku, leading to the death of 53 Azerbaijani Turks in May 1991. The situation became even more tense when Azerbaijan proclaimed its independence on 30 August 1991. Responding to this significant shift, Armenia prompted the governing councils in both Nagorno-Karabakh and its northern region of Goranboy (Shahumian) to announce their own independence. Subsequently, on 31 August, the local administration in these regions declared their "independence" (Azer, 2013).

Beginning in September 1991, with the initiation of a campaign, Armenian forces aimed to isolate Azerbaijani communities within Nagorno-Karabakh. Their offensives intensified in early 1992, resulting in the capture of Azerbaijani villages and displacement of residents. Notably, events like the massacre at Khojaly further terrorized the Azerbaijani civilian populace (Askerov & Matyok, 2015). By May 1992, Armenian forces had seized Shusha, an Azerbaijani cultural and strategic landmark. Although Azerbaijan tried to safeguard its territorial integrity, Russian military aid to Armenia altered the conflict's dynamics in favor of the Armenians (Walsh, 2021).

Throughout the conflict, Armenia's ability to maintain internal stability was pivotal to its military success. The Yerevan government channeled all resources with the military support of Soviet Russia towards securing Karabakh and quelled internal dissent. Under the leadership of Ter-Petrosyan, Armenia crafted a clear strategy that capitalized on the political

and military chaos in Azerbaijan (Walsh, 2021). By 1994, while a ceasefire period was declared, their military efforts culminated in a significant victory, capturing not only Nagorno-Karabakh but also seven adjoining Azerbaijani-populated districts, which equaled nearly 20% of Azerbaijan's national territory (Sermercioglu, 2021).

Consequently, the First Karabakh War led to the displacement of over one million Azerbaijanis, largely to other parts of Azerbaijan, and the Ceasefire agreement brokered by the Minsk Group was declared in May 1994 (Azer, 2013; Askerov, 2020).

1.2.From The Ceasefire Agreement to The Second War In 2020

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has issued four resolutions since 1993 in response to the clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh. In all of these resolutions, the UNSC made decisions aimed at ending Armenia's occupation of this region and swiftly establishing a ceasefire. These resolutions, numbered 822, 853, 874, and 884, have consistently reaffirmed "the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Azerbaijani Republic" and all other states in the region. They have also emphasized the "inadmissibility of the use of force for the acquisition of territory" (For further details, see Semercioglu, 2021, p. 51; Congressional Research Service, 2021, p.3).

The Armenians, on the other hand, disregarded the United Nations and international legal principles and impeded the numerous endeavors at conflict resolution undertaken by entities like the Minsk Group. To support peace negotiations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) established the Minsk Group in 1994. This group has been co-chaired by the United States, France, and Russia.

In retrospect, the most substantial attempt at reaching a peaceful settlement came from Levon Ter-Petrosyan, who served as Armenia's first President after gaining independence. Ter-Petrosyan recognized the significant challenges that the consequences of the war and

occupation were posing for Armenia. He believed it was crucial for Armenia to reach a peaceful agreement with Azerbaijan regarding Karabakh, but he faced opposition from Karabakh hardliners and was eventually removed from power. In October 1999, a tragic shooting occurred in the Yerevan parliament, resulting in the deaths of high-level politicians including the Prime Minister, Speaker, and several other politicians. This event deeply unsettled Armenia and sent a clear message that those advocating for a peaceful resolution to the Karabakh conflict were in jeopardy. Subsequently, the Armenian government set its resolution objective on full independence for Karabakh, a demand they were aware the Azerbaijani government could never accept (Walsh, 2021).

In November 2007, during a meeting in Madrid, the Minsk Group co-chairs outlined their efforts to reach a peaceful resolution based on six "Basic Principles for the Peaceful Settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," often referred to as the Madrid Principles (Congressional Research Service, 2021, p.3). Importantly, the first principle included in the final version, states the explicit commitment to the "return of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani control." The following five principles were designed to establish a broad framework for an agreement that would secure peace, stability, and development in the future for both Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as the entire region (see, Statement by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries, 2009). Despite numerous rounds of negotiations and meetings held between Armenia and Azerbaijan aimed at implementing these principles, little headway was achieved. The fundamental objectives of the two countries were principally at odds. Armenian and Nagorno-Karabakh leaders aspired to secure a negotiated resolution leading to Nagorno-Karabakh's separation from Azerbaijan, whether as an independent state or in union with Armenia. Besides, the Armenian leadership perceived the territories around Nagorno-Karabakh, as a "buffer zone and a bargaining tool for discussions regarding Nagorno-Karabakh's ultimate status" (Congressional Research Service, 2021, p.4). Conversely, to the Azerbaijani side, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan have been non-negotiable and the return of Azerbaijani citizens to their homes was an additional prerequisite for achieving peace (Ibid).

The 1994 ceasefire agreement was violated repeatedly until the outbreak of the Second Karabakh War. Between the 1994 cease-fire and 2020, an estimated large number of military troops and civilians on both sides died annually in fighting along the lengthy "line of contact," as well as along the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan (Semercioglu, 2021; Congressional Research Service, 2021).

Fearing fierce opposition from hardline nationalists, the Armenian government consistently refrained from implementing the peace resolution principles endorsed by the Minsk Group. The ineffective steps of the Minsk Group to take decisive action to compel Armenia to reach a settlement led to growing frustration in Baku. Consequently, Azerbaijan found itself ensnared in a seemingly endless process that Armenia was content to prolong (Walsh, 2021).

As faith in the effectiveness of the Minsk Group declined, a significant escalation occurred in April 2016 during a four-day period, known as the 2016 Four-Day War. This conflict is said to serve as a warning that went unheeded. It resulted in a limited victory for Azerbaijan, involving minor territorial gains, and showcased its modernized army and advanced military technology (Walsh, 2021).

However, the 2016 escalation had unfavorable outcomes for Armenia. It experienced substantial human casualties and territorial losses for the first time in over two decades. Additionally, the conflict revealed Armenia's technical disadvantage compared to Azerbaijan. This escalation also had repercussions on Armenia's domestic politics (Valiyev & Gafarova, 2020).

Notably, the change in leadership in Armenia during the spring of 2018, with Nikol Pashinyan at the helm of the post-revolutionary government, was significant. Pashinyan was not aligned with the Karabakh Clan (Gamaghelyan & Rumyantsev, 2021; Walsh, 2021). As a result, there was hope that this change in Armenian leadership could inject new energy and dynamics into the negotiations concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Subsequent meetings between Pashinyan and Aliyev revealed that the parties were still significantly distant from reaching a compromise (Gamaghelyan, 2021). Pashinyan's well-known declaration, "Karabakh is Armenia. Period!", along with the announcement of moving Artsakh's capital to Shusha (Shushi in Armenian) and attempts to alter the established negotiation format by involving the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh in the process, elicited a notably strong and fierce rejection in Azerbaijan (Walsh, 2021, p.27).

The events, including the contested election in March 2020 held by the self-declared Artsakh Republic, the Tovuz clashes in July 2020 along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border - an area of strategic importance for Azerbaijan due to its role in supplying gas and oil to Europe through the Southern Gas Corridor - were consistent with the "new war for new territories" policy announcement made by the Defense Minister of Armenia in March 2019.

The initial phase of the 2020 Armenia-Azerbaijan War in July 2020, along the northern border of Armenia and Azerbaijan, coupled with the lack of efforts to de-escalate the situation. The July clashes also had severe consequences for Azerbaijan, resulting in substantial losses, including the death of a respected General, Polad Hashimov (Idan & Shaffer, 2021).

The clashes erupted just before the initiation of the Southern Gas Corridor's operations. The initiated attacks on Tovuz by Armenian military and subsequently followed with shelling of Nakhchivan, an Azerbaijani exclave. According to Shaffer, the timing and location of these attacks were deliberately chosen by Yerevan to create the perception that Armenia had the capability to disrupt this critical energy and transit corridor (Idan, 2021).

On September 27, 2020, major new fighting erupted between Azerbaijani forces and Armenian/Nagorno-Karabakh forces who controlled Nagorno-Karabakh. Over a span of six weeks, Azerbaijani armed forces gradually advanced against Armenian/Nagorno-Karabakh positions in areas surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh and eventually within Nagorno-Karabakh itself. Throughout October 2020, with a significant progress towards the southern lowlands

situated between Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijani forces regained territories in the regions of Fuzuli, Jabrayil, and Zangilan, eventually securing Azerbaijan's entire border with Iran (Congressional research, 2021).

In retaliation for their losses, the Armenian troops launched attacks on the towns of Ganja, Barda, and Tartar in Azerbaijan that were not on the battlefield. The strikes on October 11 and October 17 caused immense damage in Ganja, destroying houses with missiles, and killing civilians. On November 8, 2020, Azerbaijan successfully regained control of Shusha, a pivotal Azerbaijani cultural center, and a highly strategic location in Karabakh. This achievement significantly weakened the military position of the Armenian/Nagorno-Karabakh forces, as Shusha held the key to dominating the entire territory. Yerevan was prompted to accept a ceasefire mediated by Russia after the loss of Shusha. As a consequence, Azerbaijan successfully reclaimed sovereignty over Karabakh and liberated most of its lands, bringing an end to the 2020 War (Walsh, 2021).

1.3.The Trilateral Agreement

On November 9, 2020, with the mediation of Russia, a joint statement was issued by Azerbaijani President Aliyev, Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan, and Russian President Putin, which has been referred to as a ceasefire or peace agreement by several media reports (Congressional research, 2021). The November 9, 2020, agreement comprises nine points, including a ceasefire, the exchange of prisoners and the deceased, the return of the Nagorno-Karabakh region to Azerbaijan, the withdrawal of Armenian forces from the region, and the establishment of secure road transportation, among other provisions (see, Congressional Research, 2021).

However, certain issues, such as the official boundaries of Nagorno-Karabakh and guarantees for the region's self-governance, are not explicitly addressed in the November 9, 2020, Agreement. It's important to note that the basic principles behind these issues are considered as a guiding package to include agreements on all relevant matters.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Enemy Image, Collective Traumas and Othering Process

The Karabakh War initially manifested as an internal conflict within the Soviet Union, with Azerbaijan being a constituent republic. However, the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 dramatically altered the political landscape. As per the principle of ‘uti possidetis juris’, an integral tenet of international law, Azerbaijan retained its territorial integrity (Shaw, 1997). This principle, historically formulated to avert territorial disputes, aims to uphold the boundaries of colonies that transition into independent states (Askerov, 2020). Consequently, it transforms existing demarcations into internationally accredited borders (Shaw, 1997). Following this, when Azerbaijan declared its independence, its previous boundaries as a Soviet republic attained the status of international borders. With both Armenia and Azerbaijan emerging as sovereign entities following the Soviet Union's dissolution, the nature of the Karabakh dispute evolved from a civil unrest to an international contention between two independent nations (Askerov, 2020).

From the 1980s onwards, both Armenian and Azerbaijani elites permeated their respective political and media landscapes with narratives steeped in extreme nationalism, thereby promoting mutual hostility based on ethnical differences. By the mid-90s, this entrenched discourse of hate and the deep-rooted sense of victimhood took their place as "selected traumas", in Volkan's words, in the collective memory of both nation-states (Volkan, 2001; Terzyan, 2018).

The concept of ‘Other’ is what sets oneself apart from other nations, thereby establishing differentiation from another nation. The portrayal of the Other evolves as a consequence of crafting a national identity, with the enemy image representing an extreme manifestation of this. The genesis of an enemy image involves perceiving another entity as menacing and possessing significant power. This image functions as a portrayal of the adversary, emphasizing the fundamental disparities that are deemed non-negotiable (Gevorgyan, 2023).

Considering the overall period from the establishment of both Armenia and Azerbaijan Republic till the Second Karabakh War, it becomes necessary to evaluate the nature of elite-level political discourse, the emergence of 'enemy images' for both countries and the Other's identity construction via 'self and other' dichotomy from the political psychology perspective.

Within the realm of intractable conflicts, the notion of 'images'—cognitive representations of social entities encompassing both affective and behavioral dimensions—provides insight into mutual perceptions of adversaries and oneself. In these drawn-out and devastating disputes, the antagonist is typically depicted as the exclusive architect of unfair harm, bearing sole responsibility for the anguish experienced by the opposing side (Gevorgyan, 2023).

In a close scrutinization of Armenian collective consciousness, it is understood that Armenians' perceptions of Turkey and Azerbaijan are not mere manipulations but are profoundly ingrained in their sociopolitical understanding and psyche.

According to Aram Terzyan (2018), the modern Armenian political identity is intricately intertwined with a profound sentiment of 'victimhood,' rooted deeply in the memories of the "Armenian Genocide". He contends that there is a discernible trend in Armenian foreign policy narratives that transfers the negative connotations associated with the Ottoman Empire to contemporary Turkey and Azerbaijan. This tendency became even more pronounced in 1998 when the Armenian administration broached the topic of "Genocide" recognition, pushing the two nations towards heightened tension. Turkey's unwavering support for Azerbaijan, particularly evident in the blockade placed on Armenia as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been a significant factor in intensifying this animosity in the Armenian society. The deep-seated cultural, linguistic, religious, political, and economic ties between Turkey and Azerbaijan braced with the slogan 'one state, two nations,' further solidified Armenia's shared adversary image (Terzyan, 2018, p. 156). This alignment and shared sentiment have entrenched Armenia's view of both nations as historical foes.

From the constructivist and poststructuralist perspectives in identity studies, emphasis on the pivotal role of the "Other" has been defined as crucial in shaping one's self-identity. It is thus suggested that unless an entity defines what it is not, its perception of its own identity would remain vague, emphasizing the significance of the "Other" (Tamaki, cited in Terzyan, 2018). In this process, enemy imagery turns into a crucial weapon that aids in self-definition as well as the establishment and protection of national borders via the depiction of external dangers (Campbell, 1998, p. 11). This perspective aligns with Petersson's argument that negative stereotypes and the portrayal of adversaries are vital in delineating the boundaries that enable collectives to forge and articulate their shared identities (Petersson, cited in Terzyan, 2018).

Furthermore, the concept of "selected traumas", formulated by Volkan, is abstracted for events that involve intense feelings of humiliation and victimization inflicted on one group by another group. As a result, events that were not mourned, cause pain, and create a sense of victimization become selected traumas for a group. The mental imprint of traumas that cause shame and hurt feelings becomes a unifying element of in-group identity, involving other generations (Çevik, 2010).

Collective memories or shared mental experiences of a group often arise from the mythologization of conflicts between one's nation or ethnic group and an adversary. These legends become embedded in children's psychic worlds from a very early age and become more effective throughout their growth process. Thus, identity formation is influenced by both external narratives and internalized experiences (Çevik, 2010).

Enemy images are therefore, strategically crafted to evoke fear by depicting the adversary as “barbaric, cruel, uncivilized, immoral, and treacherous”. Such portrayals accentuate the perceived threat and are underscored by the notion that the enemy possesses aggressive intentions (Terzyan, 2018).

Thus, Armenia's deeply ingrained past sense of 'victimhood' has colored its perceptions of Türkiye, the principal 'perpetrator', and its close ally Azerbaijan. This perspective

underscores the manner in which Turkey and Azerbaijan are positioned as the 'Other' in Armenian discourse, a crucial dynamic given how foreign policy in Armenia increasingly incorporates the potent sentiments of its vast and influential diaspora (Terzyan, 2018).

At this point, the Armenian diaspora's significant influence on domestic foreign policy and the crafting of Armenian identity cannot be understated. Referring to the growing body of international relations literature that recognizes diasporas as pivotal actors (Shain and Barth, cited in Terzyan, 2018), this should be noted that the Armenian diaspora has long been one of the decisive actors in shaping their homeland's foreign policies. The motivations underpinning the Armenian diaspora's identity have been and continue to be pivotal in constructivist analyses aimed at understanding the genesis of national identities (Terzyan, 2018).

Moreover, based on Sheffer's distinction, (2006), the Armenian Diaspora has shown the characteristics of an "ethnonational-religious" diaspora which maintains strong connections to their ancestral homelands, while resisting assimilative pressures that might dilute their distinct identities or their engagement in homeland politics (cited in Terzyan, 2018, p .157).

Influenced profoundly by the new generation of “Genocide” survivors – a significant portion of the Armenian Diaspora – the Armenian elite steadfastly perpetuated adversary images of both Turkey and Azerbaijan (Ibid, p. 157). This influential diaspora, owing to its acute sensitivity towards Armenian-Turkish-Azerbaijani relations, substantially circumscribed Armenia's foreign policy trajectory towards these nations. The core rationale behind the activities of the Armenian diaspora has been articulated as the intention of deepening their unity with their homeland by contributing to intensifying the collective fear and distrust towards Azerbaijan and Turkey.

Nevertheless, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict stands as a testament to the politicization of ethnic issues, where cultural distinctions played a pivotal role in shaping societal identities. The conflict also underscored the harrowing consequences of ethnic cleansing in the

construction of these identities (Gamaghelyan, 2021). According to Brubaker (1998), conflicts articulated through 'ethno-nationalist' lenses are inherently difficult to resolve (cited in Gamaghelyan, 2018, p.273, 280). In the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, this ethnic dichotomy amplified extremist nationalist views and granted them a disproportionate influence in society. Hence, the groups / ruling elites advocating for peace, had been further marginalized, through either compelling them to align with these extremes or remain marginalized (Gamaghelyan, 2021).

Therefore, following the First Karabakh War, both Armenian and Azerbaijani positions were firmly opposed to finding peaceful solutions because of their shared traumas from war, which were deeply ingrained in their collective memory (Glavanakova, 2016). The political discourse continues to be heavily influenced by the idea that peace can only be achieved by a decisive military victory over the opposition, despite both sides claiming their commitment to "achieving sustainable peace" (Novosti Armenia 2020b).

According to Smith (1996), the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict inherently fostered a dichotomy, distinguishing a non-ethnic "Us" from the ethnic "Others" (cited in Trupia,2017).

On the one hand, the Republic of Azerbaijan persistently asserted its territorial integrity and viewed the retrieval of Armenian-occupied territories as essential for negotiations, which they hold responsible for supporting an unlawful occupation. Additionally, Baku further emphasized their intention to resettle Karabakh (Qarabağ) referencing international law and its historical ties prior to 1923's Sovietization (Trupia, 2017). On the other hand, the Republic of Armenia has consistently emphasized its pursuit of independence and recognition as a means of ensuring safety for all Armenians safeguarding them from the uneven annexation of "Artsakh" (Yunusof, 2005, p. 28). This perspective is rooted in the contention that the decision made by Stalin to place the Karabakh Armenians under the jurisdiction of the Turkic-Muslim Azerbaijan SSR was a grave error (Savin, 2015, p. 112; Yunusof, 2005).

Furthermore, the Nagorno-Karabakh rivalry is also a concrete example of the emotional importance of ethnic and military hostility for both sides. Both states have painted their nations in a light of glory, with deep-seated loyalties and sentiments attached to their respective homelands. Simultaneously, they endured the grief and anguish of the countless individuals who lost lives, families, and homes due to forced population transfers and the ravages of war (Gamaghelyan, 2021).

The memories of historical intercommunal tensions between the two societies have transformed “spiritual and psychological wounds into a collective trauma” shared by both nations (Grigorian, cited in Trupia, 2017).

For Armenians, the 1992-94 war is perceived as a successful effort to prevent a repeat of the so-called "Armenocide" committed by the Ottomans in Anatolia in 1915 (Peachey, 1993, p. 35). In other words, the Armenian confrontation over Nagorno-Karabakh was seen as an effort to safeguard the intrinsic "Armenian-ness" of Armenians.

The Sumgait “pogrom” stands out among Armenians as a stark example of intercommunal violence. This city, which housed numerous refugees from Armenia, witnessed an aggressive attack on Armenians by a group of enraged individuals. The incidents ended with the deaths of 26 Armenians and 6 Azerbaijanis, with numerous others injured. More importantly, the sheer shock and scale of the violence have further deepened the emotional wound among both Armenians and ordinary Azerbaijanis. Yet, despite the Azerbaijani government subsequently contended that the Soviet secret service (KGB) manipulated several of these refugees to incite “pogroms” against Armenians, aiming to destabilize the area and reinforce the republics' reliance on Moscow (Ziyadov, 2006), the events have become emblematic in the memories of the Armenian society and heightened Armenians' fear of the ‘Turkic-Muslim enemy’, which left a lasting mark on the community's collective consciousness (Trupia, 2017, p. 34). Following the incidents, the 14,000 Armenians left the city unharmed (Ziyadov, 2006).

While the Sumgait incidents left a painful imprint on the collective memory of Armenians, the Khojaly massacre profoundly shocked and devastated Azerbaijanis on the other side. Before February 26, 1992, Khojaly was a relatively obscure town in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast, notable for its predominantly Azerbaijani population and strategic significance due to its main airport. However, the events on the night of February 25-26 forever altered its historical narrative. Armenian forces, with the assistance of the 366th former Soviet Regiment, launched an assault on the town, targeting largely defenseless civilians. Azerbaijani sources report the harrowing aftermath: “Approximately 613 individuals killed—including 63 children, 106 women, and 70 elderly—and 487 injured, with 76 among them being children. Additionally, an estimated 1,275 people were taken hostage” during this incident (Ziyadov, 2006, p. 39).

This horrifying episode left an indelible mark on the Azerbaijani psyche and deepened the psychological rift with Armenians, who were seen as not only responsible for the massacre but also prepared for intense warfare (Kirvelyté, 2015, p. 25).

Therefore, the Khojaly massacre, the Sumgait ‘pogrom’, and the capture of Shusha by Armenian forces in May 1992 not only symbolize Nagorno-Karabakh's shift to de facto Armenian control but also stand as haunting reminders of the horrible human tragedies and underscore Azerbaijan's pursuit of justice (Trupia, 2017, p. 35).

2.2.Embedment of the Mutual Violence

The 1994 ceasefire did not pave the way for constructive peace initiatives such as inter-societal dialogues, transitional justice, or joint reconciliation efforts. Instead, Azerbaijan focused on recovering from the political and economic upheavals of the initial conflict, gearing up for potential future engagements. Concurrently, Armenia concentrated on securing territories acquired during the first war, adjusting to a continuous standoff with its neighboring nation, and grappling with economic seclusion. Both nations remained steadfast

in their belief that sustainable peace could only be achieved through exerting dominance over the other (Atanesyan, 2020).

This was followed by an information warfare in the post-ceasefire period with intensive propaganda campaigns executed through mass media and education system (Atanesyan, 2020).

The perpetuation of animosity thus, was institutionalized through within the framework of violence in public school curricula and mass media, with ruling elites frequently seizing opportunities to dehumanize the opposing side, further embedding these sentiments in the collective psyche (Ayunts & Zolyan, 2016).

In political arenas, the Nagorno-Karabakh issue has served as a unifying force for both Armenian and Azerbaijani elites. These elites manipulated historical violence, reconstructing past narratives to influence new generations, especially through public education and broadcasting. These narratives often painted a violent image of the 'Other' (Trupia, 2017).

Further, both communities have cultivated a form of communicative mourning, drawing heavily on memories of occupations, killings, and losses. This mode of expression has become particularly salient in the political rhetoric of dominant circles, serving to amplify in-group cohesion and further entrench antagonistic perceptions of the 'Other'.

Yet, scholars, like Šutinienė (cited in Trupia, 2017), Glavanakova (2016) and Trupia (2017) urge us to question the origins of the 'Other' portrayal and ascertain who crafts the history-oriented dominant narratives surrounding tragic events. As a sociologist from Yerevan, Lyudmilla Hartunyan particularly has emphasized on the overshadowed dignified past of her nation, contrasting it with the deeply ingrained image of Armenians as 'victims' within their society (Trupia, 2017, p.36).

In his psychoanalytic study on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Trupia (2017), highlighted how the anguish tied to the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh for Azerbaijanis and the corresponding dread among Armenians regarding potential loss of the region, both resonate deeply within the collective memories of these nations. According to him, the relations between traumas intertwined with national identity are mutually reinforcing. Therefore, the psychological dimension of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict naturally strengthens the image of 'Other' for both states, 'further exacerbating existing stereotypes, prejudices and the emotional distress' that accompanies them (Trupia, 2017, p.36).

Such enemy images harbor intense emotional aversions, diminishing mutual empathy and fostering a zero-sum mindset. As these entrenched viewpoints solidify over time, they resist modification, further exacerbating the tension and sustaining the conflict's cyclical nature (Badulescu, 2017). Thus, grasping an understanding on how the 'enemy image' was mirrored in the formal narratives of Armenian leadership about Azerbaijanis or vice versa and how the sentiments of victimhood and trauma molded the perception of the 'Other', will be the core discussion topic in the subsequent section.

2.3.Political discourse

A. Armenian Political Elites Discourses

The evolution of Armenia's foreign policy discourse reveals significant insights into its perception of Turkey and Azerbaijan. In the mid-1990s, the first Armenian President, L. Ter-Petrosyan, endeavored to mitigate prevalent anti-Turkish/Azerbaijani sentiments within Armenian public discourse, and, notably, aimed to dismantle the entrenched victim-perpetrator narrative. Especially, during his presidential period from 1994 to 1998, he emphasized that the contemporary challenges facing Armenia necessitated relegating

historical disputes to the periphery, highlighting the economic and political advantages of fostering collaboration with both Azerbaijan and Turkey (Terzyan, 2018).

Ter-Petrosyan, remarkably put efforts to shift Armenia's perspective towards Azerbaijan and Turkey, transforming their image from historical adversaries to potential allies. According to Terzyan (2018), this transition aimed to mitigate nationalistic feelings by fostering a 'more neutral, civic identity' within Armenia. Hence, Armenian-Turkish rapprochement became the core theme of his policy agenda. Besides, in his speeches he underscored the leveraging pragmatic political and economic interests over nationalistic identity sentiments in Armenia's foreign policy since he viewed identity and collective memory as barriers to his nation's progress (Ibid).

"We always remember historical conflicts but, guided by our country's realistic interests, we must overcome our pain and establish normal interstate relations..."¹

What is more, he reinterpreted the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a conspiracy instigated by the Kremlin against both Armenia and Azerbaijan as a part of his pragmatic approach to his political thinking. In sum, the overarching strategy, under Ter-Petrosyan's leadership, aimed to dismantle the deeply rooted mistrust associated between Turkey and Azerbaijan, facilitating a resolution to longstanding tensions informed by past enmities (Terzyan, 2018).

Ter-Petrosyan's peace-oriented agenda failed to find a foothold among the Armenian political elite and in the broader post-war society. His position, perceived as being "pro-Turkish and pro-Azerbaijani, faced stark criticism from not only the leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh but also from Armenia's military, media outlets, opposition parties, and diaspora organizations" (Terzyan, 2016, p. 165). His controversial stances eventually led to his resignation in 1998, paving the way for Robert Kocharyan, a noted figure from the Karabakh war and the first president of the contested Nagorno-Karabakh region, to take over the reins of leadership.

¹ Ter-Petrosyan, 2006, p. 300; cited in Terzyan, 2018

At the beginning of his term, Kocharyan distinctly separated himself from the policies of his predecessor, taking a more assertive stance towards historical adversaries. Indeed, Ter-Petrosyan's two successors - Robert Kocharyan (1998- 2008) and Serzh Sargsyan (2008-2018) have strong relations with Nagorno-Karabakh, where is their place of origin (Trupia, 2017). This trend illuminates the propensity within Armenia to favor politicians from the "Karabakh Clan" for prominent political positions (Kirvelyté, 2015, p.29).

Nevertheless, under Kocharyan's leadership, the portrayal of Azerbaijan and Turkey intensified in adversarial terms, depicting them as unyieldingly aggressive, combative, and even as morally subordinate. Hence, Kocharyan, with his speeches and foreign policy agenda, bringing the Armenian “Genocide” allegations to the agenda of the United Nations and demanding Turkey's prosecution, meticulously steered clear of any actions that might tarnish his staunch stance. His key supporters, including the Armenian military, the nationalist 'Dashnaktsutyun' party, and nationalist constituents, ensured that he did not tread the path taken by Ter-Petrosyan (Terzyan, 2018).

Last but not least, Kocharyan, in his narratives, extended the discourse by incorporating the concept of 'ethnic incompatibility', referencing the Sumgait incidents to underscore the untenability of Armenians living within Azerbaijan. Overall, he persistently portrayed his nation's plight as a direct result of Turkish-Azerbaijani hostilities (Ibid).

Contrastingly, when Sezg Sargsyan's administration assumed office in Armenia (2008), they promptly highlighted that the nation's progression from mere survival to genuine development would be hindered as long as the blockade imposed by neighboring countries persisted. Notably, in a notable address, Sargsyan distinctly conveyed his aspiration to normalize ties with Turkiye, asserting that it was the opportune moment to institute transformative measures altering the prevailing status quo. This stance paved the way for renewed diplomatic efforts, culminating in the signing of a Protocol in October 2009 between the two nations (Terzyan, 2018).

According to some sources, the Armenian-Turkish reconciliation was hampered by Azerbaijan's discomfort with this rapprochement. However, the Sargsyan government faced robust critique from the globally influential Armenian diaspora (specifically in the USA and France) at the same time. Hence, Sargsyan, after setting aside the prospect of reconciliation with Türkiye, quickly amplified the portrayal of Armenia as a *victim* subjected to aggressions by a perpetrator to secure his position (Ibid).

Sargsyan's revised rhetoric aligned seamlessly with concepts deeply entrenched in the Armenian collective consciousness, particularly the inclination to attribute the tense relations and Armenia's blockade to Turkey. In Armenia's foreign policy discourse, the portrayal of Azerbaijan as the enemy was closely intertwined with that of Turkey. As time progressed, Sargsyan increasingly engaged in civilizational and cultural distinctions, characterizing Azerbaijan, with terms like 'barbaric', 'uncivilized', and 'dictatorial', while also accusing it of cultural and religious intolerance (Ibid).

An analysis of Armenia's official discourse from 2004 to 2016 conducted by Badulescu reveals three primary characteristics in the portrayal of Azerbaijanis as an enemy: “1) Dehumanization of the 'Other' 2) The tendency to overlap the image of the current enemy to the image of the historical enemy and the current experiences of victimization to other past traumatic experiences 3) The fear of national annihilation.” (Badulescu, 2017, pp. 78-81).

As a sample of dehumanization motive, Robert Kocharyan, during a speech he delivered at The Parliamentary Assembly of The Council of Europe on June 23, 2004, characterized the 1992-94 war as a belligerence initiated by Azerbaijani authorities with the ultimate goal of annexing the territory and conducting *ethnic cleansing* against Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh region (Badulescu, 2017).

Armenian depictions of Azerbaijanis, especially in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh war, were marked by strong negative evaluations, associating them with terms like "massacres," "atrocities," and "ethnic cleansing." Such descriptions, which allude to not only killing but

extreme violence and cruelty, aim to reinforce an "evil" image of Azerbaijanis. Additionally, Armenian leaders' references to 'events' from 1915 link past traumas and sentiments of victimhood to present narratives on Nagorno Karabakh, further painting Azerbaijanis as perpetrators against the Armenian people (Ibid).

During a speech on 28 January 2012, President Serzh Sargsyan, again explicitly drew a link between historical threats to the Armenian people and contemporary challenges, emphasizing the urgent need to prevent another potential "genocide", particularly targeting the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh (Armenians use the name of Artsakh to stress their historical relations with the region) (Ibid).

In 2018, Armenia's "Velvet Revolution" signaled the start of a momentous period of democracy and transformation. Two decades of autocratic government and pervasive corruption were challenged by a group of civil society leaders under the leadership of Nikol Pashinyan (Gamaghelyan, 2021).

The revolution disrupted the traditional security-democracy dichotomy in Armenia, which suggested that centralized power was necessary for security reasons (enemy threat). Under Pashinyan's leadership, Armenia's initial approach to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict experienced a notable shift (Shirinyan, 2018). The updated position on the conflict included a demand for the people of Karabakh to have a seat at the negotiation table, and Azerbaijan was urged to acknowledge the right to self-determination for the people of Karabakh.

However, the four-day fighting in April 2016 was still having an impact on the conflict discourse at that time (Shirinyan, 2018). To maintain his position, Pashinyan became a hard-line agitator over Karabakh after he faced unavoidable resistance in Armenia and Karabakh (Walsh, 2021). Following this, in the first half of 2019 with the introduction of the Ministry of Defense's policy of "new war, new territories", a threat from the military chief of 'Artsakh' to attack the energy infrastructure of Azerbaijan and the Prime Minister's proclamation that "Artsakh is Armenia" during rallies in Khankendi (Stephankerd) incited the idea of the

unification (Miatsum) (Walsh, 2021, pp. 27-28). Thus, the ongoing process with Azerbaijan was further undermined under the revolutionary government period.

B. Azerbaijani Political Elites Discourses

The process of creating an enemy image is mutual (Gevorgyan, 2023). Undoubtedly, a certain enemy image of Armenians exists within the collective consciousness of Azerbaijanis (Novikova, 2012). In the Azerbaijani political discourse, historical claims on Nagorno-Karabakh are rooted in ethnicity, culture, demography, and religion. For Azerbaijanis, Nagorno-Karabakh is particularly important since it is seen to be the location where the modern-day identity of Azerbaijan evolved. Furthermore, Karabakh is one of the major symbols of Azerbaijani nationalism emerged in the twentieth century. Therefore, the political discourse of Azerbaijani elites has gone beyond the simple 'us and them' dichotomy on Armenians due to their position on Nagorno-Karabakh. The primary claims that shaped both Azerbaijani foreign policy and everyday social life have been revolved around the misinterpretation of history by Armenians. Accordingly, Armenians are both denying historical facts and manipulating them to create their fake historical claims about NK (Tokluoglu, 2011).

In the aftermath of the first Karabakh war, both the Azerbaijani state and society underwent a profound shock. As a result of the war, the image of Armenia as the 'primary enemy,' casting Azerbaijanis as victims of Armenian aggression was intensified. The history archives of Azerbaijan provide documents on all the violent acts committed by Armenians. In addition to being labeled as "newcomers," Armenians were also defined to be "cruel," unreliable, and untrustworthy (Novikova, 2012). In this regard, a pioneering study by Toklukoglu (2011), which includes interviews with Azerbaijani political elites in 2001 and 2009, offers valuable insights into the actual discourse on Armenians. Excerpts from one interviewer as follows: *"All of these Armenian lies are planned against the Greater Turkish World, against Great Turkey.*

*Today these lies still continue. The Armenians kill each other and say that the Azerbaijanis did the killings. They do this to create conflicts between different nations”.*²

Furthermore, in the Azerbaijani political discourse, Armenians have consistently been portrayed as engaging in conspiracy attempts with Russia and being always receiving support from the Russians. According to certain Azerbaijani political figures, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been a Russian plan designed not only to separate Azerbaijan from Turkey but also to create a division between Azerbaijanis and Turks³. This is rooted in the idea that Russia has a longstanding and ongoing interest in maintaining influence over the Caucasus region by fostering divisions within the Turkish world (Toklukoglu, 2011).

Statements made by top Azerbaijani officials in international forums, negotiation meetings, and for the domestic audience have increasingly exhibited tones of militarization and aggression. Indeed, the Azerbaijani leadership made it clear that if diplomatic negotiations prove unsuccessful, the nation is ready to resort to military measures to address the conflict. It should be highlighted that the initial years of Azerbaijan’s independence were marked by a profound political and economic crisis, a civil war, Armenia’s aggression against Azerbaijan, and a conflict that led to the occupation of Azerbaijani territories. Subsequently, this dynamic was invoked to rationalize the suppression of political and social unrest and to exercise greater control over the country’s institutions and media channels (Novikova, 2012).

Furthermore, after the First Karabakh War’s defeat, Azerbaijan, under the leadership of Ilham Aliyev, consistently underscored the significance of military power in the first post-ceasefire era. The statement that territorial losses resulted from military and economic shortcomings in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse served as a solid ground for high-budget

² Excerpts from the interview with an Azerbaijani historian and Member of Parliament (TOKLUOGLU, 2011, p.1236)

³ From the interview with Akif Nagi, Shamil Mehdiyev from Organisation for the Liberation of Karabakh and with one of Heydar Aliyev’s former senior advisers (TOKLUOGLU, 2011, p.1237)

state investments in the military. Even during periods of economic and social upheaval, the public supported these expenditures (Terzyan, 2020).

“We will continue to build up our military capabilities. The weaponry and ammunition we have acquired in recent years suggest that we can accomplish any task”⁴(Azernews 2014).

According to Ismayilzada, from the time he came to power until 2018, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev’s discourse on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can be summarized as a transformation from “Years of Hope, Patience, Frustration” to “War”(Ismayilzada, 2021, p. 84).

According to Terzyan (2020), framing Armenia as 'belligerent' and 'destructive' has constructed the key aspect of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's discourse. Specifically, the Armenian government has been accused of 'freezing' the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution and causing instability in the region. However, he further claims that this heightened emphasis on portraying the enemy as ‘inferior’ serves an additional purpose — strengthening Aliyev’s personal leadership and centralizing power. By promoting a perception of ‘threat,’ the President successfully mobilizes Azerbaijani society against the perceived ‘aggressor.’ (Terzyan, 2020).

Nevertheless, the motivation of 'historical justice' and the return of Azerbaijanis to the occupied lands, including all historical Azerbaijani lands, gained support from all segments of society. This sentiment was particularly pronounced after the 2016 military confrontation, with the “Azerbaijani population, including opposition leaders, expressing a strong desire to unite around the supreme commander-in-chief” (president) (Shalala, 2016, p.13).

During the Security Council meeting on April 2, 2016, the President characterized Armenia's actions as a 'provocation' of the ceasefire agreement, while praising the military success of Azerbaijan, portraying it as a 'glorious victory' (Ismayilzada, 2021).

⁴ <http://www.azernews.az/azerbaijan/69476.html>

With the promising democratization process in Armenia, there were widespread beliefs that the evolving dynamics within Armenia would significantly impact the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Contrary to initial expectations of reconciliation, the absence of clear signals regarding compromise and led the Azerbaijani President to swiftly criticize the new government of Armenia, branding it as a 'repressive dictatorship' (Ibid, p. 90).

The Armenian lobby also characterized the Azerbaijani discourse, being defined as 'evil' and 'anti-Azerbaijani'. President Aliyev has consistently highlighted an ongoing information war, particularly waged by the Armenian lobby (Terzyan, 2020, p 50). He underscores that this war aims to discredit Azerbaijan, distort its realities, and portray it as a backward and undemocratic state to the global audience (Novikova, 2012).

This discourse is actually a reaction to the widespread campaign run by Armenia and the Armenian diaspora for the recognition of the Armenian "Genocide" on a global scale and their depiction of Azerbaijani state actions as a continuation of this alleged genocide (Ibid). Especially during the Second Karabakh War, Aliyev accused the Armenian lobby of collaborating with 'bribe-taking, and corrupt politicians' (Terzyan, 2020) aim to impose sanctions and generate international criticism in Azerbaijan in its efforts to regain control of its occupied lands.

The notion of an Armenian state governed by a racist ideology and being under the influence of the Armenian lobby has become institutionalized at both the government and civil society levels.

Overall, both anti-Armenian and anti-Azerbaijani propaganda have been consistently maintained at high level, with state institutions in both countries actively contributing to this effort. Ethnic hostility has often been justified through historical memory and narratives (Shalala, 2016). Last but not least, increasing intolerance within Azerbaijani and Armenian societies towards citizens who volunteer or accidentally engage with the 'foe' further

undermined the emergence of grassroots initiations to support everyday peace practices (Gamaghelyan, 2021). Therefore, the prevailing narratives put forward by policymakers, political elites, and academics shed light on how the conflicting parties legitimize their positions in the conflict.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Discourse analysis, a domain profoundly shaped by the intellectual contributions of scholars such as Norman Fairclough and Teun van Dijk, offers a unique lens to elucidate the intricate dynamics linking conflict, political ideology, and news coverage. As asserted by Fairclough (1995), discourse is not merely a mirror reflecting social reality but actively participates in its construction. This conceptual framework becomes particularly pertinent when examining the portrayal of conflict within media, which frequently harbors undertones of nationalist and ethnocentric ideologies (Fairclough, 1995).

According to the socio-cognitive account, ideologies form the basis of our social practices, and these practices are inherently connected to a cognitive aspect, including individuals' beliefs encompassing knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, norms, and values. In other words, the link between discourse and society is intrinsically tied to cognition, and it is the discourse that plays a pivotal role in shaping and reinforcing societal ideologies (van Dijk, 2000). In that regard, understanding these dynamics is crucial, as they shape the mental representations individuals construct about the world around them (Van Dijk, 1998; 2000).

Yet, before commencing on a socio-cognitive account of discourse, it is significant to refer to van Dijk's concept of ideology, which is defined from a multidisciplinary perspective in contrast to conventional approaches. In his account of ideology, the scholar underscores not only the social and political character of ideologies (as an instrument for power abuse) but also their socio-cognitive nature.

1. Ideology

Addressing ideologies without considering the nature and functions of socially shared ideas is deemed to be theoretically inadequate. Accordingly, ideology and discourse are multidisciplinary concepts that need to be examined in several fields of humanities and social sciences. Hence, the scholar categorizes the concept of ideology within the intersection of three primary clusters: 'discourse, cognition, and society' (van Dijk, 2012).

First of all, in order to delve into an analysis of language usage, text analysis, verbal communication, and interactions, the concept of 'discourse' is necessary. Secondly, the study of cognitive elements of ideologies, including their nature as ideas or beliefs, their interplay with opinions and knowledge, and their status as socially shared representations, is conducted within the realm of 'Cognition'. Lastly, the exploration of the social, political, cultural, and historical dimensions of ideologies, their foundation in group dynamics, and particularly their role in perpetuating or challenging dominance is conducted within the comprehensive sphere of 'Society' (van Dijk, 2012, p.7).

Cognitively, ideologies are a distinct form of social belief systems stored in long-term memory. They are socially shared among members of specific social groups or ideological communities. Essentially, ideologies are inherently social; there are no individual ideologies, only individual applications of ideologies. Therefore, the identity of social groups is not solely defined by their structural properties but also by their ideological underpinnings which have a cognitive dimension. Both cognitively and socially, ideologies evolve as shared resources that foster intragroup cohesion and cooperation. Consequently, the mental structures of ideologies and their associated practices are often polarized along the lines of ingroup-outgroup differentiation, typically framed as "Us" versus "Them" in ideological discourses (van Dijk, 2006, p.731)

2. Ideologies in the context of conflict

Ideologies emerge as a kind of conceptual self- and group identity, **often** in reference to 'Other' group. Within the conflict context, the ideologies about 'Other', are deeply ingrained within societal structures, manifest themselves in discourses, which then serve to further reinforce these ideologies within individual cognitive structures. These discourses are manifested through written and spoken communication. They infiltrate various aspects of society, including daily conversations, official meetings, policies, legislation, parliamentary discussions, political propaganda, educational materials, academic publications, cinema, television, and press coverage, among a myriad of other mediums. Therefore, the effectively established ideology of 'Other', is gradually becoming ingrained, unquestioned, and widely accepted by those who participate "in such discourse and interactions" (van Dijk, 2000, p.34).

Consequently, a discourse cannot be deemed as a neutral entity. It is deeply imbued with power dynamics prevailing in certain societies, often privileging ingroups over outgroups (Ibid).

3. The Media and the Conflict Discourse

Media narratives have also been instrumentalized in the process of 'Othering', a discursive practice that involves the construction of an in-group (us) and an out-group (them) (van Dijk, 2000, 2012). The media is deemed to be the primary source of public knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies, influencing both the general population and elite figures. It's essential to recognize that in this endeavor, the media collaborates with other elite groups, particularly politicians, professionals, and academics. Nevertheless, the media contributes to the establishment and reinforcement of biased or manipulated ideologies during conflicts where nationalist and ethnic discriminatory ideologies are at play (Van Dijk, 1998).

This is because the impact of the media is essentially rooted in its discursive and symbolic nature. Therefore, the media narratives are not just reflections of societal beliefs (Van Dijk,

2000). It is a tool primarily utilized for shaping public perceptions and attitudes, constructing group identities (such as 'us vs. them'), and legitimizing or delegitimizing various actions (Van Dijk, 1998, 2000).

In the intersection of discourse, ideology and conflict, the news, plays an integral role also in the discursive reproduction of enemy image during wartime. In other words, the role of media as a conduit of national and ethnic ideologies gets intensified during conflicts. It can serve as a powerful tool for political elites to shape public discourse and opinion, stoking nationalist sentiment to justify war, demonize the enemy, and rally public support (Wolfsfeld, 2004). Through the careful selection and presentation of news, the media can effectively construct a reality that is congruent with nationalist ideologies, thus becoming a critical battleground for the 'hearts and minds' of the public (Robinson, 2001).

Undertaking a thorough critique of this form of news coverage through the lens of discourse analysis elucidates the political discourse mechanism by which media narratives aid in the construction of shared national identities (van Dijk, 2012), the propagation of nationalist ideologies of conflicting parties, and the molding of public sentiment towards war (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Political practices and discourses are deeply ideological because the political field is, according to a socio-cognitive account. In that regard, a mental model — a cognitive bridge that connects political circumstances and discourse — has been conceptualized to study political ideology (van Dijk, 2012). Furthermore, all facets of speech creation and interpretation are managed by this mental model, which is also known as context (van Dijk, 2006). However, this thesis is not intended to provide a thorough explanation of the cognitive processes by which context models influence political discourse. Hence, more details can be referred to relevant research on this topic.

Thus far, a concise overview of the notion of ideology, its interdisciplinary examination, and the operation of the mental model influencing every facet of political discourse has been

provided. However, there is still a lack of information that would help us understand how these biased models, attitudes, and ideologies are really articulated in discourse. Hence, ideological discourse structures need to be examined in order to shed light on the subject mechanism.

4. Macro and Micro Ideological Strategies in Discourses

Due to the existence of cognitive and discursive biases in the news-making process, the ideas and beliefs of the 'Other' tend to be considered less worthy of sharing. Furthermore, news structures tend to highlight the most crucial information in a text, often signaled by salient headlines or topics. Thus, negative topics have a direct adverse impression on the opinions of news consumers (van Dijk, 2000).

Accordingly, there is a clear preference in news reporting for topics that accentuate negative actions by the 'Other' (Them) and positive actions by 'Us.' However, positive actions by the 'Other' and negative actions by 'Us' are typically underemphasized in news coverage and are less likely to appear in headlines or on the front page if they are reported at all. This asymmetry in news reporting can reinforce existing biases and stereotypes (Ibid).

This is achieved through a complex structure and various discursive strategies, but in the simplest terms, at a macro (semantic) level, the guiding ideological principles are 'the positive self-representation of one's own nation while the negative Other representation' (Van Dijk, 2012). These guiding principles, encompassing positive self-portrayal and negative portrayal of others, not only serve as a prevalent feature of group conflicts and our interactions with opposing groups but also typify how we discuss both ourselves and external entities overall. With a more subtle evaluation of this macro-level (semantic) strategy, the four subprinciples emerge as part of the ideological sphere.

1. “Emphasize positive things about Us”
2. “Emphasize negative things about Them”
3. “De-emphasize negative things about Us”
4. “De-emphasize positive things about Them”⁵

On the other hand, at a micro-level, discourse can be broadly formed through three primary components: ‘Meaning, Form, and Action and Interaction’, which represent the most social dimension of discourse. Ideological "content" finds its most direct expression in the meaning component of discourse through various elements such as topics, the level of description, implications, presuppositions, local coherence, examples, actors, evidentiality, vagueness, topoi, and more. Additionally, formal structure, sentence syntax, discourse forms, argumentation, and rhetoric represent other common strategic categories of discourse (van Dijk, 2012).

Overall, the structures of discourse are significantly influenced by underlying, socially shared ideologies as well as personal cognitive models, particularly at the content or meaning level of discourse. These strategies are manifested in the topics chosen to discuss or avoid, the standard topoi used in the argumentation, the local coherence of the text or speech, what information is left implicit or expressed explicitly, what meanings are emphasized or marginalized, which details are explicitly specified or left unspecified, and so on, within discourse (van Dijk, 2012, p. 67).

Through a systematical analysis of the language, symbols, metaphors, and narratives used in news reports, discourse analysis, therefore, exposes the underlying ideologies and power relations, contributing to our understanding of how political ideologies are discursively produced and reproduced through media, particularly in the context of war (Fairclough, 1995).

⁵ See, van Dijk, 2012, p.34

Indeed, the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict highlights the profound influence media narratives and nationalist ideologies have had on conflict dynamics. In this 2020 conflict, media outlets on both sides have played pivotal roles in framing national narratives and further escalating ethnic tensions.

From the very beginning of the conflict, there has been very limited application of peace journalism strategies..... Both Armenian and Azerbaijani media have predominantly adhered to a discourse centered on war, and promotion of enemy image with efforts in peace discourse remaining on the fringes. It's important to note that media outlets in both countries operate in partially free media environments. However, a comprehensive discussion of this aspect is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, the media framing of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has heavily favored a confrontational approach (Atanesyan, 2020).

During this recent conflict, nationalism, as a powerful ideological force in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, was severely intensified. In the conflict's discourse, the media portrayed the opposing side as a homogenous, menacing 'Other', often resorting to historical grievances and stereotypes. This framing echoed the ethnocentric nationalism prevalent in both nations, strengthening in-group solidarity while vilifying the out-group (Smith, 2013).

The media in both countries presented a dichotomy of 'us-enemy' in the narratives of the conflict, often avoiding neutral or balanced perspectives. In general, Azerbaijani media propagated a discourse of territorial integrity, emphasizing international law and their rightful claim over Nagorno-Karabakh (De Waal, 2003). On the other hand, Armenian media depicted the conflict as an existential threat to the Armenian people, invoking the historical narrative of the 1915 Armenian "genocide" and equating it to potential consequences if they lose control over Nagorno-Karabakh (Bloxham, 2005). These media narratives underpinned and reinforced the societal and political ideologies surrounding the conflict.

In the aftermath of the end of armed conflict, the triumphalist narrative in Azerbaijan's media and the narrative of defeat and betrayal in Armenia's media continue to fuel nationalist sentiments (King, 2021). In the post-conflict period, the role of media narratives in

perpetuating conflict and nationalism is becoming more evident. As Bar-Tal examines, these kinds of narratives can create an environment that hinders peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts, making it challenging to move past historical animosities (2013).

In sum, it is an undeniable fact that conflict-oriented content was actively promoted in the media and enjoyed high demand in the media markets of both countries. Consequently, peace discourse did not gain mainstream acceptance and remained an alternative approach to framing this conflict (Ibid).

Therefore, the 2020 case underscores the necessity for more comprehensive and critical discourse analyses of news reports, aiming to promote balanced reporting, enhance mutual understanding, and contribute to sustainable peacebuilding efforts.

In the context of peace building theories, the role of conflict reporting therefore is pivotal for sustainable peace building attempts in the aftermath of conflicts. While an accurate conflict reporting can expose these systemic injustices, by shedding light on these issues, media has the power to drive societal dialogue towards transformative changes (Lederach, 1997).

Since the realm of peace studies extends beyond mere conflict resolution, encompassing a nuanced understanding of the drivers of conflict, including media narratives, the case has utmost importance in terms of understanding formation and deployment of ideologically shaped linguistic strategies in media narratives. As accentuated by Galtung (1996a), the media plays a crucial role in perpetuating 'cultural violence', subtly embedding narratives that make structural and direct violence seem almost inevitable. Given this framework, the study of ideologically shaped linguistic strategies within media narratives is essential for deciphering the complex ecosystem of peace and conflict.

CHAPTER III

1. ANALYSIS

1.1.Data

In an effort to examine and compare the conflict reporting strategies deployed by Armenian and Azerbaijani daily newspapers during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, this study makes use of comparative discourse analysis.

In this research, a corpus of 24 English-language news articles, which are pertinent to the conflict, have been randomly gathered from the specifically determined six distinct digital platforms. As a matter of fact, it is believed that the selected platforms have the potential of representing the different perspectives related to the conflict. In detail, the sample of data originates from the news of the online media outlets of ArmenPress, ArmenianNews, and ArmenianWeekly, which epitomize the Armenian viewpoint, as well as Azertag (or Azertac in Azerbaijani), CaspianNews, and Trend, which echo the Azerbaijani perspective.

The main rationale behind the choice of these digital platforms has been to reflect the viewpoint of diverse segments of societies of both the conflict-involved countries. From Armenia's side, the conflict has various stakeholders, including the government, diaspora, and local Armenian residents of Nagorno-Karabakh. Thus, the selection of digital platforms aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding on the conflict perspectives and narratives of these different segments of Armenian society. Similarly, the Azerbaijani digital platforms encompass both state-affiliated agency and private media outlets, contributing to a well-rounded examination of viewpoints from within Azerbaijan society.

In more detail, the first media outlet from the Armenian side, "Armenpress" is the state news agency of Armenia. It was founded in 1918, as a state-run news agency for the first Armenian

Republic. Currently, it covers a wide range of topics, including official news, politics, the economy, society, regional and international events, culture, sports, etc., and produces daily articles in seven languages: Armenian, Russian, English, Arabic, French, Turkish, and Spanish.

In the framework of this research, it is worth highlighting that on the official website of Armenpress, the agency expresses its official partnership with "Artsakh" along with its publication policy, which includes countering "Azerbaijani propaganda, playing an instrumental part in the mission to secure international recognition of the Armenian “Genocide,” while addressing the issue of Turkish denialism.”⁶ (Armenpress,).

Following this, ArmeniaNEWS presents itself as an Armenian-based independent news agency that delivers news in four different languages via its online platforms (ArmenianNews)⁷. On the other hand, Armenian Weekly, originally known as Hairenik Weekly, explicitly identifies itself as an English-language newspaper associated with the Armenian political party of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. The newspaper takes pride in its historical significance, claiming to be the sole agency reporting on events in the modern Armenian history, particularly those related to the period before and during the Armenian “Genocide”⁸(Armenianweekly).

Armenian Weekly has been also recognized as the primary source of news about the homeland for the Armenian diaspora. It is based in Massachusetts, USA, and primarily focuses on providing news that caters to the interests and concerns of the Armenian-American community (Ibid).

⁶ <https://armenpress.am/eng/about/>

⁷ <https://news.am/eng/about/>

⁸ <https://armenianweekly.com/history/>

Referring to Azerbaijani media platforms, with its official name, the Azerbaijan State News Agency, AZERTAC is a significant news and information agency in the Republic of Azerbaijan that serves as the exclusive source for official government news. The agency was originally established by the Government of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1920. Following Azerbaijan's regaining of state independence, the agency reverted to its historical name remaining with its original mission. Azertag provides news in multiple languages, including Azerbaijani, English, Russian, French, German, Arabic, Chinese, and Spanish, covering a wide range of topics, such as politics, economy, culture, health, etc.

As the second source of news among the Azerbaijan media channels, the Trend News Agency was established in 1995 as a private media organization. The agency is one of the significant news providers for a big region that encompasses, Caspian, Caucasus, and Central Asia operating news services in Azerbaijani, English, Russian, Turkish, and Persian. Additionally, the agency is affiliated with several multinational news organizations and associations along with incorporating a non-governmental think tank consisting of experts from Azerbaijani and foreign academy world, diplomatic circles, etc ⁹.

Lastly, Caspian News, which started broadcasting in 2016, states that it emerged with the aim of filling the gap in quality, in-depth and fact-based journalism that covers topics related to the Caspian Sea region. In addition to its coverage of Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan, the media platform features an Opinion section that provides perspectives on the intricate issues in the region such as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

In general, the selected media outlets fit well with the objectives of this research, which aims to investigate the employment of discursive strategies within the framework of socio-cognitive theory and assess whether any changes have occurred over time. The time frame selected for this study also aligns with pivotal stages in the trajectory of the dispute. These stages include the intensification of the conflict into an armed confrontation, the

⁹ <https://en.trend.az/about>

announcement of a ceasefire, the initiation of peace dialogues, and the current political climate within the region. This temporal demarcation allows for a comprehensive understanding of the evolving nature of the conflict and how it has been represented in media discourse over time (Madianou, 2005; Philo & Berry, 2004).

Overall, the news reports were randomly selected from the subject media outlets and subsequently organized according to the four terms of the conflict. As a result, each phase consists of six news articles, one from each media agency.

1.2.Determination of Terms of The Conflict and Peace Process

This thesis concentrates on the three-year span from 2020 to 2023, a timeline that has been divided into four distinctive phases, each reflective of the conflict's transformation into a peace process and the altering political landscape in both nation states.

The first stage encompasses the trajectory from the brewing conflict to an intensive war, concluding with the establishment of a ceasefire agreement approximately over a two-month duration. The ensuing phase focuses on the interval from the announcement of the ceasefire agreement to the official cessation of hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The third stage corresponds to the onset of peace negotiations held in January 2021, in Moscow, symbolizing the commencement of multiparty talks at the level of political leadership. The final stage embodies the latest steps towards actualizing the peace agreement, characterized by Armenia's Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan's acknowledgement of Nagorno-Karabakh as a constituent component of Azerbaijan on May 22, 2023. (Pashinyan, N., 2023; News, M., 2023)

Figure 1: List of The Terms and Corresponding Political Developments

Trajectory of Conflict and Peace process	Political Developments
Armed Clash Period (September 20, 2020 - November 10, 2020)	During this phase, violent hostilities erupted between Azerbaijan and the Armenian forces safeguarding Nagorno-Karabakh on September 27, 2020. The conflict resulted in significant casualties, exceeding 6000 troops. Official announcements reported 3,360 fatalities from the Armenian side and 2,820 from the Azerbaijani side (Congressional Research Service, 2021, p.11).
Ceasefire Agreement Period (November 10, 2020 - December 12, 2020)	A comprehensive ceasefire agreement was signed on November 9, 2020, marking the formal cessation of armed clashes. The signatories were the presidents of Azerbaijan and Russia, and the prime minister of Armenia (Congressional Research Service, 2021, p.13).
Peace Talks Period (January 10, 2021 - January 20, 2021)	This phase marked the commencement of political dialogue aimed at conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The first tripartite political summit, following the signing of the peace agreement, was convened in Moscow on January 11, 2021. This meeting involved the heads of state of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia (TASS Russian News Agency, 2021).
Current Period (May 21, 2023 - May 31, 2023)	In this ongoing phase, Armenia has demonstrated a willingness to recognize Nagorno-Karabakh as a part of adjacent Azerbaijan, given that certain conditions are fulfilled. The Armenian Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinian, indicated during a press conference on May 22 that Yerevan's recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh as Azerbaijani territory would be contingent upon guaranteeing the rights and security of the ethnic Armenians residing in the region (Shahverdyan ,2023)

The first period

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, a long-standing territorial dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia, escalated into open hostilities on September 27, 2020. This marked the commencement of the first phase of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war. The outbreak of hostilities resulted in a significant number of casualties, marking this period as one of the most devastating in the protracted conflict's recent history.

Official figures reported that the conflict claimed the lives of more than 6000 troops, highlighting the ferocity of the renewed violence (The Congressional Research Service, 2021).

The Congressional Research Service, (2021, p.11) confirms these numbers, citing official announcements that report 3,360 fatalities from the Armenian forces and 2,820 from the Azerbaijani side. These figures, however, reflect only the military casualties. They fail to capture the substantial toll on civilians and the extensive damage to infrastructure, which added layers of complexity to an already multifaceted conflict.

Moreover, the war had profound geopolitical implications, prompting global concerns about stability in the South Caucasus region. The flare-up of hostilities garnered significant attention from the international community, not only because of the humanitarian crisis unfolding but also due to the potential for the conflict to draw in regional powers such as Russia and Turkey (Ohanyan, 2020). Therefore, this period in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict symbolizes the danger inherent in unresolved territorial disputes and the immense human cost they can exact.

The second period

The cessation of hostilities, in its comprehensive form, was realized with the assistance of Russian mediation, resulting in a formal agreement signed on November 9, 2020. This accord, endorsed by Azerbaijani President Aliyev, Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan, and Russian President Putin, was widely perceived and reported by numerous media outlets as either a ceasefire or a peace treaty. A significant stipulation of this agreement was the sustained presence of the Russian Federation's peacekeeping forces within the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone, guaranteed until the year 2025 (Congressional Research Service, 2021, p. 13; O'Loughlin et al., 2021, p. 13).

The enforcement of the Russian-brokered agreement was symbolized by the introduction of its peacekeeping troops alongside the Armenian segment of the disputed border, thereby

creating a buffer zone between the warring factions. This military action denoted the official cessation of the Second Karabakh War, both in terms of political diplomacy and ground-level combat operations. The advent of the normalization and peace process was preluded by President Aliyev's official address, in which he announced the end of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, subsequent to the reclamation of the Lachin region on December 1 (Kirişik, 2023, p. 243) Additionally, on December 12, President Aliyev enacted a presidential decree that effectively terminated the curfew that had been previously imposed in September (“From today, the curfew has been lifted in Azerbaijan”, 2020).

The third period

The political summit held on January 11, 2021, marked the first tripartite meeting between the heads of states of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia following the establishment of the peace agreement in Moscow (TASS Russian News Agency, 2021; Avedian, 2021). Not only did this summit signify a critical step in the peace process, but it also underscored the geopolitical importance of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the broader context of regional stability.

The summit resulted in a joint statement that outlined the necessary steps and objectives for the successful implementation of the peace agreement (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2021). This statement underscored the importance of restoring economic and transport links in the region, as well as unblocking transport infrastructure, thus affirming commitment to the peace process and regional revitalization.

Furthermore, the summit also discussed the mandate of the Russian peacekeeping forces in Nagorno-Karabakh, extending it until 2025. This decision was critical in maintaining peace and security in the region and underscored the pivotal role of Russia as a mediator in the conflict (Kucera, 2021).

However, the summit was not without its challenges. There were contentious issues, such as the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, that were not conclusively addressed. Despite these difficulties, the tripartite meeting represented a significant milestone in the peace process, signaling the willingness of all parties to engage in dialogue and move towards a peaceful resolution (Giragosian, 2021).

Furthermore, following the inaugural trilateral peace negotiations in January 2021, the Armenian public's response to Prime Minister Pashinyan's political maneuvers presented a complex panorama of societal and political responses. The peace agreement was viewed by a significant portion of Armenians as an acquiescence to defeat, inciting widespread criticism and protests against Pashinyan. Numerous individuals held Pashinyan accountable for the apparent setbacks in the conflict, prompting calls for his resignation (International Crisis Group, 2021).

Hence, the reaction to Pashinyan's decisions during this critical period mirrors the societal struggle of Armenia, trying to reconcile with the consequences of a protracted conflict and the demands of establishing peace (Kolstø & Blakkisrud, 2021).

The fourth period

In an unexpected development in the post-conflict scenario, the Armenian leadership expressed willingness to acknowledge the contested Nagorno-Karabakh region as part of neighboring Azerbaijan, contingent on specific stipulations being fulfilled. In a press briefing held on May 22, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian stated that Armenia's recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh as a territory of Azerbaijan is predicated upon the assurance of rights, safety, and security for the ethnic Armenian community that inhabit the mountainous region (Shahverdyan, 2023).

This willingness to compromise and acknowledge the territorial claims of Azerbaijan marks a significant shift in Armenia's stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, potentially paving the

way for an enduring resolution to the decades-long conflict. However, this compromise is not without its conditions, the most significant of which is the guarantee of rights and security for the ethnic Armenians, underscoring the importance of minority protection in conflict resolution (OSCE, 2023).

However, this development was met with considerable domestic opposition. Pashinian's pronouncement stirred up extensive reaction from both those in power and the opposition. The opposition, in particular, countered with a call for nationwide protests against the government (Vikrant, 2023). This reaction illustrates the complex and multifaceted nature of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, and the inherent challenges in navigating the path towards a mutually acceptable resolution.

2. Coding Procedure

The coding procedure of the present study entailed a comprehensive evaluation of twenty-four news reports derived from the online platforms of six distinct newspapers. The sample was equally divided between Azerbaijani and Armenian media outlets, with each nation represented by three newspapers. The selection of these specific news reports was executed through a random sampling technique, contributing to the robustness and impartiality of the research procedure (Bryman, 2016).

Random sampling is a technique where each unit of the population has an equal likelihood of being chosen. The key advantage of this method is its potential to yield a sample that is representative of the population, reducing sampling bias and enhancing the generalizability of the findings (Lohr, 2019). This is particularly crucial in the study of media narratives, where bias can considerably influence the interpretation and presentation of the news.

However, this method also bears certain limitations. For one, it assumes that the population is homogenous, which might not be the case in the context of news reports that can significantly vary in terms of content, tone, style, and ideological slant (Etikan et al., 2016). Consequently, despite the representativeness of the sample, random sampling may not adequately capture the heterogeneity inherent in the population of news reports.

Additionally, random sampling can inadvertently lead to the selection of outliers that may distort the analytical outcome. Despite these limitations, the random sampling approach was deemed suitable for this research, given the focus on obtaining a balanced representation of news reports from both Azerbaijani and Armenian media outlets.

Besides, the codebook, a pivotal tool in the analytical framework of this research, was meticulously applied to a qualitative analysis of 24 newspaper articles that were sourced from six distinct newspapers and spanned distinct phases of the latest conflict and peace process.

However, as coding proceeded, it became apparent that the original framework, rooted in prior study of Van Dijk (2006) evolved around immigration and racism, in which did not entirely encompass the emergent themes in the context of this study. This realization mandated a modification of the coding scheme. Specifically, the category labeled 'Burden' was expanded to include a nuanced category, 'Threat', to more aptly characterize the conflict.

The final codebook comprised a total of 25 distinct codes. During the coding process, these codes were performed for each article published during the determined four phases of the conflict. Articles exhibiting specific attributes of a given code were assigned a numerical value of '1' to indicate the presence of those attributes. Conversely, if the code was considered irrelevant, a value of '0' was assigned. On a macro scale, a compilation of the aggregate counts of these micro-level categories was undertaken for both nations and systematically displayed in a tabular format. The utilization of a dual-layered approach facilitated the acquisition of a comprehensive command of both the specific themes addressed in each article and the more general patterns that are distinctive to each country (Liamputtong, 2011; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

3. Coding Strategies

This study employed a two-fold coding strategy to analyze news reports on the 2020 Nagorno Karabakh conflict. The coding strategy was developed based on Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to discourse analysis (2006, 2012).

The coding strategies adopted in this study fall into two categories: micro and macro-level discursive elements, each lending a different perspective to the discourse analysis.

Micro-level discursive elements refer to the complex and specific components of ideology that are evident in a text. These elements encompass various aspects such as word choices, sentence structure, rhetorical techniques, and the overall coherence of the text. The initial coding phase centred on this micro-level analysis, uncovering how language dynamics within the reports contribute to the construction of specific frames and ideological perspectives.

The second phase of coding pivoted to macro-level discursive strategies, with a primary emphasis on Van Dijk's seminal semantic strategy of "positive self-presentation and negative other representation." This strategy aims to clarify the prevalent binary framework observed in discourses, wherein the ingroup (referred to as "Us") is depicted in a favorable light, while the outgroup (referred to as "Them") is portrayed in a negative manner (Van Dijk, 2006; 2012). Through the utilization of this particular approach in the examination, it is aimed to unveil the fundamental discursive structures that form the basis of the news reports and their collective portrayal of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.

The utilization of a dual-phase coding approach facilitated an inclusive examination of the discourse by integrating meticulous micro-level analysis with expansive macro-level exploration. This coding enabled a multi-dimensional and intricate analysis of the subject matter. This approach not only emphasized the subtle ideological influences within the text itself, but also the larger ideological narratives that shaped the media representation of the 2020 Nagorno Karabakh conflict.

4. Coding Schema

As indicated above, the codes formulated hereunder are derived from the socio-cognitive approach of Teun A. van Dijk (2006). His approach on discourse analysis articulates that ideologies are deeply ingrained systems of beliefs that function as the basis of social representations, influencing the structure and meaning of discourse (Van Dijk, 2006). In this approach, it is being postulated that ideologies, as the interface between societal structures

and individual cognition, influence discursive practices (media discourse) and are thus reflected in various aspects of discourse. These aspects have been translated into analytical codes at both macro and micro levels of analysis of ideology.

Within various fields, including discourse studies, a distinction is frequently made between macro- and micro- levels of description or analysis. As a matter of fact, the macro and micro facets of society frequently intertwine and influence one another.

Nevertheless, for the purpose of our analysis, the distinction between macro and micro levels proves useful in elucidating the dynamics of ingroup-outgroup polarization. On the one hand, these dynamics are realized through social practices, including discourse practices, which are underpinned by mental models at the micro level (Van Dijk, 2012).

On the other hand, these practices are informed and shaped by institutions, organizations, and overarching group relations at the macro or global level (Van Dijk, 2012).

Through the analysis of these macro and micro strategies, it is possible to identify and critique the ideological underpinnings of discourses, shedding light on the basis of the reproduction and maintenance of ingroup and outgroup perspectives.

Coding schema for Macro (Semantic) Level of Analysis

Negative Other-Representation Vs Positive Self-Representation

The primary foundation of macro-level analysis of ideological discourses, as outlined by Van Dijk (2006, 2012), is mostly based on the dichotomous framework of self and other. Notably, in discourses focusing on outgroups, the representation of the 'Other' often adheres to the macro-strategy of Negative Other-Presentation. The primary strategic approach underlying these discourses involves presenting 'Us' in a favorable manner while depicting 'Them' in a negative manner, a recurring pattern often seen in conflicts between groups and interactions among different groups.

On the one hand, the strategy of Positive Self-Representation aligns with the manner in which discourse, whether oral or written, presents the ingroup (referred to as "Us") in a favorable manner. This can encompass emphasizing the positive attributes, accomplishments, principles, or behaviors of the group. The objective is to establish a positive perception of the collective 'Us,' reinforcing the inherent value, ethical position, and frequently, perceived superiority of the ingroup.

On the other hand, negative Other-Representation refers to a discursive tactic in which the outgroup (referred to as "Them") is portrayed in a negative manner. This can entail accentuating the perceived shortcomings, inadequacies, or potential dangers posed by the outgroup, often amplifying these aspects to establish a distinct demarcation between the ingroup and the outgroup. The portrayal of the outgroup in a negative manner serves to strengthen its perceived inferior or negative position as seen by the ingroup.

It's crucial to note that these strategies are not just about positive or negative depictions per se, but they work in a relational manner. The positive self-presentation is often defined in contrast to the negative other-representation, and vice versa. This binary opposition fuels the polarization between 'Us' and 'Them,' supporting the construction and maintenance of distinct group identities.

In this context, a crucial component of Van Dijk's macro (semantic) level of analysis is the 'ideological square,' a conceptual tool that effectively deconstructs the ideological discourse. The ideological square encapsulates four primary principles: the accentuation of positive characteristics of 'Us', the emphasis on negative traits of 'Them', the mitigation of negative aspects associated with 'Us', and the understatement of positive features attributed to 'Them' (Van Dijk, 2006; 2012).

Moreover, these broad principles are often embodied through micro-level discourse devices, thereby bridging macro ideological structures with micro discourse practices (Van Dijk, 2006; 2012). This dual-layered approach, connecting macro and micro elements, provides a

comprehensive and nuanced lens for examining discourses, particularly those pertaining to conflict reporting.

Coding schema for Micro (Semantic) Level of Analysis

While the macro-level strategy reflects broader social and ideological structures., the micro-level analysis involves the exploration of social actors and their interactions within specific social contexts,

As defined by Van Dijk, the macro-level strategy of 'positive self-presentation and negative Other-presentation' is manifested in various forms with the micro-level discourse categories, ranging from actor descriptions, authority, burden (topos), categorization, comparisons, consensus strategy, counterfactuals, disclaimers, euphemisms, evidentiality, examples, generalizations, and many others (2006, 2012). It is through such mechanisms that discourse can contribute to the reproduction of injustice and polarization in and between societies (Van Dijk, 2006).

Each of these micro-level categories is defined in accordance with the study of Van Dijk (2006) as a code reflecting the specific strategies or tactics used in discourse implicitly or explicitly convey ideological messages (see Appendix). For instance, "Actor Descriptions" refer to how social actors are portrayed in discourse, often based on their group membership, which can reveal underlying biases or ideologies. Similarly, "Categorization" focuses on the division and classification of social actors into groups, typically reflecting societal power structures and biases (Van Dijk, 2012). The rest of the categories studied in the upcoming coding schema section.

CHAPTER IV

1. FINDINGS

The findings of the study revealed that the media in both Armenia and Azerbaijan employed a significant amount of 'negative other-representation' on a larger scale. This discursive practice was utilized to strengthen the sense of in-group belonging and viewpoints of the respective groups involved in the conflict (Van Dijk, 2006). However, the post-conflict period in Azerbaijani newspapers witnessed an increase in the strategy of 'positive self-representation', which can be attributed to the altered power dynamics. The research also highlighted the changing number of micro- level devices throughout the different phases of conflict and peace in accordance with changing political climate.

The First Period: Micro And Macro-Levels Analysis of Newspapers from Both Armenia and Azerbaijan

Table 1: The first Period / Micro-Levels Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis of Newspapers from both Armenia and Azerbaijan

Period 1	Armenian Newspapers				Azerbaijani Newspapers			
	ArmenPress	ArmenianNews	ArmenianWeekly	Total	Azertac	Trend	CaspianNews	Total
Categories								
Actor description	8	4	26	38	16	6	19	41
Authority	2	1	9	12	4	3	6	13
Burden/ Threat	2	3	4	9	2	4	4	10
Categorization	1			1			1	1
Comparison				0			1	1
Consensus	1		1	2				0
Counterfactuals				0				0
Disclaimers			2	2			2	2
Euphemism		1	4	5			3	3
Evidentiality				0	1		6	7
Example&Illustration	1	2		3		1	4	5
Generalization	2			2	2	2	4	8
Hyperbole			2	2		4	1	5
Implication	5	2	2	9			4	4
Irony	2			2		1		1
Lexicalization	10	3	5	18	6	5	11	22
Metaphor	1			1			3	3
National self-glorification				0			6	6
Norm expression	2	2	2	6	1	3	4	8
Number game			6	6	4		8	12
Polarization	3	1	4	8	2	2	4	8
Populism	4	2	8	14	1	1		2
Presupposition	2	1		3		2	5	7
Vagueness				0	1			1
Victimization	2	3	6	11	3	2	14	19
Uncategorized				0				0
Sum	48	25	81	154	43	36	110	189

Table 1 provides an overview of the deployment of twenty-five categories of micro-level ideological discourse strategies, as proposed by Van Dijk (2006), along with an additional uncategorized section. These strategies were used by six different newspapers from Azerbaijan and Armenia during the initial stage of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.

The data compilation table illuminates the variation in the usage of different discourse strategies by the examined newspapers. It is noteworthy that 'Armen Press' employed sixteen of the total strategies, the highest among the Armenian news outlets, in their conflict

reporting during the first phase of the conflict. On the contrary, 'CaspianNews,' an Azerbaijani outlet, used a more diverse range of strategies, employing twenty-three out of the total set of strategies, inclusive of the uncategorized one.

Within the specified period, from a week prior to the commencement of military clashes until the announcement of the peace agreement, upon examination of the Armenian media outlets, it is discernible that the most frequently utilized strategies were Actor description, Lexicalization, Populism, and Authority, respectively 38, 18, 14, and 12 instances in their conflict reporting.

A more granular view of the data reveals that the onset of the conflict, which eventually intensified into a war, the 'Lexicalization' (10) strategy was predominantly used by 'Armen Press' while 'Armenian Weekly' primarily utilized the 'Actor description' (26) strategy among the predefined categories.

On the other hand, in the context of Azerbaijani media outlets, the strategies predominantly put into operation were Actor description (41), Lexicalization (22), Victimization (19), and Authority (13) which made up 95 instances of the overall 189 strategic deployments.

In a similar vein, the analysis of Azerbaijani newspapers revealed that 'CaspianNews' applied the 'Lexicalization' and 'Victimization' strategies most frequently, respectively 11 and 14 instances. Concurrently, 'Azertac' utilized 'Actor description' as the dominant category in their conflict reports, observed 16 times per se. These patterns suggested a tactical use of discourse strategies in shaping the narrative of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.

Example 1

“We didn’t want war. The war was imposed on us, and it is our duty to defend our homeland and families,” - Populism, polarization (“Azerbaijan Launches Deadly Attack on Artsakh”, 2020)

Populism, both as a rhetorical device and an ideological stance, shapes conflict reporting in multifaceted ways. Journalists, either knowingly or inadvertently, may share the speech of politicians, as in our case, within an 'us' (ingroup) versus 'them' (outgroup) or a *polarization* framework thereby establishing and reinforcing the dichotomies (Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017).

In the given statement, the discourse strategy of 'populism' was applied, which attempts to align the speaker's position with perceived popular sentiment, suggesting a shared perspective or common cause among a broad population. The speaker appeals to emotions by suggesting that war was not a desired outcome, but rather a circumstance thrust upon them, thus necessitating defense.

The phrases "our homeland" and "our families" are utilized to evoke a sense of collective identity and shared responsibility. Therefore, by presenting war as an unwanted yet unavoidable condition, the speaker emphasizes the righteousness of their defense efforts.

Example 2

"Stepanakert calls on Baku to abandon policy of military blackmail and threats"- *Topoi of threat* ("Stepanakert calls on Baku to abandon policy"; 2020)

As a recurring themes, the 'topoi of threat' crafts a narrative wherein the official 'Baku' as the authority of outgroup, was portrayed as a source of danger and thereby providing a justification for defensive or offensive actions by the ingroup against their potential attacks. (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001)

Example 3

"President Ilham Aliyev: To achieve sustainable international peace and security, there must be put an end to occupation" – *Lexicalization* ("President Ilham Aliyev: To achieve sustainable international"; 2020)

As it is illustrated, "Lexicalization," as an analytical strategy, was utilized through a particular conscious selection of word of "occupation" that **must be** dealt with for the sake of a 'long-lasting "peace"'. In the context of conflict reporting, this strategy becomes profoundly useful as the choice of lexical items by the head of state or politicians can have influence on the framing, understanding, and interpretation of events within ingroup (Van Dijk, 2006).

Example 4

"Armenia carried out the **ethnic cleansing** (*Lexicalization*) against the Azerbaijani population in the **occupied territories**. All Azerbaijanis have been **forcibly** (*hyperbole*) **expelled** from occupied territories" – *Victimization* ("President Ilham Aliyev: To achieve sustainable international"; 2020)

As a strategic narrative tool, the category of victimization was subtly employed to shape public perceptions and interpretations of actions perpetrated by the adversary, in this case, "Armenia". This strategy notably emphasized the distress and adversities faced by the "Azerbaijani population," positioning them as the 'victims' and highlighting their presumed innocence and the injustices inflicted upon them (Somer, 2005). However, utilization of victimization narratives has dual implications – while fostering empathy and reinforcing solidarity within the ingroup, it can also escalate conflict into war by reinforcing stereotypes, and perpetuating biases (Volkan, 2006). Therefore, a consistent utilization of victimization device, can be a serious obstacle hinders conflict resolution attempts.

The subsequent segment offers qualitative examples at macro -level elucidating the disparate utilizations of macro strategies in the newspapers of the two nations, as suggested in the preceding micro-level quantitative data analysis.

Table 2: The first period / Macro- Level Analysis of Newspapers from both Armenia and Azerbaijan

Macro-level	Period 1	Armenia %	Period 12	Azerbaijan %
Categories				
Actor description	38	25%	41	22%
Authority	12	8%	13	7%
Burden/ Threat	9	6%	10	5%
Categorization	1	1%	1	1%
Comparison	0	0%	1	1%
Consensus	2	1%	0	0%
Counterfactuals	0	0%	0	0%
Disclaimers	2	1%	2	1%
Euphemism	5	3%	3	2%
Evidentiality	0	0%	7	4%
Example&Illustration	3	2%	5	3%
Generalization	2	1%	8	4%
Hyperbole	2	1%	5	3%
Implication	9	6%	4	2%
Irony	2	1%	1	1%
Lexicalization	18	12%	22	12%
Metaphor	1	1%	3	2%
National self-glorificaiton	0	0%	6	3%
Norm expression	6	4%	8	4%
Number game	6	4%	12	6%
Polarization	8	5%	8	4%
Populism	14	9%	2	1%
Presupposition	3	2%	7	4%
Vagueness	0	0%	1	1%
Victimization	11	7%	19	10%
Uncategorized	0	0%	0	0%
Sum	154	100%	189	100%

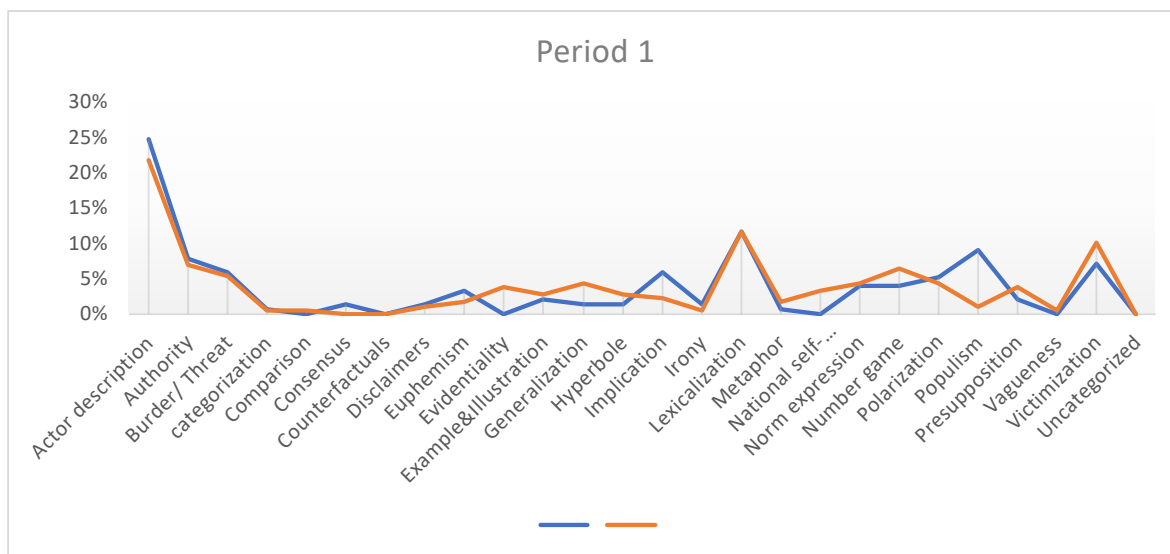


Figure 2 : The overall distribution of micro-level strategies in the first period

The comparative analysis of overall Armenian and Azerbaijani media outlets' implementation of the macro-level (semantic) discursive strategies - positive self-representation and negative other-representation - is consolidated and presented in Table 2.

Overall, the data demonstrates that Azerbaijani newspapers utilized these discourse strategies to a greater extent, accounting for a total of one hundred and 189 instances. Meanwhile, Armenian newspapers trailed slightly behind, exhibiting 154 instances of such strategic use of discourse devices.

As delineated in the preceding micro-level analysis, both parties in the conflict extensively utilized strategies of 'negative other-representation' and slightly less 'positive self-representation' during the violent conflict. These narrative techniques were deployed to shape the discourse surrounding the conflict and its legitimacy, exerting significant influence on public perceptions of the 'Others' or 'enemy' as aggressors.

By employing predominantly above listed discourse strategies, the opposing factions endeavored to construct and underscore predominantly 'negative other representations.' This

endeavor was principally based on the dichotomy of 'Us' versus 'Them.' In this way, especially through Threat, Lexicalization and Victimization devices, they aimed to cultivate a socio-political atmosphere that deemed defensive or aggressive actions as justifiable within the context of military operations.

Example 1

“The poems that Azerbaijani children learn in kindergarten and Azerbaijani school textbooks **clearly show** that the Azerbaijanis view Armenians as their **enemies**”. – *Example & illustration, polarization, topoi of threat*. ("Armenia parliament speaker: Azerbaijan has declared a war"; 2020)

In order to heighten the persuasiveness of the arguments, speaker operationalized the discourse strategy rooted in the use of example and illustration. The speaker references “Azerbaijani kindergarten poems and school textbooks” to substantiate their claim, thus utilizing these elements as *evidence*. Furthermore, the statement embodies a *polarizing* perspective by casting Armenians and Azerbaijanis in opposing roles, thus perpetuating the dichotomy of 'Us vs. Them'. Additionally, by insinuating that Azerbaijanis are taught from a young age to view Armenians as enemies, the speaker engages in a '*topoi of threat*' discourse strategy. This strategy evokes an imminent danger, implicitly framing the social environment as a threat, thereby reinforcing the speaker's ideological stance.

Example 2

“Armenia committed **a number of** (*vagueness*) **war crimes and crimes against humanity** against **Azerbaijani civilians**”. - *victimization* (“President Ilham Aliyev: To achieve sustainable international”; 2020)

As explicated by Wodak and Meyer (2015), the 'negative other-representation' of the adversary - in this context, Armenia - was utilized as a discursive strategy to dehumanize the outgroup. The presented statement employs the discourse strategy of 'victimization' by alleging that “Armenia committed war crimes and crimes against humanity against

Azerbaijani civilians.” This, in turn, made the state of conflict or war appear more tolerable to the in-group. Concurrently, this tactic aimed to induce empathy towards the 'victimized' in-group, in this case, the Azerbaijanis.

The use of the term 'a number of' serves as a *vague* quantifier, which leaves the extent of the alleged crimes unspecified. This introduces an element of ambiguity that may amplify the perceived severity of the crimes, thus strengthening the victimization narrative.

The intended consequence of such strategy was twofold: first, to enhance the in-group's morale, and second, to strengthen its unity. Ultimately, such discursive maneuvers, firmly rooted in a socio-cognitive approach to discourse (Van Dijk, 2006), served to consolidate the Azerbaijanian people's conviction in the righteousness of their stance in the conflict.

The second Period: Micro and Macro levels of Quantitative and Qualitative analysis

Table 3: The second period / Micro-level Analysis of Newspapers from both Armenia and Azerbaijan

Period 2	Armenian Newspapers				Azerbaijani Newspapers			
	ArmenPress	ArmenianNews	ArmenianWeekly	Total	Azertac	Trend	CaspianNews	Total
Categories								
Actor description	4	6	31	41	5	4	17	26
Authority	4	1	6	11	2		3	5
Burden/ Threat	3	3	5	11	2	2	1	5
Categorization	1		1	2			4	4
Comparison		1		1			1	1
Consensus			1	1			1	1
Counterfactuals				0				0
Disclaimers		1	1	2				0
Euphemism				0		1		1
Evidentiality	1	1	6	8	2	2	5	9
Example&Illustration			5	5	1	1	3	5
Generalization	1	1	2	4			1	1
Hyperbole	2	2	2	6	1	1	1	3
Implication	1	1	3	5	1	1	5	7
Irony				0				0
Lexicalization	5	3	3	11	2	5	4	11
Metaphor	1	1	2	4		2	1	3
National self-glorification		1		1	2	2	5	9
Norm expression	1			1				0
Number game		1	3	4	1	3	5	9
Polarization	1	1	1	3	2		3	5
Populism	2			2	4	1	3	8
Presupposition	1	1	2	4	2		7	9
Vagueness	2	3	5	10	1	2	2	5
Victimization	2	1	7	10	2	3	3	8
Uncategorized			1	1				0
SUM	32	29	87	148	30	30	75	135

The analysis reveals that Armenian Weekly, among the other Armenian newspapers, prominently applied micro-level ideological strategies during the transition period of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in their news article. The news outlet primarily deployed the strategies of actor description (31 instances) and victimization (7 instances). Correspondingly, Caspian News, from the Azerbaijani side, took a leading role in the use of

micro-strategies, favoring actor description (17 instances), presupposition (7 instances), and national self-glorification (5 instances).

Example 1

“Armenian residents were **given just days** before **the entry of the Azerbaijani military to depart from the region.** - *Vagueness*. **Many of these families** have been **burning down their homes** after collecting their belongings and loading up their vehicles, ahead of their expected handover to Azerbaijan”. - *actor description*. – (“Azerbaijan Takes Over Artsakh Territories”; 2020)

The sentence "Armenian residents were given just days before the entry of the Azerbaijani military to depart from the region" can be classified under the discursive strategy of 'vagueness', as it provides an ambiguous timeframe rather than a specific period. The term "just days" is imprecise and leaves room for varied interpretations, thus demonstrating the characteristic feature of the vagueness strategy.

The latter portion of the quote, "Many of these families have been burning down their homes after collecting their belongings and loading up their vehicles, ahead of their expected handover to Azerbaijan," exemplifies 'actor description'. This strategy vividly portrays the actions of the Armenian families, evoking imagery and emotional responses in the readers. It places the Armenian residents as the 'actors' directly affected by the conflict, underscoring their desperate actions of burning their homes in anticipation of the region's handover to Azerbaijan.

Example 2

“The return of the **internally displaced persons and refugees** to the Nagorno-Karabakh - *Lexicalization* region and surrounding districts under the supervision of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is **also included in the document**.”- *Lexicalization* (“Ceasefire Brings An End To Armenia-Azerbaijan Fighting”; 2020)

The statement exemplifies the discursive strategy known as 'lexicalization'. The terminology used, such as "internally displaced persons", "refugees", and "the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees", serves to shape the narrative of the situation, lending legitimacy and specificity to the scenario being described. These terms draw upon established international lexicons related to human displacement, evoking certain standardized understandings and norms associated with humanitarian law and practice.

Table 4: The second period / Macro Level Analysis of Newspapers from both Armenia and Azerbaijan

Macro-level	Period 2	Armenia %	Period	Azerbaijan %
Categories	N		N	
Actor description	41	28%	26	19%
Authority	11	7%	5	4%
Burden/ Threat	11	7%	5	4%
Categorization	2	1%	4	3%
Comparison	1	1%	1	1%
Consensus	1	1%	1	1%
Counterfactuals	0	0%	0	0%
Disclaimers	2	1%	0	0%
Euphemism	0	0%	1	1%
Evidentiality	8	5%	9	7%
Example&Illustration	5	3%	5	4%
Generalization	4	3%	1	1%
Hyperbole	6	4%	3	2%
Implication	5	3%	7	5%
Irony	0	0%	0	0%
Lexicalization	11	7%	11	8%
Metaphor	4	3%	3	2%
National self-glorificaiton	1	1%	9	7%
Norm expression	1	1%	0	0%
Number game	4	3%	9	7%
Polarization	3	2%	5	4%
Populism	2	1%	8	6%
Presupposition	4	3%	9	7%
Vagueness	10	7%	5	4%
Victimization	10	7%	8	6%
Uncategorized	1	1%	0	0%
Sum	148	100%	135	100%

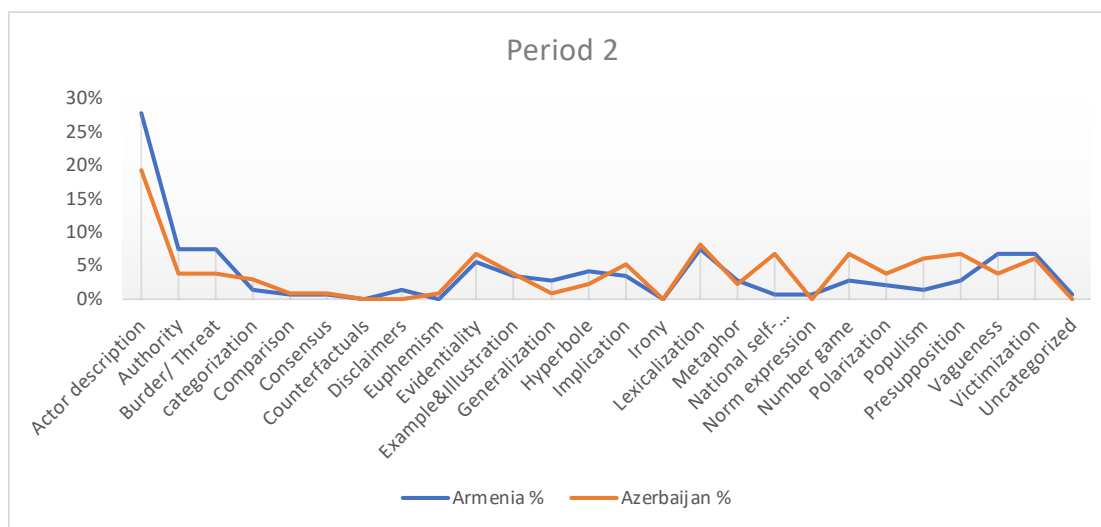


Figure 3 : the overall distribution of micro-level strategies in the second period

In a similar vein, the study also scrutinized that how Azerbaijani and Armenian media outlets undertook the macro (semantic) strategies aftermath of the war. On the one hand, Azerbaijani press tended to emphasize the justifiability of their military operations (lexicalization, 8%) and extol their nation's positive attributes (national self-glorification, 7%; populism, 6%) in order to underscore the themes of unity, resilience, and adherence to territorial sovereignty.

Conversely, Armenian media outlets predominantly employed strategies of actor description (28%), authority and threat (7%). These were employed to portray the adversary negatively while concurrently deemphasizing the negative attributes of the ingroup, who emerged from the war as the defeated party.

Example 1

“The recent statements of Azerbaijani president Ilham Aliyev show **his expansionist aspirations** (*actor description*) **towards** Armenia, **Expert** on Turkish studies Ruben Safrastyan (*authority*) said at a press conference in Armenpress, stating that **Aliyev, in fact**, is telling the whole world **about his aggressive policy.**” - *Topoi of threat*. (“Armenia should decisively counter Turkey’s, Azerbaijan’s statements”; 2020)

To begin with, the speaker employs an 'actor description' strategy through the phrase "Azerbaijani president Ilham Aliyev". This offered readers a clear identification of the actor involved, thus contributing to the formation of mental models about the reported events (Van Dijk, 2006).

Secondly, the author employs 'authority' as a strategy, mentioning "Expert on Turkish studies Ruben Safrastyan". By introducing an authority on the subject, the author seeks to enhance the credibility and validity of the assertions made in the article, drawing upon Safrastyan's expertise to give weight to the analysis of Aliyev's statements (Van Dijk, 2006).

Finally, the 'topoi of threat' strategy is evident in the reference to Aliyev's "expansionist aspirations" and "aggressive policy". This not only portrays the Azerbaijani president as a potential threat but also subtly reinforces the notion of the outgroup (Azerbaijan, in this case) as inherently aggressive or dangerous. In this way, the text contributes to the 'negative other-representation' of 'Them' observed in media discourse around conflicts (Van Dijk, 2006).

Example 2

“President Ilham Aliyev: The Second Karabakh War will go down in history as Azerbaijan’s glorious victory - *National self-glorification*. (“President Ilham Aliyev: The Second Karabakh War”; 2020)

“The Patriotic War is over (*lexicalization*). Azerbaijan has won a **brilliant victory** (*hyperbole*) in this war, **our lands** have been liberated from **occupation**, we have expelled the **occupiers** from our lands.” - *national self-glorification, lexicalization, polarization*. (“President Ilham Aliyev: The Second Karabakh War”; 2020)

The excerpt from President Ilham Aliyev's statement provides an illustrative example of the macro-level discursive strategies within the context of Van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive approach.

Firstly, the assertion "The Second Karabakh War will go down in history as Azerbaijan's glorious victory" serves as a clear example of 'national self-glorification'. Aliyev strategically accentuates the triumphant aspect of Azerbaijan's role in the conflict, depicting the nation in a positive light, thereby reinforcing in-group solidarity and national pride.

Secondly, the phrase "Azerbaijan has won a brilliant victory" embodies a 'hyperbole' strategy. The adjective "brilliant" amplifies the perceived magnitude of Azerbaijan's victory, making the achievement seem even more significant. ("President Ilham Aliyev: The Second Karabakh War"; 2020)

Thirdly, the utterance "we have expelled the occupiers from our lands" illustrates 'polarization' and 'lexicalization' strategies. The use of the term "occupiers" to refer to the out-group (presumably, Armenian forces) creates a sharp divide between 'Us' (Azerbaijanis) and 'Them' (Armenians), highlighting the perceived opposition between the two. It also labels the out-group in a negative way, thus serving the 'negative other-presentation' often found in conflict discourses (Van Dijk, 2006).

Lastly, the entire statement, through its emphasis on victory and liberation, can be seen as a form of 'lexicalization'. The choice of words such as "victory", "liberated", and "expelled" construct a narrative of triumph and freedom, contributing to the broader discourse on Azerbaijan's role and experiences in the conflict.

The Third Period: Micro And Macro Levels of Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis

Table 5 Micro-level of Quantitative and Qualitative analysis

Period 3	Armenian Newspapers				Azerbaijani Newspapers			
	ArmenPress	ArmenianNews	ArmenianWeekly	Total	Azertac	Trend	CaspianNews	Total
Categories								
Actor description	4	3	29	36	5	8	22	35
Authority		3	17	20	3	3	10	16
Burden/ Threat			4	4			1	1
Categorization	1		3	4			7	7
Comparison				0		2	3	5
Consensus				0				0
Counterfactuals				0				0
Disclaimers			1	1			2	2
Euphemism				0	1			1
Evidentiality		2	6	8	1			1
Example&Illustration			2	2				0
Generalization			2	2				0
Hyperbole			2	2		1	1	2
Implication		1	3	4		2	5	7
Irony			1	1			3	3
Lexicalization	3		3	6	1	2	26	29
Metaphor				0				0
National self-glorificaiton			1	1	1	3	5	9
Norm expression				0	1		2	3
Number game			7	7		1	2	3
Polarization			5	5			3	3
Populism			1	1	1	2	1	4
Presupposition	2	1	10	13	1	2	4	7
Vagueness	1	1	1	3	1			1
Victimization			5	5		1	5	6
Uncategorized	2	4	8	14	6	7	4	17
Sum	13	15	111	139	22	34	106	162

The analysis reveals that the third period was primarily marked by the usage of novel ideological categories - indicated in the uncategorized label - by both sides. However, it is also apparent that the strategies of actor description and authority were evidently maintained as effective categories to present and narrate the situations, even amidst the fluctuations and uncertainties inherent to the peace negotiation process.

Example 1

“It is a matter of fundamental importance – *authority* - that the **Azerbaijani authorities** - *actor description* - **are delaying** the return of 62 Armenian prisoners of war **by distorting the legal process** - *topoi of threat and victimization*- , **and by artificially labeling them with the status of ‘suspects’ or ‘an accused,’ and are using detention** as a form of **punishment,**”- *lexicalization* (“Armenia agrees to unblock transport links”; 2021)

The quote indicates the use of several discursive strategies. The initial clause, "It is a matter of fundamental importance," employs authority and assertion to underscore the significance of the following statement. The subsequent depiction of Azerbaijani authorities as "delaying the return of 62 Armenian prisoners of war" is an instance of actor description, casting the Azerbaijani authorities in a negative light. The assertion that these authorities are "distorting the legal process" represents a topos of threat and victimization, insinuating an abuse of power. Finally, the classification of prisoners as 'suspects' or 'an accused' and the claim that detention is being used as a form of punishment serves as a form of lexicalization, emphasizing the illegitimate treatment of these individuals. This entire discourse thereby constructs a negative representation of the 'Other', i.e., the Azerbaijani authorities, while simultaneously painting the Armenian prisoners as victims (van Dijk, 2006).

Example 2

“Azerbaijan **seeks to reconnect** the country’s exclave – *actor description, lexicalization*– the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic – with its mainland after **the successful counter-offensive operations in the country’s Karabakh region.**” *National self-glorification* (“Azerbaijan, Armenia Agree to Restore Transport Communications”; 2021)

The quoted text implies several discursive strategies. Firstly, the expression "seeks to reconnect" employs the lexicalization strategy, shaping the narrative in a way that positions Azerbaijan's action as a justified pursuit of territorial integrity. Furthermore, the reference to the "Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic" is an instance of categorization, distinguishing this

territory as an autonomous entity separate from the main dispute over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The phrase "successful counter-offensive operations" implies to national self-glorification, hence is a form of positive self-presentation at macro level since portraying Azerbaijan's military actions in the Karabakh region as justified and triumphant (van Dijk, 2006).

Table 6- The third period / Macro Level Analysis of Newspapers from both Armenia and Azerbaijan

Macro-level	Period 3	Armenia %	Period	Azerbaijan %
Categories	N		N	
Actor description	36	26%	35	22%
Authority	20	14%	16	10%
Burden/ Threat	4	3%	1	1%
Categorization	4	3%	7	4%
Comparison	0	0%	5	3%
Consensus	0	0%	0	0%
Counterfactuals	0	0%	0	0%
Disclaimers	1	1%	2	1%
Euphemism	0	0%	1	1%
Evidentiality	8	6%	1	1%
Example&Illustration	2	1%	0	0%
Generalization	2	1%	0	0%
Hyperbole	2	1%	2	1%
Implication	4	3%	7	4%
Irony	1	1%	3	2%
Lexicalization	6	4%	29	18%
Metaphor	0	0%	0	0%
National self-glorificaiton	1	1%	9	6%
Norm expression	0	0%	3	2%
Number game	7	5%	3	2%
Polarization	5	4%	3	2%
Populism	1	1%	4	2%
Presupposition	13	9%	7	4%
Vagueness	3	2%	1	1%
Victimization	5	4%	6	4%
Uncategorized	14	10%	17	10%
Sum	139	100%	162	100%

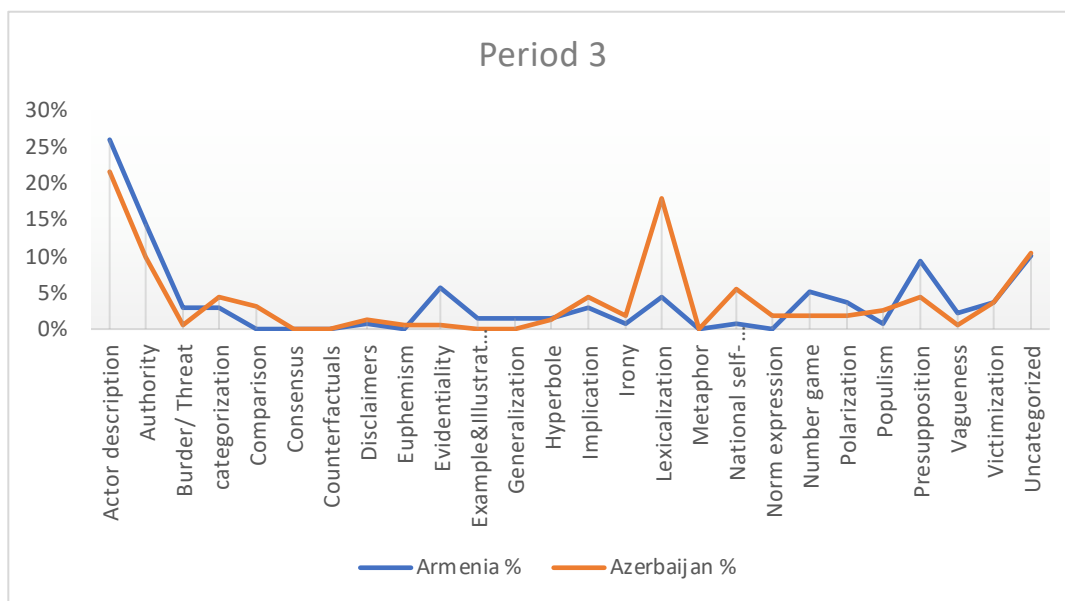


Figure 4: The overall distribution of micro-level strategies in the third period

Presented in the table, it can be observed that for Armenian media outlets, the employment of the uncategorized discourse device was scored max 1% in overall first two periods. However, during the third period corresponds to the first trilateral peace negotiations, the figure surge to 10%.

On further examination, it was found that Armenian newspapers exhibited atypical instances of neutral other-representations. Particularly, in the occasions when political leaders expressed neutral or subtly positive views regarding the assertions of the opposing side. Such instances were specifically prominent during collective meetings, wherein the necessity of focusing on peacebuilding efforts and shared strategic interests were underscored.

Example 1

“In a briefing following the meeting with the Presidents of Russia and Azerbaijan the Armenian PM said that the implementation of the agreements enshrined in the joint statement **can change the economic prospect of the region**. According to him, the new **economic**

situation can lead to more security guarantees”. – *Uncategorized*. (“Implementation of Moscow agreements can change”; 2021)

Corresponding to the evolving political environment, the discourse of Armenian political figures underwent a transition from a strong emphasis on negative 'Other' representation to more neutral and positive rhetoric. This shift was evident in the modification of discourse strategies (uncategorized 24%, actor description 11% and lexicalization 8%).

Example 2

“Azerbaijani President: Restoration of transport communications can impart great dynamism to the development of the region and strengthen security” - *Uncategorized* (“Azerbaijani President: Restoration of transport communications can impart”; 2021)

The statement by the Azerbaijani President as reported by AZERTAC , the emphasis that is put on the 'restoration of transport communications' for regional development and security could potentially be categorized as an 'uncategorized discourse device' since it does not neatly fit into the predefined categories by Van Dijk (2006), but it nonetheless communicates specific ideological underpinnings since the discourse suggests a forward-looking, peace-oriented perspective that promotes regional cooperation and development.

However, it should not be interpreted as a complete departure from the previously held ideological position of the adjacent enemy states. Indeed, the media outlets continued to attribute negative traits to the outgroup in their reporting, by highlighting the challenges and issues emerging from the perceived inconsistencies on the implementation of the peace agreement by ‘Other’.

Example 3

“The eighth point of the ceasefire agreement mandates that the parties exchange all prisoners and casualties. **Yet Azerbaijan has refused to comply with this measure, artificially protracting the process while keeping dozens of captured Armenian soldiers and civilians imprisoned.**” –*Vagueness, lexicalization and victimization* (“Armenia agrees to unblock transport links”; 2021)

The text is an example of several discourse strategies, including vagueness, lexicalization, and victimization. The vagueness strategy is evident where the text does not provide concrete figures regarding the number of Armenian soldiers and civilians allegedly kept imprisoned by Azerbaijan, leaving room for interpretation and generalization. Moreover, lexicalization as a dominant category, is employed in the negative depiction of Azerbaijan as refusing to comply with the ceasefire agreement, creating an image of a non-cooperative and problematic entity. The use of the term "artificially protracting the process" further contributes to the negative other-presentation of Azerbaijan (Van Dijk, 2006; Wodak & Meyer, 2015).

Example 4

“The **so-called** status issue of Nagorno-Karabakh mentioned by Armenia's PM Pashinyan refers to the recognition of the **illegal separatist regime deployed in the region - Categorization** -since the early 1990s when a war ensued there”. - *Irony, lexicalization* (“Azerbaijan, Armenia Agree to Restore Transport Communications”; 2021)

The statement from Caspian News incorporates the usage of 'irony', 'lexicalization', and 'categorization' discourse strategies in line with Van Dijk's (2006) framework. The use of the term 'so-called' in relation to the status issue of Nagorno-Karabakh constitutes an ironic discursive device, subtly questioning and delegitimizing Armenia's claim over the region. Furthermore, the reference to the 'illegal separatist regime' is a clear instance of lexicalization, assigning a specific, negative term to the Armenian presence in Nagorno-Karabakh. This negative lexical choice contributes to the negative 'Othering' of the Armenian

side. Finally, the strategy of 'categorization' is employed when the statement implicitly categorizes the Armenian side as aggressors, referring to the deployment of what they label an 'illegal separatist regime' in the context of the 1990s war. This statement serves to reinforce negative perceptions of the 'Other' while bolstering Azerbaijan's self-image.

The fourth Period: Macro level Quantitative and Qualitative analysis

Table 7- Micro-level Quantitative and Qualitative analysis of Newspapers from both Armenia and Azerbaijan

Period 4	Armenian Newspapers				Azerbaijani Newspapers			
	ArmenPress	ArmenianNews	ArmenianWeekly	Total	Azertac	Trend	CaspianNews	Total
Categories								
Actor description	4	11	36	51	3	5	13	21
Authority	1	2	15	18	3	1	4	8
Burden/ Threat	1	1	2	4		1		1
Categorization		2	5	7	1	1	1	3
Comparison				0			3	3
Consensus			1	1				0
Counterfactuals				0				0
Disclaimers		1	3	4		1	1	2
Euphemism	1		1	2	1		2	3
Evidentiality		3	6	9		3	5	8
Example&Illustration	3		1	4			1	1
Generalization		2	3	5		1	2	3
Hyperbole				0			1	1
Implication	1	2	5	8	1		3	4
Irony				0			2	2
Lexicalization			14	14	3	3	6	12
Metaphor			1	1	1		1	2
National self-glorificaiton				0	1	1	1	3
Norm expression			1	1			3	3
Number game	1		6	7		1	4	5
Polarization	2	2	3	7	1	2	3	6
Populism		1	2	3	3	1		4
Presupposition		4	5	9	1		4	5
Vagueness	1	1	2	4	2		2	4
Victimization	2	1	5	8		1	4	5
Uncategorized			1	1	1	1		2
Sum	17	33	118	168	22	23	66	111

In spite of the substantial shifts in strategic deployment and the increased presence of 'uncategorized' strategies noted in the third phase of study, the media outlets such as Armenian Weekly and CaspianNEWS managed to readjust their overall micro-level strategies in the subsequent phase.

They returned to employing key discourse categories such as Actor description, Authority, and Lexicalization in their reports during the fourth phase of the conflict. This illuminated the how discourse strategies can be adapted to the evolving socio-political context (Van Dijk, 2006).

Example 1

“Pashinyan has previously said that Armenia **is prepared** to recognize Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity. However, this is **the first time** he has **explicitly said** that **Artsakh would be included** within Azerbaijan’s borders” – *Lexicalization* (Avedian, 2023)

This is a form of 'lexicalization', a discourse strategy that emphasizes specific word choices to convey nuanced meanings and frames (Van Dijk, 2006). Here, Pashinyan's explicit affirmation serves to clearly delineate territorial boundaries and potentially shift the narrative surrounding the disputed region.

Example 2

“Following over a month of military action to **liberate its territories from Armenian occupation** from late Sept. to early Nov. 2020, Azerbaijan **has pushed Armenia** to sign the surrender document”. - *national self- glorification, populism, lexicalization* (“Armenia recognizes Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan”;2023)

The text demonstrates the use of multiple discursive strategies. 'National self-glorification' is employed through the phrase "liberate its territories," which frames Azerbaijan's actions in a positive light, emphasizing its success and power. 'Populism' is shown in the appeal to the sentiment of national unity and victory. Lastly, 'lexicalization' is displayed with specific word

choices like "liberate" and "surrender," which serve to create a particular narrative about the events.

These strategies work collectively to depict Azerbaijan's military actions as justified, valiant, and successful, while casting Armenia's role in the conflict as passive and defeated. This not only promotes a positive self-image for Azerbaijan but also delegitimizes the position of Armenia, reinforcing the ideological perspectives of the Azerbaijan side (Van Dijk, 2006).

Table 8- The fourth period / Macro Level Analysis of Newspapers from both Armenia and Azerbaijan

Macro-level	Period 4	Armenia %	Period	Azerbaijan %
Categories	N		N	
Actor description	51	30%	21	19%
Authority	18	11%	8	7%
Burden/ Threat	4	2%	1	1%
Categorization	7	4%	3	3%
Comparison	0	0%	3	3%
Consensus	1	1%	0	0%
Counterfactuals	0	0%	0	0%
Disclaimers	4	2%	2	2%
Euphemism	2	1%	3	3%
Evidentiality	9	5%	8	7%
Example&Illustration	4	2%	1	1%
Generalization	5	3%	3	3%
Hyperbole	0	0%	1	1%
Implication	8	5%	4	4%
Irony	0	0%	2	2%
Lexicalization	14	8%	12	11%
Metaphor	1	1%	2	2%
National self-glorificaiton	0	0%	3	3%
Norm expression	1	1%	3	3%
Number game	7	4%	5	5%
Polarization	7	4%	6	5%
Populism	3	2%	4	4%
Presupposition	9	5%	5	5%
Vagueness	4	2%	4	4%
Victimization	8	5%	5	5%
Uncategorized	1	1%	2	2%
Sum	168	100%	111	100%

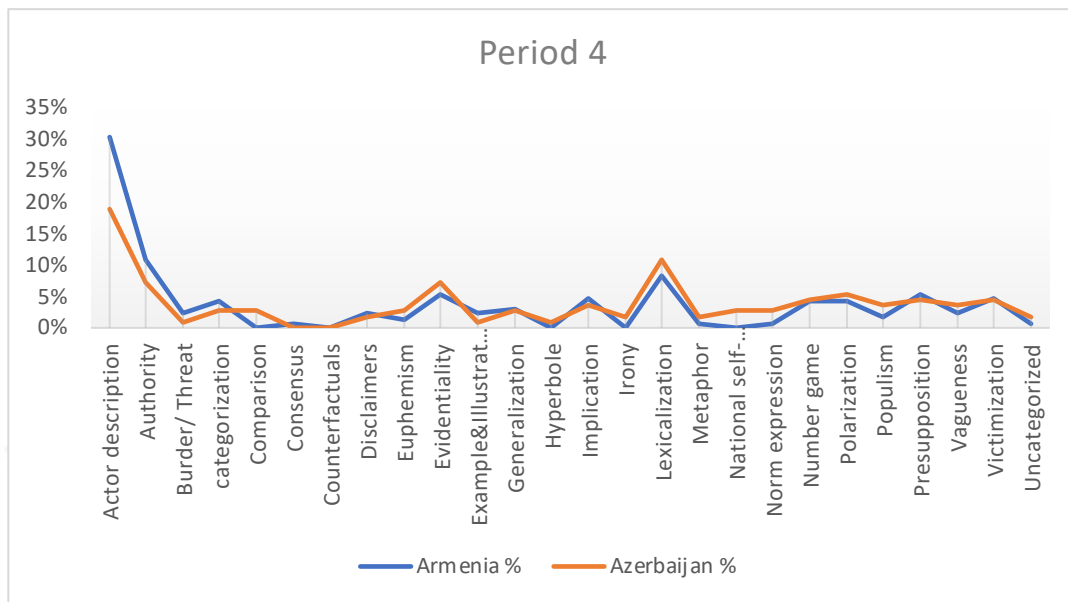


Figure 5: The overall distribution of micro-level strategies in the fourth period

During the final phase of the study, corresponding to the acknowledgement of the contested Karabakh region as part of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity by the PM of Armenia, Armenian media outlets sought to strike a strategic equilibrium between ingroup and outgroup presentations. This attempt was aimed at curbing any potential local resistance while attempting to facilitate the implementation of the trilateral agreement's stipulations. This discursive maneuvering was evidenced by the predominant deployment of 'authority,' 'categorization,' 'lexicalization,' 'populism,' and 'presupposition' strategies in news reports. The period was shaped by a balanced usage of these different discursive tools respectively, 11%, 9%, 8%, and 7% in response to the evolving geopolitical landscape (Van Dijk's, 2006).

Example 1

“If we understand each other correctly on this issue with Azerbaijan, yes, Armenia recognizes Azerbaijan's territorial integrity of 86,600 square kilometers with the understanding that Azerbaijan recognizes Armenia's territory of 29,800 square kilometers,” said Pashinyan” (Armenaiannews) – *Authority, presupposition, lexicalization* (“Armenia’s Pashinyan: Azerbaijan's 86,600 square km includes Karabakh”; 2023)

The quote by Prime Minister Pashinyan, as reported by Armenian News, demonstrates the use of the discursive strategy of 'authority.' By employing this strategy, Pashinyan asserts his role as the official representative of Armenia, making statements that hold significant weight due to his position. The quote also illustrates the use of 'presupposition,' as it assumes a mutual understanding between Armenia and Azerbaijan regarding the respective territorial integrity of each country. Finally, 'lexicalization' is used in the explicit mention of the square kilometers that constitute the territories of Armenia and Azerbaijan. This concretizes the abstract concept of territorial integrity, lending credibility and objectivity to the statement.

Example 2

“During his Monday press conference, Pashinyan added that there should be “international guarantees during negotiations, considering that the issue of the rights and security of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh can be forgotten, and Azerbaijan continue its policy of ethnic cleansing and genocide against the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh.”- *victimization, polarization, categorization.* (Avedian,2023)

In the aforementioned excerpt, several discourse strategies articulated by Van Dijk (2006) are evident. First, the 'Victimization' strategy is utilized when Pashinyan alludes to the potential neglect of the rights and security of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. This creates an image of Armenians as victims, thereby rallying sympathy and support. Secondly, the 'Fallacy' strategy is invoked through the prediction of continued ethnic cleansing and

genocide” by Azerbaijan without concrete evidence, it serves to negatively portray the outgroup, Azerbaijan, and cultivate a sense of danger. The 'Polarization' strategy is also present, as Pashinyan clearly delineates between 'Us' (Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh) and 'Them' (Azerbaijan). Lastly, the 'Categorization' strategy can be observed in Pashinyan's emphasis on the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, thereby reinforcing the perception of distinct ethnic groups with different stakes in the conflict.

In parallel, Azerbaijani media outlets perpetuated the positive portrayal of their own nation during the military conflicts by prioritizing narratives of resilience and triumph over hardship. This was achieved through the prominent use of the national self-glorification discursive strategy, accounting for 11% of the employed strategies during this phase. Meanwhile, the Azerbaijani press upheld the "negative other-representation" of Armenia as the principal instigator of the conflict, implementing a lexicalization strategy that constituted 17% of the discursive approaches during the final stage. By selectively utilizing specific words and stylistic choices, the media reinforced a narrative of Armenian culpability in the conflict.

Example 3

“Azerbaijani President: Karabakh region where Armenians live today is our ancestral and legitimate land”- populism (“Azerbaijani President: Karabakh region”; 2023)

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's assertion that "Karabakh region where Armenians live today is our ancestral and legitimate land" utilizes discursive strategies anchored in *populism* and *nationalist rhetoric*. The appeal to historical claims and legitimacy underscores a collective ownership and establishes a form of in-group unity. This serves to authenticate Azerbaijan's territorial claims over the disputed region in the public narrative.

Example 4

“President Ilham Aliyev has stated that Armenia’s refusal to recognize the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan has been the primary obstacle to reaching an agreement on other

issues reflected in a peace treaty currently being negotiated between the two countries.” – *Generalization, lexicalization* (Mammadli,2023)

The provided excerpt showcases two main ideological devices. The 'Generalization' strategy is embodied in President Ilham Aliyev's assertion that the refusal of Armenia to recognize Azerbaijan's territorial integrity is the primary impediment to achieving a peace agreement. By attributing the lack of progress to a single factor, Aliyev oversimplifies the complex dynamics of the negotiations, potentially downplaying other contentious issues. The 'Lexicalization' strategy can be observed in the specific language employed in his speeches, such as 'refusal' and 'obstacle', which contribute to painting a negative picture of Armenia's stance in the negotiations. These strategies serve to portray Armenia as the party hampering peace efforts, reinforcing a negative other-presentation.

2. DISCUSSION

The 2020 war laid bare the profound nationalism and militarism deeply ingrained in both societies. The document signed on November 9, 2020, has been regarded by some circles as a ceasefire declaration rather than a comprehensive peace treaty (Gamaghelyan, 2021). In the aftermath of the 2020 War, the people of both Armenia and Azerbaijan seem eager to signal significant investments in the military-industrial complex, authoritarian ideologies, and the disregard for social and educational aspects of life, in the pursuit of a perceived future victory. The continuation of military and nationalistic rhetoric in the post-war period and the dearth of voices calling for normalization and reconciliation raise fears of a new period of arms races and clashes.

As a part of their political responsibilities, leaders are tasked with gaining the support of their populace and defending the legitimacy of their country on the international stage by articulating their cause. In his post-war speeches, Aliyev employed rhetorical strategies in general, 'national self-glorification' discourse in particular, to bolster the righteous position

of the Azerbaijani state. During his address to the nation, Aliyev sought to renew the self-confidence of the Azerbaijani people and underscored Azerbaijan's dignified, just, and resolute stance on the Karabakh conflict (Şeşen & Unalan, 2022).

Following the cessation of armed clashes in November 2020, Azerbaijan's leadership promptly emphasized the end of the conflict. For Azerbaijani political figures and the entire nation, this marked a moment of victory achieved through a rightful struggle on their sovereign territories. The efforts of militarization hence were credited for this triumph. Interestingly, from the onset of the war, numerous previous critics of the Aliyev regime started commending the government and its military investments (Gamaghelyan, 2021). Per Giragosian for Azerbaijan, and as the victor, there is no acknowledgment of the rights or demands of the defeated (2021).

For Armenians, however, the ceasefire executed by Russia is seen not as a conclusive peace agreement but as a postponement of status and security issues, which are expected to be addressed in subsequent diplomatic negotiations (2021, cited in Karabakh Gambit). Yet, in a time of unprecedented fragility, the consequences of the war and the ongoing impact of failed democratization process have left Armenia disoriented.

Armenia current strategic position has been defined as being lack of preparedness for the potential resumption of diplomatic negotiations on Nagorno-Karabakh. There is an absence of a diplomatic strategy or a clearly defined end-state goal, leaving Armenia and Karabakh unequipped in the arena of diplomatic warfare (Giragosian, 2021).

For that reason, in the aftermath of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has predominantly adopted a cautious foreign policy language (Gevorgyan, 2023). This new approach seems to reflect the challenges and uncertainties surrounding Armenia's diplomatic stance and the complexities involved in navigating discussions related to Nagorno-Karabakh in the present political landscape. Furthermore, in the post-war era, from the conducted analysis, we see how the lexicon has experienced a shift towards a moderate

stance on Armenia's position on Karabakh. This discursive shift corresponds to the third period and the subject discursive strategy has been indicated under the 'uncategorized' category. Following the announcement of recognition of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and Karabakh being part of it, in his speeches, the Prime Minister emphasized the significance of working groups, discussions, and meetings as a means to prevent military attacks or the use of force in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. He highlighted how any disruptive behavior could jeopardize the ongoing peace talks (Ibid).

However, the transformation from enemies to allies does not occur rapidly; the progress of an changing an enemy image takes time and may persist for centuries. The historical context in Armenia has long been marked by a discourse of threat surrounding the enemy. In the aftermath of the 2020 War, 'discourses of manipulation' and populism have also been identified in Prime Minister Pashinyan's speeches, consistently highlighting Azerbaijan's nature as a "reneging" state. In response to intense criticism from the opposition and to restore domestic stability, Pashinyan emphasized the presumptions attributed to the Azerbaijani side, suggesting potential oversights that could lead to the continuation of its policy of ethnic cleansing against Karabakh Armenians (Avedian, 2023). Consequently, the Azerbaijani leadership has been characterized as "reneging," "deceptive," "deconstructive," and a "destabilizer." (Gevorgyan, 2023, pp. 66-67).

CHAPTER V

1. CONCLUSION

Over the course of the study, the socio-cognitive discourse analysis approach was employed to examine the news reports during the outbreak of the Second Karabakh War and the following peace negotiations, drawing from both Azerbaijani and Armenian sources. A total of twenty-four news articles were randomly selected and analyzed regardless of the text size, twelve from each country and 3 for the total of 4 periods. These reports were selected from three different media outlets from each country, with an intent to capture a broad range of perspectives. The time frame for the study was spanning from 2020 to 2023, encapsulating the conflict's evolution from armed confrontation to ceasefire / peace negotiations.

This period was further divided into four distinct phases, each characterized by shifting political landscapes and strategic developments on the ground. This breakdown facilitated a detailed examination of how the media narratives adapted to these changing conditions, providing valuable insights into the discourse's dynamic nature.

By adopting a mixed-methods approach, employing both quantitative and qualitative analyses, this study sought to provide a comprehensive exploration of the media representations that emerged during this tumultuous period.

With this comprehensive framework, the study aimed to answer two central research questions, which guided the analysis. Firstly, the study examined the patterns in the employment of discourse strategies across the four phases of the conflict, identifying which strategies were predominant in both sides' discursive practices. The results delineated in the findings section of the study bear testament to the complex dynamics of conflict reporting within the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The adopted comparative approach in

this analysis unveiled the role of specific lexical choices and styles in coloring the narrative. These linguistic elements were strategically deployed to depict the unfolding events through an ideologically tinted lens, allowing each side to craft and control their unique narrative at each stage of the conflict (Fairclough, 2015; Van Dijk, 2006).

At the micro level, the Armenian and Azerbaijani media outlets exhibited few similarities in their deployment of various ideological devices, pointing to the multifaceted nature of the discourse strategies leveraged by each side.

However, a remarkable convergence was observed at the macro level of discourse. Both Armenian and Azerbaijani media extensively utilized 'negative other-representation' as a predominant narrative strategy in depiction of 'Other'. This points to a leading common discursive mechanism of delineating an adversarial 'Other' which serves to crystallize and affirm in-group identities, and to maintain and bolster specific perceptions of the conflict within their respective societies (Van Dijk, 2006).

Notwithstanding, the perpetual process of othering the enemy is driven by the fundamental strategy of portraying the enemy as an embodiment of evil and malevolence, while depicting 'the self' as embodying everything good and just (Gevorgyan, 2023).

This uniformity in the 'negative other-representation' strategy signals the profound influence such macro level discursive practices can wield in shaping societal understanding of, and attitudes towards, the conflict resolution.

Secondly, the study sought to observe if any change occurred in discourse patterns of media outlets during the different phases of the conflict and peace process, and to understand how these discourse strategies contributed to the construction of 'us' versus 'them' narratives, in shaping public perceptions of the conflict. Notably, the predominant semantic discursive tool employed by both sides during the conflict was 'negative other-representation.' However, in the post-conflict period, in the case of Azerbaijani newspapers, the 'positive self-representation' emerged as an equally prominent device. This strategic shift in discourse

mirrored the altered political reality, serving to celebrate the 'ingroup's' victory in the battleground.

If conflict reporting leans towards bias or is overly influenced by political interests, it can skew perceptions, exacerbating tensions and undermining authentic, locally-driven peace initiatives (Lederach, 1995). In this regard, it becomes necessary to refer to Lederach's (1997) the Transformative Peace Building theory that further emphasizes the importance of change or evolution of local context and cultures as a part of endogenous peace initiatives. Through this evolution, conflict reporting becomes a source of power to uphold neutrality, capture diverse voices, and remain sensitive to local contexts.

The role of conflict reporting hence, is of paramount importance at all stages of conflict, extending from the onset of hostilities to the establishment of sustainable peace-building processes. Drawing from Galtung's Peace Journalism theory (1998), it's clear that responsible conflict reporting can facilitate understanding, promote reconciliation, and pave the way for a more sustainable peace.

Within this context, it becomes vital to ensure that media discourse is rigorously monitored and critically analyzed. Academics, in particular, have a significant role in assessing these narratives and providing an informed and objective critique. By doing so, they contribute to enlightening local communities and promoting a more rational and unbiased understanding of the conflict.

However, this study identifies a notable gap in academic literature concerning the intersection of Critical Discourse Analysis and conflict reporting, especially in conflicts with an ethnic dimension, such as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Despite the potential of Critical Discourse Analysis to illuminate the ways in which media discourse constructs and perpetuates conflict narratives, its application in the context of conflict reporting remains relatively underexplored.

Given the profound impact that media narratives can have on conflict dynamics and peace-building processes, it is imperative that further research be conducted in this area. Specifically, future studies should aim to extend the categories of discourse devices to encompass a great array of ideological underpinnings and develop a deeper understanding of how media discourses are shaped in ethnically charged conflicts and how these discourses, in turn, influence public perceptions and responses.

Despite the burgeoning interest in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a method to dissect and elucidate various societal discourses, there remains a conspicuous absence of comprehensive academic research addressing the interface between CDA and conflict reporting. This lacuna is especially significant in the context of ethnically-charged conflicts.

Critical Discourse Analysis, with its potential to unravel the ways in which media discourse shapes and perpetuates narratives of conflict, provides an invaluable lens through which to understand the intricate dynamics of conflict discourse. As Teun A. van Dijk elucidates, CDA provides the tools to study 'opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language' (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 352).

However, despite this acknowledged potential, the application of CDA in the domain of conflict reporting remains relatively uncharted, limiting our understanding of how conflict narratives are constructed, disseminated, and perceived. Further academic scrutiny in this direction could offer insightful revelations on the role of language and discourse in shaping public perceptions and influencing conflicts outcomes.

In sum, such an inquiry would be particularly pertinent in the context of conflicts where ethnic identities are implicated, like the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The role of media discourse in such conflicts is twofold: not only does it serve to reflect the prevailing sentiments and biases, but it also contributes to the creation and perpetuation of particular conflict narratives (Bhatia, 2015). There is a pressing need for further academic exploration

at the intersection of CDA and conflict reporting, particularly in the context of ethnically fraught conflicts.

2. THE RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Conducting an academic inquiry must be done within the boundaries of ethical measurements. This research is not free of any ethical consideration and limitation, stemming from the shortcomings of the employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method and the researcher's positionality in the chosen methodology and the broader research context.

The utilization of the selected CDA method, primarily focused on racism discourses, was initiated by the scholar who formulated the socio-cognitive theory of discourse analysis (van Dijk, 2000b, 2006, 2012). In general, due to the defined boundaries of this theory, a more comprehensive analysis of the ethno-nationalist conflicts and a complete understanding of enemy images are yet to be developed. Nevertheless, it is anticipated that this research contributes pragmatically to the further development of the socio-cognitive approach through the formulation of additional discursive strategies (see “Threat” in appendix).

Moreover, in contemporary times where personal politics significantly influence researchers' perspectives, claiming complete objectivity in qualitative research is unattainable. Given the researcher's role as part of the collective and a "carrier" of enemy images, the challenge lies in studying these images objectively while remaining reflexively active. The involvement of a second researcher/coder is suggested to enhance the sophistication and objectivity of the discourse analysis surrounding the selected case study.

3. APPENDIX

ACTOR DESCRIPTION: In discourse analysis, the portrayal of actors reflects underlying ideological biases, with differential depiction based on group affiliations. This dimension reveals a tendency to depict ingroup actors “positively or neutral” and outgroup actors negatively. Analyzing these descriptions illuminates the ideological underpinnings of actor representation, thus enhancing our understanding of bias and group dynamics (van Dijk 2006, p. 735).

AUTHORITY (ARGUMENTATION): Referencing recognized authorities - such as international organizations, academics, professionals, or the courts - in contentious debates serves as an effective tool to add credibility to an argument. The authorities invoked often align with the speaker's ideology, highlighting the interplay of persuasion, power, and credibility within the discourse. This category examines the usage of such appeals within the discourse.

BURDEN (TOPOS): This category pertains to argumentation strategies that represent immigration as an economic liability for local councils and communities. Often deployed in anti-immigration discourse, this tactic utilizes widely accepted arguments, or *topoi*, to substantiate the conclusion, focusing on the economic impact of immigration rather than cultural or prejudiced reasons. The use of this strategy in discourse reveals how economic factors are used to shape attitudes towards immigration (Van Dijk 2006, p. 735).

However, in the confluence of discourse, ideology and conflict reporting, a transformation of analysis categories becomes necessary. The focus is shifted towards what can be referred to as the *'Topoi of Threat'* (see THREAT) for a more granular examination of the ideological underpinnings embedded in the context of conflict reporting. This adaptation facilitates a more insightful exploration of the discourse strategies adopted in conflict reporting, thus highlighting the pervasiveness of ideology in shaping these narratives.

CATEGORIZATION (MEANING): This category refers to a common discursive tactic used in parliamentary debates where 'Others', such as refugees or immigrants, are sub-divided into additional categories, often associated with either positive or negative characteristics. One prominent example is the dichotomy established between 'genuine' political refugees and 'bogus' asylum seekers. This form of categorization and othering reflects broader societal attitudes and concerns regarding immigrants or refugees, informing the way these groups are represented and discussed in political discourse (Van Dijk 2006, p. 735).

COMPARISON (MEANING, ARGUMENTATION): This category refers to the discursive strategy of contrasting 'us' (ingroups) with 'them' (outgroups). Such comparisons can be used to either reinforce stereotypes and discrimination against "Others", or foster empathy for outgroups, or critique one's own government by drawing negative parallels with undemocratic regimes (Van Dijk 2006, p. 735).

CONSENSUS (POLITICAL STRATEGY): This code refers to a prevalent discursive strategy in which a purported cross-party or national consensus is invoked, especially during debates of national significance such as immigration. The function of this strategy is to leverage the perception of collective agreement or past bipartisan support as a persuasive tool to endorse current policies. This tactic often aligns with nationalist ideologies, fostering a sense of unity within the ingroup in the face of perceived external threats (Van Dijk 2006, p. 736).

COUNTERFACTUALS (MEANING, ARGUMENTATION): This category pertains to the use of hypothetical situations, typically framed as "What would happen if..." within political discourse, often in immigration debates. These counterfactuals aim to clarify potential outcomes and cultivate empathy, encouraging individuals to imagine being in the situation of others, thereby promoting a humanitarian ideology (Van Dijk 2006, p. 736).

DISCLAIMERS (MEANING): In political discourse, disclaimers are strategically employed to balance self-presentation while accentuating the outgroup's negatives,

particularly in immigration debates. Although expressed through 'Apparent Negation', 'Empathy', 'Benevolence', or 'Denials', the focus often shifts to emphasizing the outgroup's negatives, hence maintaining a positive ingroup representation (Van Dijk 2006, p. 736).

EUPHEMISM (RHETORIC; MEANING): Euphemisms serve as a semantic mitigation strategy. This linguistic device aids in moderating negative opinions or actions linked to the ingroup, thus contributing to a broader strategy of positive self-presentation and the prevention of negative impression formation about the ingroup. This mitigation or use of euphemisms can be understood both in ideological terms (ingroup protection) and in contextual terms, such as adherence to politeness norms or other interactional rules (Van Dijk 2006, p. 736).

EVIDENTIALITY (MEANING, ARGUMENTATION): Evidentiality in discourse enhances the credibility of claims, often through referencing authoritative figures, (see Authority) reliable sources, or personal experiences. It is crucial in immigration debates to convey objectivity and counter perceived bias. In empathy-evoking narratives, firsthand victim evidence is key (Van Dijk 2006, p. 736).

EXAMPLE/ILLUSTRATION (ARGUMENTATION): Examples/ Illustrations, often presented in the form of brief “narratives or vignettes”, as a potent rhetorical device in argumentation. These serve to enhance the credibility and memorability of generalized points by making them more relatable and emotionally impactful, while also providing empirical evidence. They play a critical role in shaping perceptions of groups in various discourses, influencing the positive or negative connotations attached to them (Van Dijk 2006, p. 737).

GENERALIZATION (MEANING, ARGUMENTATION): Generalizations, accompanied by specific examples of events or actions, constitute a strategic approach in discourse analysis. The intention behind using these elements is to widen the applicability of a particular assertion, suggesting that these examples are not outliers but representative of commonplace situations. In debates regarding the outgroups, these generalized statements paired with concrete instances serve to formulate certain perceptions about these groups,

often underlining negative characteristics or sentiments towards them (Van Dijk 2006, p. 737; Van Dijk, 2012, p. 55).

HYPERBOLE (RHETORIC): Hyperboles, as semantic rhetorical tools in debates, are utilized for enhanced meaning within the strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. They exaggerate aspects aligned with specific political viewpoints, for instance, underscoring undesirable conditions in left-leaning discourse or magnifying perceived negatives of 'Others' in right-leaning discourse (Van Dijk 2006, p. 737; Van Dijk, 2012, p. 56)

IMPLICATION (MEANING): Implicitness in discourse arises from various pragmatic and socio-political considerations, allowing speakers to convey sensitive meanings without explicit expression. This becomes crucial in debates on ingroup-outgroup polarization, where implicitness helps avoid direct mention of potentially biased or negative in-group details. Recipients, drawing on shared knowledge or attitudes, infer these implicit details, shaping their understanding of out-group traits (Van Dijk 2006, p. 737; Van Dijk, 2012, p. 56).

IRONY (RHETORIC): In immigration debates, accusations are often subtly conveyed via irony. This strategy permits indirect critique, insinuating doubts about the authenticity of claims and the intentions of outgroups. The subtlety of irony allows face-threatening assertions to be presented less confrontationally, enhancing their persuasiveness (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 737).

LEXICALIZATION (STYLE): The expression of underlying ideologies through specific lexical choices is key in shaping the discourse on the groups. Lexicalization varies depending on the speaker's ideological stance, goal, role, and perspective and is influenced by the context of the discussion. In conservative immigration debates, word choices often negatively depict refugees, while discourses supportive of refugees emphasize the negative actions of authoritarian regimes (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 737).

METAPHOR (RHETORIC): Metaphors serve as powerful rhetorical tools within debates, making abstract or complex concepts more relatable and persuasive. Particularly in immigration discourses, metaphors such as the 'flood metaphor' are commonly employed. This metaphor represents refugees as an overwhelming, unstoppable threat, symbolizing the perceived danger of immigration and indirectly associating refugees with negative characteristics (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 738).

NATIONAL SELF-GLORIFICATION (MEANING): National self-glorification, a practice frequently observed in political speeches that contributes to the strategy of positive self-presentation. This form of rhetoric involves expressing “positive references to one's own country, its principles, history, and traditions”. While this nationalist rhetoric can vary across countries, it often combines with racist ideologies in debates to underline the nation's dedication to its values (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 738; Van Dijk, 2012, p. 60).

NORM EXPRESSION: In discourse on migration debates, norm expression is a strategy that strongly advocates in-humanitarian policies. This strategy involves explicit normative assertions regarding what collective entities “should or shouldn't do”, aiming to promote an attitudinal shift towards a more empathetic stance towards minorities, marginalized groups, etc. (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 738).

In our examination, we will also leverage this category to scrutinize the articulation of humanitarian norms and their application, based on the inferred requirement in specific conditions. This analytical lens can provide critical insights into how such norms are discursively constructed and operationalized within the context of conflict reporting.

NUMBER GAME (RHETORIC, ARGUMENTATION): In the context of discourse analysis, the strategic use of numerical data and statistics plays a crucial role in enhancing the perceived credibility and objectivity of arguments. This practice of presenting numerical information allows speakers to convey a sense of factual representation, shifting from

subjective assertions to data-driven perspectives that amplify the plausibility and perceived objectivity of arguments (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 738).

POLARIZATION, US-THEM CATEGORIZATION (MEANING): Polarization refers to a semantic strategy predominantly employed when discussing Others. This strategy entails articulating polarized cognitions and categorically dividing people into an ingroup (US) and an outgroup (THEM). The practice is largely dictated by underlying social representations like attitudes and ideologies rather than individual people or unique events. Therefore, heightened contrasts intensify polarization, attributing semantic opposites to US and THEM. (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 738).

POPULISM (POLITICAL STRATEGY): The populist strategy is often coupled with argumentation fallacies. This strategy postulates on behalf of the ingroup, asserting they disapprove of "Others" due to the perceived negative ideological threat (a fallacy). Populism typically surfaces in debates involving conflicts of interest, ethnicity, or ideas and asserts the perspectives of 'the people' or 'everyone' against opposition views (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 738).

PRESUPPOSITION (MEANING): A form of "semantic implication" frequently utilized in debates, in which propositions are insinuated to be true without being explicitly challenged. It involves leveraging shared socio-cultural knowledge to infer non-explicitly stated meanings. Presuppositions strategically function to presuppose the truth of a proposition when such truth is not established at all, thereby acting as a covert way to introduce contentious beliefs (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 739).

TOPOI OF THREAT: A discursive strategy employed within conflictual narratives to cultivate an image of the 'Other' as a potent and imminent danger (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). The strategy is operational in political discourse as a powerful mechanism of persuasion, shaping audience perceptions and controlling the narrative around a specific conflict. By delineating the 'Other' as a threat, speakers can tap into audiences' fears or insecurities,

fostering a climate conducive to the acceptance of protective or retaliatory measures (Van Dijk, 2006).

Moreover, the 'topoi of threat' is not confined to mere portrayals of physical threat. It can also encompass narratives of cultural, economic, or ideological threats e.g., within immigration discourse, immigrants may be depicted as 'burden' /threats (see Burden) to the host country's economic stability, cultural heritage, or social cohesion, thereby furthering negative stereotypes and fostering division (Van Dijk, 2006).

VAGUENESS (MEANING): A discursive technique that employs ambiguous expressions in debates and dialogues, as a measure to avoid overtly biased speech while still advancing compelling assertions prevalent in contentious debates "(e.g., 'few', 'a lot'), adverbs (e.g., 'very'), nouns (e.g., 'thing')" (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 739).

VICTIMIZATION (MEANING): The strategy, prevalent in discourses on immigration and ethnic relations, pivots around the binary framework of "Us" versus "Them". This strategy characteristically portrays the ingroup (Us) as victims of the perceived negative traits or actions of the outgroup (Them). Accompanying the strategies of dramatization and polarization, it emphasizes the supposed 'bad' nature of the outgroup. Through deploying narratives that depict harrowing experiences or injustices suffered by ingroup members, this strategy underscores the unfavorable impacts or threats posed by outgroup (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 739).

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Curriculum Vitae

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Professional Experience

Operations Coordinator

[Inchape Shipping Services] – [Istanbul, Turkiye] [November 2023- Present]

Operations Executive

[Legero International Logistics-] – [Istanbul, Turkiye] [August 2021- November 2023]

Education

University MA Ankara Social Science University Peace and Conflict Studies -2023
(English) (3.43/ 4.00 GPA)

University BA Marmara University – Political Science and International Relations – 2018
(English) (3.48/ 4.00 GPA)

Language Skills

English Reading: Advanced, Writing: Advanced, Speaking: Advanced

Azerbaijani Reading: Native, Writing: Native Speaking: Native

Turkish Reading: Native, Writing: Native, Speaking: Native

Arabic Reading: Intermediate, Writing: Intermediate, Speaking: Intermediate,

Projects

Kashmir Conflict: Identity and Conflict, 2021

Yemen Crisis: Can Federalism be a solution to Yemen Crisis, 2021

The analysis of Zahra Ali's book of "Islamic Feminism" within the framework of Gender Studies and Islam, 2018

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