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## **Narrative Approach to Interethnic Conflicts:**

### ***Narrative Templates as Cultural Limiters to Narrative Transformations***

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#### **Abstract**

Narrative approach to interethnic conflicts considers them as competing stories. In this connection, it is argued that for effective conflict resolution the competing narratives should undergo certain transformations that could bring them towards their convergence into a common one. However, discussions of narrative transformations to conflict resolution often fail to differentiate between surface narratives and underlying schematic narrative templates. In this regard schematic narrative templates which are deeply entrenched with patterns of collective memory and identity can serve as “cultural limiter” which restrains the process of narrative transformations. This thesis is illustrated through the narrative analysis of the BBC Russian Service video report “Karabakh: Two Versions of the Story” (aired on 18th April, 2011). In the analysis of the BBC video report the author employs some procedures which are suggested by the model of “chronotopic” method.

#### **Keywords**

public discourse, truth, Azerbaijan, ethnic conflict

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### **In Lieu of Introduction**

Narrative approach to interethnic or identity-based conflicts is a relatively new field of academic and practical explorations (Winslade & Monk, 2000). The theoretical grounds for this approach are laid down by post-neoclassical social epistemology which suggests viewing social reality as a process of social construction (Berger, Luckmann, 1996). Emerged at the second half of the 20th century the new look has been explicated in the idea that realities are organized and maintained through narratives. Some of the postulates derived from the social constructionism can be applied to narrative approach to interethnic conflicts, such as: 1. Narrative serves as an important tool in grasping social or historical reality (Berger, Luckmann, 1996); 2. Any narrative is a product of a certain construction which always includes acts of interpretation (Martin, 1986; Gergen, 2011); 3. The more skillfully constructed narrative (that is more coherent, with well developed plot and well elaborated beginning and most importantly – ending) is perceived as more reliable and more readily believed in what "really happened" (Bennet, Feldman, 1981).

Within the “narrative” framework conflicts in some essential ways are considered as competing stories (Cobb, 2004). As evidenced by many cases parties at conflict strive for legitimizing their claims by creation and dissemination of their own version of “what happened in reality” while at the same time trying to delegitimize the claims and version of their opponents. In this connection it is argued that for effective conflict resolution the competing narratives should undergo certain transformations that could bring them towards their convergence into a common one (Cobb, 1993). The underlying assumption is that a common narrative would help parties at conflict to create a shared, internally consistent vision of the past, present and future, which is considered as an important precondition for civil peace (Steiner-Khamsi, 1994).

However, creation of a common narrative is a difficult task, especially when it concerns to interethnic conflicts. One of the obstacles arises from the fact that in periods of war and conflict, societies develop their own narratives which, from their viewpoint, become the only true narratives. These narratives tend to denigrate and disavow the narrative of enemy. This is definitely the case with the Israel–Palestine conflict. For example, in discussing narratives in the Israel–Palestine conflict, Adwan and Bar-On (2004 ) argued the impossibility of creating a joint narrative that could be accepted by both sides at the current stage of hostility

and violence between the Israeli Jews and the Palestinians (Adwan & Bar-On, 2004 ). The contradiction between the two sides' intentions and between their narratives is so strong that Adwan and Bar-On concluded "that a joint narrative would emerge only after the clear change from war culture to peace culture took place" (2004 , p. 516). Another type of narrative intervention – personal life storytelling for groups of Israeli Jew and Palestinian students – was suggested by Bar-On and Kassem (2004). The researchers suggested that a group develops its own collective memory out of the painful personal stories, which can lead to the development of joint space through which the participants' narratives could be accepted (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004 ).

Regarding narrative intervention into intractable conflicts, at least two issues that could restrain intervention effectiveness are worth mentioning. One is what might be called narrative embeddedness into identity (Hammack, 2008). Thus, some scholars argue that national identities are grounded in a stock of stories (MacIntyre, 1984). In this connection, any desired narrative transformations should inevitably be limited by patterns of identity based in the larger stock of stories. Another issue may be called narrative truth. Wertsch (2012) distinguishes between propositional truth and narrative truth. Propositional truth is more about historical facts (dates, acts of particular historical personages, and so forth) that can be more or less easily verified, whereas narrative truth is about the motives of the personages or the meanings of the historical events. Narrative truth is maintained through the ways how the events are spun into a coherent story (Wertsch, 2012). In this connection James Wertsch proposed to make distinction between "specific narratives" and "schematic narrative templates" (SNT) (Wertsch, 2002). According to the author, specific narratives are surface texts that include concrete information about the particular times, places and actors involved in events from the past. In contrast the SNT provide the recurrent constants of a narrative tradition. They do not include any concrete information, but are instead cookie cutter plots that can be used to generate multiple specific narratives (Wertsch, 2002). These templates differ from one cultural setting to another and require special analysis to reveal their role as a basic model for constructing plot lines for major historical events, including events that may not fit particularly well in this scheme. It is also argued that narrative template is used by a "mnemonic community" to interpret multiple specific events by interpreting them in accordance with a schematic plot line (Wertsch, 2002). In turn, as schematic narrative templates are deeply entrenched with patterns of collective memory and identity they may resist any significant nar-

rative transformations. In this connection, SNT can be considered as “cultural limiter” which restrains the process of construction of a common narrative from among the competing accounts.

In this regard the Armenia-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno Karabakh could serve as a good illustration for the above thesis. This conflict from the very beginning was accompanied with competing narratives including conflicting historical representations, historical accounts which aimed to justify territorial claims (Garagozov, 2006, 2012). In addition to conflicting historical accounts regarding ancient times both sides in conflict exert great efforts in creation and dissemination of their versions of what happened in the Karabakh conflict during the period of 1988-1994. Pointing out to the completely opposing character of Armenian and Azerbaijani narratives on Karabakh conflict Thomas de Waal (2003) has termed them “sealed narratives”. However, even if Armenian and Azerbaijani narratives on Karabakh conflict are both “sealed narratives” there is one important difference between them which is derived from the different history writing tradition developed by each community. Thus, distinct from the Azerbaijani history writing which has not developed SNT, Armenian historical writing tradition has well developed specific schematic narrative template (Garagozov, 2008). This narrative template what I called the “Loyal People Encircled and Tortured by the Enemies” essentially defines how Armenians perceive themselves and their neighbors and imposes certain limitations upon the process of narrative transformations for the Karabakh conflict. In what follows further I shall outline the Armenian schematic narrative template in more details.

### **Armenian Narrative Template: “Loyal People Encircled and Tortured by the Enemies”**

One of the most important shared narratives that binds the Armenian mnemonic community together concerns repeated Armenians’ “sufferings” at the hands of the “infidels,” first the Persian fire-worshippers, then the Muslim Arabs, afterward, the Mongol “pagans,” and later, the Turks. This national memory has encouraged Armenians to develop habits of emplotment, or narrative templates that lead them to interpret many events in similar way – namely as suffering at the hands of enemies. The Armenian Church which traditionally patronized medieval history-writing has played a particular significant role in creation of this

narrative template. Martyrologies, biblical texts, and much similar literature, had their own influence on the medieval Armenian historical accounts, which fitted into the “Procrustean bed” of providentialism and magical Christianity (Thomson, 1985). Specifically, for religious and ideological reasons, these works presented a diligent and detailed description of the Armenians’ “sufferings” at the hands of the foreign invaders. Based on the narrative analysis of the main Armenian historiographic works (Garagozov, 2008) I have outlined the following formulae of this “Loyal People Encircled and Tortured by the Enemies” narrative template:

1. An “initial situation” in which the Armenian people are living in glorious times disrupted by enemy intrigues, as a result of which
2. the Armenians fell victim to aggression,
3. they have to live through a period of suffering and difficulties,
4. if they remained loyal to their faith, they overcame their enemies; if they betrayed their faith, they were defeated.

To sum up, the Armenian cultural tradition has produced numerous “victim” narratives which are based on the mentioned above narrative template and which left strong footprint on how Armenians perceives themselves and others. In this connection we can say that the Armenian narrative template mediates the effort after meaning in the Armenian “mnemonic community”. It is a cultural tool that is widely understood and employed by Armenians when making sense of events, both past and present, and as such it provides a plot line for narratives such that they take the shape of the same story told over and over with different characters. Dealing with basic properties of the SNT in general Wertsch has noted:

It is not to suggest that this template is simply a fabrication or figment of the imagination of this mnemonic community. Instead, it suggests that the narrative template provides an interpretative framework that heavily shapes the thinking and speaking of the members of the community, sometimes in ways that are quite surprising to those coming from other collectives. (2012, 176)

For example, it would be surprising for Azerbaijani side which lost to Armenians not only Nagorno Karabakh but 7 adjacent regions of Azerbaijan and has about 1 000 000 refugees and IDPs who were forcibly evicted from Armenia and occupied regions of Azerbaijan during the last 25 years to hear that Armenians continue to perceive themselves as victims and the most suffered side in the Karabakh conflict.

In this connection the BBC Russian Service video report “Karabakh: Two Versions of the Story” which was aired on 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2011 (Boldyrev, 2011) deserves a particular atten-

tion as an attempt by an external observer to tell us the Armenian and Azerbaijani versions of the Karabakh conflict in a single narrative. I will be analyzing this particular narrative as a way of illustrating the main points of my thesis about the role of the Armenian SNT and in particular its function as a “cultural limiter” which restrains the process of construction of a common narrative from among the competing accounts. In this connection I also assume that the task of spinning off the coherent narrative as it is usually expected from such a report would be hard to achieve without the reflection on the specific function of SNT as cultural limiter. Before I go into this analysis let me outline in brief the method of my analysis.

### **“Chronotopic reading” as a Method of Narrative**

#### **Analysis: Theoretical Background**

In general there are a number of different connotations that are connected to the use of the term narrative analysis. Depending on different theoretical perspectives narrative analysis may differ in its aims and methods (Bamberg, 2010). In the narrative analysis of the BBC video report I will employ some procedures which are suggested by the model of “chronotopic reading” which I developed and described elsewhere (Garagozov, 1994). Therefore I will briefly outline the basic theoretical framework within which the model of chronotopic reading has been elaborated. This model heavily draws on the writings of Bakhtin (1981), Vygotsky (1956), and Leont’ev (1983). The central category for this model of reading is the notion of chronotope which was suggested by outstanding Russian literary scholar, philosopher and philologist Mikhail Bakhtin for the analysis of novel. He defined chronotope as “intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (1981, p.84). According to Bakhtin:

chronotopes are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel...[they] serve for the assimilation of actual temporal (including historical) reality, [and] permit the essential aspects of this reality to be reflected and incorporated into the artistic space of the novel. (1981, p. 250)

In Bakhtin’s view: “every entry into the sphere of meaning is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope” (1981, p. 250). In the “Concluding Remarks” Bakhtin situates “the significance of all these chronotopes” on four different levels: (1) they have narrative, plot-generating significance; (2) they have representational significance; (3) they “provide the basis for distinguishing generic types”; and (4) they have semantic significance (1981, pp. 250-251). Unlike other Bakhtin’s categories such as the concepts of carnival, polyphony or heter-

oglossia this concept was neither especially appreciated nor elaborated by the Western scholarship. There might be different reasons for a long lasting neglect which is somehow only recently getting over as it is signified by producing a special volume devoted to the chronotope (Bemong, Borghart, De Dobbeleer, Demoen, De Temmerman & Keunen, 2010). But there is still not a systematic theory of this concept. Partly it is due to Bakhtin's rather vague and broad description of the chronotope which can elicit different interpretations. In this connection, initially designed as an analytical tool for establishing generic divisions in the history of the novel, chronotopic analysis has recently been suggested as a conceptual instrument for enriching such diverse fields as narratology, reception theory, gender studies and cognitive-psychological approaches to literature (Bemong, Borghart, 2010). In this regard a cognitive-psychological approach to the chronotope concept suggested by Bart Keunen (2000) is worth noting. Striving to link the concept of chronotope with the notion of schemata (memory schema, action schema) he argues: "Chronotopes are not only semantic elements of texts; they are also (and in the first place) cognitive strategies applied by specific readers and writers" (2000, p.2). The model of chronotopic reading or chronotopic analysis which I proposed in my research (Karakozov, 1994) draws on two important insights from Bakhtin: 1) chronotopes as spatial-temporal structures are explicated (embodied) in plot construction of the narrative; 2) reader through specific system of mental actions aimed at reconstructing spatial-temporal (chronotopical) structures of the text can get access to the meaning (sense) level of the text. In the upshot, the model of chronotopic reading is a specific kind of reading activity that is focused on analysis of plot as a means of making sense of a story. In this connection, the model of chronotopic analysis includes the following procedures: a) to break down the whole narrative into separate episodes (events); b) to define the meaning of each episode (event); c) to regroup episodes and to generalize the meanings; d) to define the overall sense of the narrative.

In this case my task is made easier since I have a video report that has been assembled, that is, frame montage; this makes it easier to break the narrative down into fragments (episodes). In addition, following some basic tenets of narrative approach (Polkinghorne, 2007) I will be including some comments and notes in my narrative analysis that I believe would provide better understanding of the narrative context for the audience which is not well familiar with the Karabakh conflict. From this point of view my narrative analysis could be also considered as a kind of narrative intervention into the Karabakh conflict.

### Object of study - “Karabakh: Two versions of the Story”

The report begins with a video series accompanied by the following voice-over<sup>1</sup>:

*“The pomegranate trees are running to seed, but we cannot help them. The local residents know that the area has been mined. This blackened orchard has been the victim of war for 20 years now. Five mines and several projectiles were found in the field next to it. And there are many more fields like this in Karabakh.”*

The meaning of this fragment at the beginning of the narrative can be termed as **“farming difficulties in Karabakh.”** Then a voice accompanied by scenes of gunfire exchange, followed by women (Azerbaijanis) lamenting over freshly dug graves and trucks full of refugees (also Azerbaijanis), continues:

*“At first they fought with sticks and stones, and then they began shooting, then cannons and tanks, stolen or bought at Soviet military bases, came in to back up the machineguns. In the end, this war was fought by the armies of unrecognized Karabakh and Armenia, on the one side, and Azerbaijan, on the other. The hostility between two once fraternal republics has taken more than 20,000 lives, and more than a million people have become refugees.”*

This fragment, which dispassionately presents statistics of the losses, can be entitled as **“escalation of the conflict and losses.”** Admittedly, nothing is said here about the reason for the conflict, which could give the uninitiated viewer or listener the impression that people were suddenly filled with mutual hatred and began killing each other. Nor is anything said about the fact that most of the refugees are Azerbaijanis, who have been driven from their homeland. A voice off screen goes on to say:

*“Now the capital of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic is like any other provincial center. But as soon as you turn off the main street, evidence of the past fighting is still all too obvious (walls pockmarked with bullet and projectile holes are shown). The capital is in a valley, 10 km up the hill is the city of Shusha. In September 1988, within three days, Armenians left Shusha and Azerbaijanis abandoned Stepanakert. A front line formed. Grad projectiles were fired from Shusha on Stepanakert (video series—firing of Grad projectiles, people hiding in their homes), at night people hide in shelters, in the morning they come out to see what is left of their homes (video series—two middle-aged Armenian women are standing in a doorway; the reporter asks them): “What are you doing out in the street?”— (One of the women an-*

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<sup>1</sup> Since this video report did not have a written transcript, I had to transcribe it in writing myself (in italics), retaining the style of the statements as much as possible. I underlined some of the words and phrases in the written text in order to analyze and draw the reader’s attention to them. My comments and explanations to the transcribed text are given mainly in parentheses.



swers): *“I’m not out in the street, I’ve been standing around here for an hour, I can’t go home or get to work.”*

This fragment, which concentrates entirely on the vicissitudes of the life of the Armenian population of Stepanakert during the active stage of the conflict, can be termed as **“the crisis situation in Stepanakert caused by shelling from Shusha.”** In the next fragment, which shows a tank, we are told:

*“A tank that began the Armenians’ victorious attack on Shusha 19 years ago still stands on the outskirts of the town. But there are enough other reminders. The life of Shusha can hardly be called urban. Although people somehow still manage to live here, many homes have been abandoned forever. The ruins of this mosque and this abandoned armored artillery vehicle are just a small reminder of the town’s former inhabitants. The most important thing for the Armenians’ self-identity has been restored (shot of an Armenian church). When Bishop Parkev returned to Shushi (for some reason the reporter pronounces the name of the town of Shusha in the Armenian way—Shushi), Grad projectiles were kept in the wrecked Christ the Savior church. The church was rebuilt. (For the first time, we see the reporter.) The bishop is sure that the entire town will follow suit and be rebuilt. Shushi, according to him, will become the cultural center of Karabakh. And peace will be possible.”*

It is worth noting both the verbal statements chosen for the narrative (...many homes have been abandoned forever. *“The ruins of this mosque and abandoned armored artillery vehicle are just a small reminder of the town’s former inhabitants,”* *“The most important thing for the Armenians’ self-identity has been restored”*) and the visual shots accompanying this fragment: a destroyed mosque and a restored Armenian church shown in its entire splendor. All of this makes it possible to entitle this fragment as **“overcoming the crisis by capturing the town of Shusha and driving out its former inhabitants (Azerbaijanis).”** However, judging from the next fragment, it is still too early for the Armenians to feel so reassured. Azerbaijan is destroying the idyll, which “for some reason” does not want to reconcile itself with the current state of affairs. The narrative goes on to say:

*“But like everyone here, the bishop believes that Azerbaijan must take the first step. (Shot of Bishop Parkev, who says): “Until the situation is resolved, no one can feel very confident of course. The hostilities might flare up again at any moment, since we often hear aggressive outbursts from the leader of the Azerbaijan Republic. If we go for a compromise for the sake of peace, it should be mutual. But today the president of Azerbaijan is putting forward unreasonable demands that look nothing like a compromise.”*

This fragment can be called as **“the uncompromising Azerbaijanis, who have no wish to make peace, are preventing the restoration of a peaceful life.”** The narrative continues as follows:

*“This house is occupied (shot of a sign in Russian on the gates of the house). Shusha is Armenian; the people of Karabakh believe that history has already been rewritten. On the outskirts of the city stands the house of famous Azerbaijani composer Bülbüloğlu. In the garden is a bust of his father destroyed by shelling. Now postal worker Liuda from Stepanakert lives there. Her house was destroyed by a bomb. ‘How can I go back, where can I go if my apartment no longer exists,’ says Liuda. ‘You mean it has been completely destroyed?’ asks the correspondent. ‘Yes, there is nothing left but bare ground,’ replies postal worker Liuda.”*

This fragment can be called **“Armenians are taking up residence in Shusha.”** So far we have been seeing and hearing the voices of the Armenian side. In the next episode, Bülbüloğlu presents the Azerbaijani viewpoint, managing to say, *“Of course it is very painful to see my father’s home...,”* before his voice is drowned out by the correspondent’s voice-over, saying,

*“Bülbüloğlu, Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Russia. He, which is unique for the Azerbaijanis, managed to visit his father’s home. He visited Shusha twice with a delegation of cultural figures and spoke to the woman now living in the house. He says their conversation was genial. But relations on a personal level are one thing, and the ambassador’s official position is another.”*

Again there is a shot of Bülbüloğlu, who says,

*“When they talk about a compromise, what does this compromise consist of? Giving up a piece of your land and saying, go and live on it as you wish? What sort of compromise is that? We are the ones offering a compromise. We are willing to see the Armenians living there alongside the Azerbaijanis who lived there as part of Azerbaijan in conditions of the highest autonomy. This is the only solution to the situation. But in order for it to work, the occupied territories taken under fire must first be returned. Today the goodwill of the Azerbaijani leadership and the president of Azerbaijan is conducive to resolving this issue peacefully. And to be frank, society is ready for this, the people are fed up with the whole thing, they say that enough is enough, the problem must be resolved.”*

In this fragment, we hear the opinion of the opposing side in the conflict, that is, the Azerbaijanis, for the first time; albeit with cut-ins and innuendos. The implicit meaning to be drawn from the reporter’s comments can be defined as follows: **“at the personal level, the Azerbaijanis can socialize and make peace with the Armenians, but the government’s official irreconcilable position is preventing this.”** The narrative then returns to Stepanakert (video series: airport in Stepanakert; voice-over):

*“Here is a new point of tension. For the first time in 20 years, the airport in Stepanakert is preparing to receive civilian flights. The runway destroyed by bombs has been restored and, at the beginning of May, an airplane, flying over the mountains from Armenia, is due to land here. Baku is protesting—a breakaway community cannot control Azerbaijan’s sky. The people of Karabakh are saying that this land and*

*sky is theirs.” Shot of one of the local Armenian leaders, who says, “The people of Karabakh have their own main question—the future of NKR. If we find a solution to the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh, it must be higher than the current status, and then all the other questions that result from or might be consequences of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will be much easier to resolve.”*

This fragment can be entitled as **“Azerbaijan is preventing the restoration of peaceful life in Nagorno-Karabakh.”** In the next fragment, the reporter’s narrative begins almost heroically,

*“When the time came to defend his home village, Alexander (an invalid on crutches appears on the screen) ascended these hills and took up defense against the enemy ensconced on the nearby summits.”*

A phrase follows that does not entirely live with the previous,

*“In February 1992, refugees from the village of Khojaly stretched out along this valley.” (It is not clear why Azerbaijanis began fleeing Khojaly, if the talk before this was about Armenians defending their village.) Alexander continues talking on screen: “And when they approached Agdam, the Azerbaijanis began attacking us. And there was artillery fire.” (Again, this does not jive with the former statement. It is difficult to imagine how refugees from Khojaly could attack Armenian positions set up in advance. However, without commenting upon this statement, the reporter says), “Alexander is talking about the bloodiest events of that war. But this is only one of two opposing versions of what happened. In two days, 500 residents of Khojaly were killed or later froze to death. (Video series—Azerbaijanis lamenting over the bodies of the perished residents of Khojaly.) The Armenians claim that there was firing from the crowd of refugees. The Azerbaijani side is sure that peaceful citizens were deliberately killed. The people of Karabakh (Incorrect term: correct would be to use the term - the Armenian community of Karabakh) are indignant about these statements. They call the accusations that many residents were shot point blank a fabrication.”*

This fragment can be entitled as **“there are different versions of what happened in Khojaly.”**

This fragment deserves special attention since this is the first time the reporter articulates that there are *“opposing versions of what happened.”* This part of report, as I believe, is of special significance in understanding the entire narrative construction, which I will discuss in more detail a little later. But let us return to the report. The reporter goes on to say,

*“The evidence of fighting is still so obvious it is as though it happened just yesterday. And the venom with which the Armenians and Azerbaijanis defend their truth is also as strong as ever. Fifteen years after the war, there are still two versions of the story. There on a promontory stands a monument to one of the 60 Armenian soldiers who were killed. The path goes past positions where now Armenians, now Azerbaijanis were entrenched for 4 years. Alexander believes that it is best not to dig up the past, then peaceful coexistence will be possible. But, as always, there must be the right conditions for this. (Alexander says), ‘Nothing good will come of digging up the past again. Digging up the past... But it still has a way of revealing itself. The best thing is to come to terms. Come to terms on how we can live here independently. Let them live here if they want. But it is our land, we will never leave.’”*

This fragment can be termed as **“there is no need to dig up the past, the Azerbaijanis should agree to our conditions.”** We are then informed that

*“people are digging up history, sometimes literally. Historian Vagram Varitsian (he appears on screen) took me to the ruins of the town of Tigranakert. The foundations of a 5th-6th-century church can be found here. On the hill is a citadel founded in the first century BC. The archeological searches appear to be peaceful, but Varitsian admits that there are also political implications. It must be proven that Armenians have also lived in lowland Karabakh from time immemorial. At the foot of the ancient city, fresh history is in evidence. A row of entrenchments still not overgrown with grass. Here ancient stones sleep. Here two enemies stand side by side.”*

This fragment, which contains a historical excursion of dubious nature (Varitsian’s confession that the archeological digs have political implications), can be entitled as **“Karabakh is time honored Armenian land.”** Then the reporter appears again and says,

*“There, on the horizon, in the mountains, is one of the best fortified frontiers in the world, the so-called line of contact between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan. The war came to an end in 1994, when the sides stopped firing. But, of course, there is no contact there. Tens of thousands of soldiers on both sides are separated by hundreds of meters of mine fields. (Again the reporter’s voice can be heard off screen): And these tens of thousands of soldiers still wait in full combat-readiness.”*

The meaning is as follows: **“The crisis has still not been fully resolved.”** (V. Kazimirov<sup>2</sup> appears on screen):

*“Of course, I think that peaceful settlement can be reached. But this primarily requires a solution to question number one ... exclusion of the possibility that the hostilities will be resumed. As soon as the possibility of renewed hostilities is excluded, the Azerbaijanis will have no other choice but to look for solutions at the negotiation table, while the Armenians will have no reason to hold onto the territory they gra... (quickly corrects himself) took during the hostilities.”*

This peacekeeping appeal to the Azerbaijanis by Kazimirov, who almost made a blunder, is essentially a call **“to the Azerbaijanis to recognize and reconcile themselves with the current situation.”** Then we hear the reporter’s voice again:

*“There in the distance is the destroyed town of Agdam that once supplied the Soviet country with magnificent port wine. Before the war, almost 30,000 Azerbaijanis lived there. During the war, the Armenian positions were fired on from there using heavy artillery. In 1993, tens of thousands of Agdam residents became refugees. The Soviet constitution (it appears that everyone eulogizes it here) could do nothing to help them.*

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<sup>2</sup> Ex-cochairman of the Minsk OSCE Group for Russia, retired diplomat who is known for his pro-Armenian position shown in his calling for the Azerbaijanis to proceed from the current reality and recognize the status quo that developed during the war.

*The town was razed to the ground. Now for the people of Karabakh this dead landscape is just part of a defense complex that keeps the enemy's cannons at a safe distance."*

This fragment is worth noting for the fact that it continues the Armenian version of events (during the war, the Armenian positions were fired on from there using heavy artillery). But for some reason, it is not explained why in particular "tens of thousands of Agdam residents became refugees." The meaning of this episode is as follows: "**Agdam was destroyed because the Azerbaijanis fired on the Armenians.**" And, finally, the reporter's concluding phrase,

*"People can talk for hours about what happened on this land 200 or 500 years ago. But they are unwilling to talk about what the future will be like (shot of a blossoming tree), except perhaps to compare Karabakh to the Middle East conflict. If this is so, it turns out that the main heritage of the Soviet empire in these environs is mutual hate and mistrust."*

To sum up the reporter's thought, "**the future of these environs is uncertain, and the main heritage of the Soviet empire is mutual hate and mistrust.**" In what follows further I shall regroup the defined meanings in order to get a more generalized ones.

### Making Sense of the Report

The meanings generated in the narrative analysis are summarized in the table below

#### Meaning framing of the "Karabakh: Two Versions of the Story"

	Meanings of the episodes	Generalized meanings
<b>A</b>	(1) "the crisis situation in Stepanakert caused by shelling from Shusha"	<i>Period of crisis and suffering for the Armenians that has been overcome</i>
	(2) "overcoming the crisis by capturing the town of Shusha and driving out its former inhabitants (Azerbaijanis)"	
	(3) "The town of Agdam was also destroyed because Azerbaijanis fired on Armenians from there"	
<b>B</b>	(1) "Armenians take up residence in Shusha"	<i>Restoration of a peaceful life in Karabakh</i>
	(2) "Karabakh is time-honored Armenian land"	
<b>C</b>	(1) "farming difficulties in Karabakh"	<i>However, the crisis is not entirely over since the Azerbaijanis, who do not wish to make peace, are preventing</i>
	(2) "Azerbaijan is preventing the restoration of life in Karabakh"	
	(3) "uncompromising Azerbaijanis who do not wish to	

	make peace”	<i>the restoration of a peaceful life</i>
<b>D</b>	(1) “there are different versions of what happened in Khojaly”	<i>The Azerbaijanis should recognize and reconcile themselves to the current situation</i>
	(2) “there is no need to dig up the past, the Azerbaijanis should agree to our (the Armenians’) conditions”	
	(3) “the Azerbaijanis can make peace with the Armenians on a personal level, but the government’s official irreconcilable position is preventing this”	

As one can see from the above table, the narrative about Armenian suffering which is summarized under the heading the "*period of crisis and suffering for the Armenians*" constitutes a significant part of the report. Essentially, this narrative reproduces the main components of the Armenian schematic narrative template "Loyal People Encircled and Tortured by the Enemies". In this connection Armenian responding to the Khojaly events is especially revealing. These events are related to the most terrible event of the Karabakh war - the destruction of the Azerbaijani town of Khojaly and the mass slaughter of its population.<sup>3</sup> Although the international community has acknowledged the fact of Khojaly massacre at hands of Armenian militants the Armenian side refuses to recognize their wrongdoings in Khojaly. Instead, the Armenians are trying to come up with different justifying stories, with some of them even insisting that the Azerbaijanis themselves committed the murders in Khojaly (Garagozov, 2010). This response is evidenced by the reporter as well: "*The Azerbaijani side is sure that peaceful citizens were deliberately killed. The people of Karabakh (i.e. Armenians of Karabakh-R.G.) are indignant about these statements. They call the accusations that many residents were shot point blank a fabrication.*" (Boldyrev, 2011). There might be different explanations why Armenians so furiously resist admitting their wrongdoings in Khojaly but one thing is clear that a narrative depicting Armenians not as victims but victimizers do not fit into the Armenian schematic narrative template and therefore is disbelieved and excluded

<sup>3</sup> In the small hours of 26 February, 1992, the Azerbaijani town of Khojaly was razed to the ground in just a few hours by Armenian fighters with the support of servicemen of the 366th regiment of the CIS Joint Forces, and hundreds of its peaceful residents were brutally slaughtered. During these events, according to official data, a total of 613 people, including 106 women, 63 young children, and 70 old people were killed and 1,000 peaceful citizens of different ages were maimed by bullet wounds. On the night of the tragedy, 1,275 peaceful citizens were taken prisoner and nothing is known about the fate of 150 of them to this day. International organizations and witnesses reported the particular cruelty with which the Armenians treated the defenseless civilian population of Khojaly, including the many instances of desecration of the bodies of the perished Azerbaijanis (See: Human Rights Watch World Report, 1993; Goltz, 1992; The New York Times, 1992; Human Rights Watch / Helsinki, 1994; De Waal, 2003).

from the mainstream Armenian narrative on the Karabakh conflict. The report is also remarkable by its “one voice-ness”, reflecting mainly only version of one side in the conflict—the Armenian. As one can see from the report, this version is voiced by the Armenians, Kazimirov, and, finally, the reporter himself, which actually goes beyond the bounds of neutrality dictated by journalistic ethics. For example, we are told by the reporter how the Azerbaijani side fired on the Armenians from Shusha and Agdam, but there is no talk about the Armenian side firing on the Azerbaijanis, although it was the Azerbaijanis who were forced to flee from Karabakh. Essentially (apart from Bülbüloglu’s words), we do not hear what the Azerbaijanis have to say. So, while the report is called “Karabakh: Two Versions of the Story”, the reporter picked up mainly only the Armenian version of the Karabakh story. At the context of narrative “wars” between Armenian and Azerbaijani sides in the Karabakh conflict the “one voice-ness” of the report makes it perceived by Azerbaijani side as a biased, «pro-Armenian”. The question - what made the reporter pick up the “pro-Armenian” version of the Karabakh conflict report is beyond the scope of this article. However, this case can be considered within the *narrative compression* paradigm which is suggested by Sara Cobb and her colleagues for analyzing the political conditions influencing the process of why some narratives are granted legitimacy while any alternatives are marginalized (Cobb, 2012). Proceeding from my analysis I would suggest taking into account some cultural factors in addition to political conditions when analyzing the process of narrative competition. In this regard two narrative properties should be especially mentioned. First, “victim” narratives can provide a winning option in narrative competition. The party which broadly employs such type of narratives usually wins over sympathy among the audience and competition after all. Another winning option is provided by such narrative’s property as its coherence, well developed plot, and consistence; a party with a better constructed narrative has more chances to win the narrative competition. From this cultural paradigm point of view, the Armenian narrative on Karabakh conflict definitely has advantage in competition with the Azerbaijani narrative as better elaborated and clearly articulated “victim” narrative.

In general the narrative constructed by the BBC reporter certainly has its flaws. For example, it is internally contradictory. The verbal and visual elements of the report contradict each other to a certain extent: we are always being told that “the Azerbaijanis are attacking and the Armenians are defending themselves,” but we see pictures of sobbing Azerbaijani women and men and Azerbaijani refugees. However, any viewer or listener unfamiliar with the conflict details is unlikely to be able to identify the ethnic affiliation of the sobbing and

fleeing people shown on screen, and could easily make a sense generated by this video report summarized as:” *the Azerbaijani side, “due to stubbornness, government pressure, or some other unknown reason, is preventing the restoration of peaceful life in Karabakh.”*

### **In Lieu of a Conclusion**

The BBC reporter's failure to create a coherent narrative that could cover both parties' versions is instructive. It is instructive in a sense that is attesting to how hard is to compose a narrative from among the competing versions of the conflict. However, a story told from the viewpoint of just one of the sides in the conflict can hardly make this conflict easier to resolve. For conflict resolution, as it follows from the narrative approach is an outcome of a certain narrative transformations of the competing accounts to be initiated through the process of narrative mediation and dialogical interactions between the conflicting sides. In this connection discussions of narrative transformations in narrative approach to conflict resolution often fail to differentiate between surface narratives and underlying narrative templates. For example, even in the face of what appears to be disconfirming evidence as in the case with Khojaly, the Armenian narrative interprets it in accordance with the Armenian People Encircled and Tortured by the Enemies narrative template. Accenting on the Armenian victimhood this schematic narrative template which is underlying Armenian narratives on the Karabakh conflict is a powerful source underpinning resistance to any significant changes. In this connection narrative templates can impose certain restraints upon the process of narrative transformations. Recognizing this might help us understand the troubles and odds that confront anyone trying to pursue the process of narrative transformations for conflict resolution in interethnic conflicts and to develop more comprehensive strategies of narrative intervention into the conflicts.



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