The role of participatory journalism in conflict resolution: The case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
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Master thesis
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Preface

The writing of this thesis was preceded by a series of events. One day back in time, when I was just a little bit older than my daughter is now, I was leafing through the newspaper of my grandmother and stumbled on a letter to the editor. This letter was written by a woman seeking advice on whom her son should live with after her separation with his father. The situation could be considered trivial, if it would not be about a separation resulting from the ethnic dispute then boiling in the Southern Caucasus. The mother, an ethnic Azerbaijani living in Armenia, could, due to the developing conflict in and around Karabakh, no longer stay with her husband, an ethnic Armenian, as she was afraid of the anti-Azerbaijani violence. The woman also feared that her son could fall victim to anti-Azerbaijani oppression and discrimination in Armenia. The family was breaking up for reasons beyond their control.

The letter raised the question whether or not ordinary people who found themselves in circumstances of war could somehow change the situation and influence their own destinies. The answer took a long time to come. During my first Master’s in sociology, I could for the first time advance my understanding of ethnic disputes and it took me another ten years to find a Master program that would give me a possibility to dive deeper into the origins, causes, and processes of ethnic conflict and its resolution. Now I feel confident to share with you my understanding of how ordinary people can influence conflict dynamics and conflict responses.

Writing this thesis would not have been possible without the help of some people. I would therefore like to thank prof. Bomert, my thesis supervisor, for his helpful comments on the draft of this thesis and his help during the editing process. I would also like to express my gratitude to Oksana Karpenko, executive director of the Centre for Social Research (CISR) in Saint Petersburg, my internship supervisor, for her willingness to share her ideas on research methods suitable for my study. I also owe a large debt of gratitude to my family and friends for supporting me during my study in whatever way they could. I am especially indebted to my husband and our daughter for being remarkably patient throughout my lengthy studying, researching, analyzing and thesis-writing process.

Evgenia Mamedkhanova,
February 2, 2020
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1. Background to the study

1.1. Introduction

The media’s role in conflicts has acquired attention of many scholars. A considerable body of research has examined the media’s role in promoting conflicts (Groebel, 1995; Kuznetsov, 2013; Kaufman, 2015; Novikova, 2012; Baghdasaryan et al., in Javakhishvili & Kvarchelia, 2013), while other scholars focus on the ability of the media to assist in peacebuilding (Puddephatt, 2006; Esenov, 2012). Some researchers conclude that the media’s role in both areas has not been adequately addressed yet (Gilboa, 2009; Schoemaker & Stremlau, 2014). Regardless of their views, these studies are mostly conceived in isolation from each other; they are either comparative or historical in nature. While the former has an intrinsic value for social sciences as it helps making forecasts about the future, the latter helps reveal different patterns in news making over time, but none of the above-mentioned studies considers mixed research methods as a proper methodology in the field of media. With these considerations in mind, a new approach that encompasses both perspectives is clearly needed, as it will be comprehensive to further guide research into this field and will bear a relevant relationship to contemporary reality.

According to traditional liberal thought, the media are given the democratic role “to act as a public watchdog overseeing the state” (Curran, 1996, p. 83) on behalf of citizens. This implies that the media’s function is to exercise supervision and social control over state authority and report power abuses by government, if there are any. Furthermore, in line with this approach, the media should stimulate citizen discussion and expression regarding the functioning of government. In this context, the study of the letters-to-the editor as a forum where voices and opinions can be expressed, may lead to an important insight about the newspapers readership’s importance for the press and its role in influencing political choices in conflict-prone settings.

How does the readership perceive politically problematic topics such as ethnic conflicts? Does the audience present its own analysis of problem causes? Does it also offer solutions? Do the letters of two societies in conflict adopt the same discourse on a solution to the conflict or can differences be found? Does the readership of the concerned newspapers, examined independently from each other, demonstrate general consensus on issues about the conflict and the peace process? Does the newspapers’ audience express support for war or call for reconciliation? Does the discourse in the letters change over time? The answers to these questions lay at the core of this research.
1.2. Relationship between governments, citizens and the media in conflict-prone settings

The twentieth century has witnessed the emergence of conflicts in different parts of the world, involving territorial and border problems, ethnic rivalry and uneven distribution of resources. The process of the disintegration of the Soviet Union set the stage for a number of ethnic conflicts where the new international borders did not match the ethnic affiliations of local populations. These conflicts became an integral part of the new reality in which the media were given an important role. In the process of the dissolution of the Soviet Union marked by rising nationalism and calls for the return of lost national values, the mass media guided the masses through this new reality. The media not only informed people about matters relating to their interests, but also generated ideas and sentiments with respect to ethnic relations (Esenov, 2012). The media’s appeal to ethnic sentiments was based on serious considerations, as examined in this section.

In volatile conflict societies the calls to love for the fatherland, for the national values and religion are the most effective methods for reaching out to communities. Such incitements create the conditions for strengthening ethnic identity.

In a crisis situation when the population relies on the news media as the main source of information, the media set a tone of war. When chaos takes over societies and uncertainty grows, the media get “the power to shape news consumers’ opinions on the topics about which they are ignorant” (Tuchman, 1978, p. 2). The media establish the context in which their audience discusses the meaning of events. They do not tell people what to think, but what to think about (Van Dijk, 1995; Rotberg & Weiss, 1996; Ruigrok, De Ridder & Scholten, in Seib, 2005).

The ability of the mass media to set the agenda – to tell people what issues are important – makes it attractive to the government and other parties concerned as an instrument of support in time of war. Gilboa et al. (2016, p. 654) grant the media the status of “a tool political actors employ in order to develop, refine, and promote their own agendas and strategies.” In situations of war and conflict, governments and/or other key players take control of the media to manage the flow of information, to justify and legitimize its military offensive operations or brutal actions, releasing favorable information and propagating half-truths to manipulate public opinion in support of their war aims (Cottle, 2006). Such a relationship between the media and sources of political power in crisis situations is defined by Christians et al. (2000) as collaborative, since the media lend support to the government.

But the state-media interaction is not limited to state domination of the media used to promulgate state propaganda. Rotberg and Weiss (1996, p. 18) maintain that “media motivate powerful governmental or institutional responses”. The newspapers carrying pages of images of atrocities call
for action in response to the cruelty. Media coverage of conflict puts pressure on policy makers to adopt decisions they otherwise would not adopt (Gilboa, 2009).

Turning to the work of Christians et al. (2000) once more, it can be noted that, when the media start to play an active role toward the government, it can adapt several functions. It can facilitate deliberation of diverse civil society voices. Another function of the media, monitoring, can include gathering and publishing information of interest to the audience. The radical function implies questioning the established political system. While the collaborative and monitoring roles deal with information conveyance and transmission, the other two imply the media’s active involvement within conflicts. We can safely conclude that the media play a key role in discussions about conflict.

At the heart of this research I put the media as an actor that can exert pressure on governments to ensure their responses to conflict. I focus in particular on the opportunities that the media offer to citizens to express their views about the current state of affairs in conflict and their ideas on how to further address it, on the right to be heard and on the opportunity for dialog with decision-makers. By approaching the role of media in this vein, I address the following question: does participation of popular masses in media operations serve as a catalyst for peacebuilding or as a brake in this process?

The main obstacle in search of the answer to this question lies in the theoretical knowledge available in the field of media studies for the assessment of the mass media impact on politics. Most publications on the media’s watchdog and informant role are grounded in the experiences of democratic societies such as the US, UK and the Netherlands (Cottle, 2000, 2006; Wahl-Jorgensen, 1999; Ruigrok et al., 2005 among others). McNair claims that “the normative principles of liberal journalism [...] have a general applicability” (2009, p. 284). Nevertheless, the mass media in advanced capitalist societies in fact possess leverage on politics which is unavailable to the media in undemocratic or transitional countries (Grigorian & Rzayev, 2005).

What role is attributed to the media in non-democratic societies? In what way can the media under state restrictions enhance public participation in international affairs and policy? How can the public under authoritarian or transitional regimes discuss politically sensitive topics and by what means?

In the next section the relationship between the media and the political type of regimes will be considered. I address the role of traditional media in supporting citizens’ engagement in dialog with political actors in totalitarian, transitional and authoritarian regimes, drawing on the example of the Soviet press system and the systems that emerged from it.
1.3. Media and public engagement in non-democratic societies

The US-based watchdog organization Freedom House provides annual reports on global press freedom and democracy which are widely used by mass media and conflict study scholars and policymakers. The current research also uses some reports from this organization. The fact that Freedom House addresses the issues of press freedom in relation to democracy begs the question: what is the connection between these two notions? Conventional wisdom maintains that democracy and media are closely linked. Throughout history media have played a prominent role in the relationship between those who govern and the governed, as it served as a principle source of political information for people and facilitated dialogue between government and citizenry. The media’s ability to keep citizens well-informed about the actions and performance of government institutions and officials is directly linked to the media’s task to hold governments to account. As long as the media’s political coverage is free from restrictions imposed by the state, it serves as public control of government. As soon as the media become subject to government censorship, they fail to fulfil their watchdog function.

This simplistic stereotyping view of the media role in the establishment and maintenance of political order, borrowed from the work of Gunther and Mughan (2000), serves to distinguish two opposing regimes: democracy and authoritarianism. Relying on this classification, one can argue that in non-democratic regimes the media no longer can serve their intended purpose of being a conduit between governments and the public by providing citizens a forum for debates with the government about public affairs. The remaining part of this section examines the limitations of this argument.

According to Altschull (1995, p. 212), the media in all regimes claim to be socially responsible and act in the service of society. Altschull gives the example of the Soviet press that offered their readers the opportunity to present their views on the pages of newspapers. Although the party-dominated media used to impose certain restrictions on the public expression of concern, the letters to the editor were an effective instrument to influence community organs of the administration. The Soviet people used this facilitative role of the media to present to the authorities “requests, remarks, suggestions, and demands of the population” (Mickiewicz, in Altschull, 1995, p. 221). This accessibility of the media for the masses in pre-glasnost times can be explained from the Marxist-Leninist perspective which “considered it essential to provide everyone access to the official discourse” (Roth-Ey & Zakharova, 2015).

In his book “Glasnost, perestroika and the Soviet media”, written in the late 1980s, McNair (2006) also paid attention to the role of newspapers as a forum for public discussion in the pre-glasnost period. A common feature of these letters was, according to McNair, a reflection of the interests defined by the Party and promotion of the socialist system. Such a description stands in stark contrast with the
purpose of letters articulated by the Party itself – to be “a barometer of public opinion” (McNair, 2006, p. 20).

In the years following the start of perestroika, the mass media changed significantly compared to the previous period. What was new in the press under the policy of glasnost was the gradual loosening of control by the state authorities which enabled an open discussion of previously forbidden topics such as dissatisfaction about social and political life in the Soviet Union. According to Hollander (1994) and Reader (2015), this was an example of the freedom of expression which until then was considered to be an exclusively Western phenomenon. At that time the number of letters sent by readers to the newspapers increased dramatically. It can be argued that the reason why newspapers had published a great deal of these letters on their pages was that the Party retained control over the media and through the publication of the readers’ letters it wanted to demonstrate popular endorsement of the principle of glasnost and the allegiance to the state and its ruling party. Nevertheless, this does not obscure the fact of public mobilization in articulation of their concerns and interests reflected in the increased number of letters sent to the newspapers. This situation rather raises concerns regarding the role of media selecting letters to publish. I will return to this issue in the subsequent chapter.

Paradoxically, the period of democratic transformations was followed by backtracking on press freedom. On January 16, 1991, Gorbachev proposed to suspend the law about the press (McNair, 2006). Although this effort did not succeed, Gorbachev continued tightening control of the mass media. Alternative media appearance did not affect the situation with increasing political engagement of the media. The traditional Soviet media continued to be the backbone of the media system. Apart from the censorship, there were other tools in the hands of authorities such as laws that protect reputation, honor and dignity which helped them to control the media.

The early 1990s were marked by the spreading of a nationalist discourse in the media. Publications on ethnic and nationalist conflicts among the former Soviet republics replaced previously popular articles that focused on the ideological struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union (Altschull, 1995). Newspaper pages were replete with the publication of tendentiously selected historical facts (Yamskov, 1991), which were used to justify territorial claims and demands for independence.

In this period the press of the former Soviet states continued to publish reader’s letters. There have been some changes in their content. If in the era of Gorbachev’s glasnost the USSR leadership was beyond criticism, now it became the subject of ongoing reproach. The central government was blamed for incompetent decisions, halfway measures of reform, tardiness and impotence that led to the failure of perestroika (Bakinskiy rabotschiy, September 5, 1991). At the same time, these criticisms were generally levelled against the central government and bypassed local authorities.
At the dawn of the new millennium, virtually all former Soviet states – with the exception of the Baltic states – saw increased self-censorship and control by ‘oligarchs’. According to Freedman and Shafer (2014), referring to country reports by the US State Department on human rights practices in Azerbaijan and Armenia, “newspapers, including opposition and independent outlets [...] avoided topics considered politically sensitive” in the former, and that “most publications (in print media) tended to reflect the political leanings of their proprietors and financial backers” in the latter. Since freedom of the press suffered restrictions, citizens turned to social media outlets that became a new forum for information and debate. But over time social media also have become subject to restrictions, although to a lesser extent than print and broadcast media. Thus, according to Huseynov (2013, p. 100), Azerbaijani authorities use censorship tactics such as data-filtering and content blocking along with targeting of individuals “who take to the Internet to voice critical opinions”.

In this section, using the example of the Soviet Union and post-Soviet states, I tried to explore how media in non-democratic regimes facilitate participation of citizens in public dialog. It has become clear that in each regime public participation faces specific challenges. For example, during the totalitarian regime the media enabled citizens to communicate about issues that requested attention of the authorities, but citizens had been involved in the communication with officials on condition that their messages were aligned and consistent with official Soviet policy. Thus, the media granting popular masses access to the debate with the government had taken on a collaborative role with the latter in support of the existing government and social order.

During the period under Gorbachev’s rule, access to the media by the general public increased unprecedentedly. In this period a high degree of media freedom could be observed. Nevertheless, critical voices could only be reported along with a qualifying comment (McNair, 2006).

The subsequent transition to the authoritarian rule in most of the newly independent states that emerged after the USSR’s collapse, overturned attempts to produce a pluralist media which had been made during the period of Gorbachev’s glasnost, and marked the return to media censorship practices. Independent and opposition media faced a crackdown in a number of post-Soviet states. Even the Internet became subject to external power influences. Under such circumstances, the citizen’s access to the information media is granted to those who will merely reinforce official positions.

Summarizing the arguments about the role of traditional media in supporting citizen’s engagement in dialog with established power in non-democratic societies, it can be noted that a non-democratic regime, in contrast with a democracy, does not seek public engagement in a debate that print media can stimulate. Nonetheless, in non-democratic polities governments are often pushed to accommodate citizens in public dialog. There are historical examples that show how excluded or
oppressed groups attract publicity abroad and lay government open to criticism and disapproval of the international community. In other words, governments in these societies are facing a dilemma: on the one hand they realize that participation of citizens in public dialog can jeopardize the stability of the existing social order while on the other, they have to provide a forum for dialog on issues of common concern through the media as a preventive measure against further popular discontent and revolt.

The aim of this study is to examine how participatory journalism in the form of letters to the editor impacts conflict resolution efforts. For the purpose of this study I will focus on the letters published in two national official newspapers that in Soviet times were the media organs of the local Communist Party Central Committees and which after the break-up of the Soviet Union became pro-government outlets. I am examining how the readership of these two newspapers portrayed the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh at the peak moments of the conflict and confront these depictions with the decisions taken by the authorities around the same periods. In this way I want to identify whether or not the government decisions were in line with the readership opinions on a solution to the conflict expressed in the letters.

Drawing on the aim of the study, I defined the main research question as follows:

How does the readership of the Azerbaijani Bakinskiy rabochiy and the Armenian Kommunist/Golos Armenii perceive the causes of conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and how does this impact conflict resolution efforts?

To make a rigorous assessment of the role of public participation and engagement in conflict mediation through the media, I have set up the following sub-questions:

What are the constraints for participatory journalism in Azerbaijan and Armenia?
Who are the actors of participatory journalism in Azerbaijan and Armenia?
Which methods and discursive resources have been used in the letters for the discussion of conflict? Has the discourse in the letters changed over time?
With what effect for conflict resolution was participatory journalism articulated in Azerbaijan and Armenia? Was participatory journalism relevant for decisions made by local governments with reference to the conflict resolution?

1.4. Structure of the Master thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. They provide the background to the study, explore the conceptual framework of public participation in the creation of media content within mainstream media, discuss methodology used for analyzing effects of participatory journalism for policy-making processes in war-
torn settings, offer a historical introduction to the case under scrutiny, develop the empirical foundations of this thesis, and finally point to a conclusion about the role of public participation in conflict mediation through the media. These chapters are divided into sections and sub-sections, which tackle specific aspects of the subject under study. At the end, a bibliography, appendices and an executive summary are provided.

The theoretical part of this thesis focuses on media-society relationships. It is aimed at answering the following questions: Whose interests, views and voices do the media represent nowadays? Whom do the media give access to the public sphere? Can the media remain independent from those they cover? The theoretical part starts by outlining the academic debates on public participation in the decision-making process through the media. Further, it explores the concept of participatory journalism and looks at the challenges it faces in accessing the public sphere. It then outlines the key scholarly debates about the impact of participatory journalism on conflict transformation. Finally, the description of the research design is presented as well as its benefits and shortcomings.

The empirical part of the thesis begins with the discussion of the factors influencing participatory journalism practices in the media in Azerbaijan and Armenia. The second section examines the coverage of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and explains the coding procedure. The third section explores the elements that constitute frames. In the fourth section, an assessment of framing effects of the letter writers’ interpretations of the conflict and its causes for policy-making processes is made. In the final section, the results of the study are interpreted.

The overall discussion of the findings begins with a restatement of the study purpose followed by a summary of the main findings and a discussion of how they fit the literature and previous research. The discussion is concluded with a review of the strengths and limitations of this study and suggestions for further research.

1.5. Societal and scientific relevance of the thesis

In the introduction to his book “Media and participation” (2011a), Carpentier starts the discussion of these two concepts with a striking example. He tells the story of a group of boys who were prisoners in Theresienstadt, a concentration camp during World War II. These boys, despite the dire conditions, established their own newspaper with the objective of mobilizing people to fight the injustices and building a new life. This example is in sharp contrast with the current academic debates on the role of public participation for social change through the media. Most research in this area examines the use of participatory communication in Western democracies and tends to ignore its use in a different context. In my view, there is a need for revisiting this debate. Consider, for example, a definition of
participation that takes on a quite different significance in democratic and non-democratic contexts. The meaning attributed to the concept of participation in a democratic system implies that citizens are not only granted access to governmental information that helps them to make choices and decisions, but also comprises citizen interaction with the government and even participation in decision-making processes on issues of collective interest (Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2007). As to the participation in non-democracies, where freedom of expression is subjected to restrictions and the principles of pluralism are rejected, the degree of citizen participation in public affairs is limited. Spaces for participation are often created from above: citizens are welcome to participate in state-led debates on issues that government sees as most relevant. Participation where citizens play a decisive role faces barriers in non-democratic countries, as the emergence of an independent civil society is seen by government as a challenge to the existing social order.

Western dominance in the field of media studies is also an obstacle to the assessment of the mass media impact on politics outside of the Western world. When scholars such as McNair (2009) propose adaptations of the normative principles of liberal journalism to non-Western contexts, they ignore specific regional and national media practices which are defined not only in terms of political impediments and economic factors, but also include cultural and social constraints. This is best illustrated by the conclusion of Freedman and Shafer (2014) in their analysis of the contemporary press environment in the South Caucasus. The authors claim that by contrast to the Western idea of the media that must serve as an independent watchdog of society, in the South Caucasus region “ordinary citizens and governmental officials [...] often argue that the press should serve as an agent of state-building and nationalism and that its principal duty is not owed to the citizenry but to the country and its government of the moment. One ramification is that many citizens are led to believe that the press should not be fully free to criticize government and public officials” (Freedman & Shafer 2014, p. 190). Here we see that Western-style press freedom is in conflict with traditional Eastern cultural values and that for the analysis of the local concept of press freedom we need to consider national traditions and history.

This research is an attempt to extend the geographical boundaries of participatory journalism research beyond established Western democracies and to examine the role of traditional media in supporting public engagement in dialog with the established power in non-democratic societies. Furthermore, this research explores the ability of participatory journalism to influence political choices in conflict-prone settings. I illustrate my research by examining the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the disputed area of Nagorno-Karabakh. This conflict has not attracted serious concern from the international community and has generally been neglected in Western conflict studies, although it is worth special attention. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, although ‘frozen’ at the time, has a potential
to erupt into a full-blown war again and given that both countries involved are EU’s immediate neighbors\(^1\), the renewal of hostilities will affect not only domestic politics in Azerbaijan and Armenia, but may have devastating consequences for the European Union as well. First of all, the resumption of war can cause a wave of mass refugee movements towards the EU. Second, the danger of an unplanned escalation is a disruption of Caspian oil and gas supplies to the EU which at the moment helps to diversify the EU’s gas supplies away from Russia, in a period of tense relations with the latter. On top of that, the unresolved status of Nagorno-Karabakh undermines global efforts to fight terrorism: according to Gomes and Freire (2005), while Nagorno-Karabakh remains an unrecognized entity, it is open to shelter terrorists, since practices of an illicit nature are out of the control of the international community. Against this background, the finding of a political settlement for the Karabakh conflict should be one of the EU priorities in fostering security and stability around the Union and in its neighborhood.

This research is therefore intended to make three principal contributions to the study of the role of public participation for social change. First, to include to scholarly research and the debate on media studies participatory journalism experiences and practices of non-Western countries. This doesn’t imply that I urge to refrain from using Western-oriented media theories. Instead, I advocate an inclusive research agenda that incorporates various perspectives. Second, this research offers a comparative approach to the study of the role of participatory journalism in conflict resolution that takes local traditions, values and history that affect citizens-media relations into account. Third, this study shows that even in difficult circumstances, such as those that people of Azerbaijan and Armenia have experienced for the last 30 years, public participation through the media has the power to change or challenge the current situation. At the same time this research is aimed to raise public awareness that participation of popular masses in media operations can be used not just for constructive and peaceful purposes, but also to strengthen conflict through hatred and intolerance.

\(^1\) Not from a terrestrial or maritime point of view, but according to the European Neighborhood Policy.
2. The conceptual framework

2.1. Media: whose story is being told?

The media as an arena for debates on issues of common concern have attracted academic attention. Both media and conflict study scholars have investigated the role of mass media in shaping public opinion, influencing the functioning of political systems and processes and the (re)construction of collective identity. In this context, the concept of the public sphere has been a useful tool for the analysis of the mass media in shaping public discourse (Dinan & Miller, 2009). Developed by Habermas (2013a; 2013b), this concept identifies the public sphere as a site for public discourse independent of both civil society and the state and open for all sectors of society. In the framework of this concept, the media have the potential to contribute to the public debate by providing a platform for it. Although some scholars, such as Curran (1996), question the applicability of Habermas’ ideas to the media’s role in constituting the public sphere of society in the modern context, I believe that this concept is an effective tool for an assessment of the observable reality in that it helps tackle deviations from the ideal public sphere as described by Habermas.

The starting point chosen for the discussion of the media’s role in constituting the public sphere of society is the work of Nordenstreng (2000) on media-society relationships. He identifies the viewpoints from which the media roles can be explored: state, capital (market) and civil society with whom the media have a close relationship.

Figure 1. Relations between state, capital and civil society

This graphic representation of the media position in society is a useful scheme for further analysis of the relationships between the media and the actors that use the media as a platform for public debate.
This chapter is divided in two sections. First, it deals with the analysis of the media from the above-mentioned perspective, adopting the concept of the public sphere as a guiding framework. The following questions support the analysis: Whose interests, views and voices do the media represent nowadays? Whom do the media give access to the public sphere? Can the media remain independent from those they cover?

Second, this chapter discusses the academic debates on public participation in the decision-making process through the media. It explores the concept of participatory journalism and looks at the challenges it faces in accessing the public sphere. Furthermore, this chapter explores scholarly debates about the impact of participatory journalism on conflict transformation.

2.1.1. The relationship between media and the state

In today’s world the media have become a field of political and ideological struggle among various groups seeking control over society through the construction and transmission of their own reality (Tuchman, 1978) and exclusion of competing views from the media space. In that regard the media serve as a medium for facilitation and organization of information flows and its immediate transmission over great distances. The media offer opportunities for political actors to provide citizens with information regarding their policies. At the same time the media help to focus attention of the general public on topics that have relevance to political actors, reinforce stereotypes and traditions, and prioritize issues of the powerful. Along with that, the media help to interpret and explain to the audience messages transmitted by those who currently hold power. This suggests that the media play a large role in the political life of modern society.

The state is traditionally seen as a principal actor among various groups in seeking to shape perceptions and agendas through the media. This is largely due to the fact that media have historically been utilized in the service of political groups as a means of articulating their views to citizens. But with the spread of democracy around the globe, the media-state relationship has changed over time. The media began to check governments, monitor the exercise of power and report on the abuses.

Gilboa et al. (2016) suggest that state-media relations have a multidirectional nature. For the purpose of analysis of these relations, we need to consider the points of convergence between state and media and the circumstances in which media play either an independent or a subjugated role.

Various models have been proposed for analyzing state-media relations in contemporary democracies (Christians et al., 2009). These models are not isolated from each other and to some degree they overlap. The principle assumptions of these models are:
• A key priority for the state should be ensuring citizen access to public sector information.
• The state should adopt a constructive and tolerant attitude towards criticism by the media.
• The state must not hamper journalists in gathering information by legal means.
• The state must guarantee freedom of the press.
• The state should take measures to protect and promote a plural media landscape.

With respect to the latter, the state reserves the right to interfere with media operations in situations that constitute a threat to public safety. A case in point is when, in times of war or after catastrophic events, the media adopt government-defined story frames (Bird & Dardenne, 2009; McQuail, 2003). This form of collaboration between the media and the government can of course be driven by patriotism when the media deliberately decide to support the state, but a more plausible explanation is that the state is “compelled to seek the mandate of public support [of its war aims], and [it does] it via the media” (Cottle, 2006, p. 74). To that end, the state requests “a suspension of normal rules of free expression and a duty of loyalty on the part of the media” (McQuail, 2003, p. 121).

State-media interaction models have also been proposed for non-democratic societies. For instance, in the case of Russia, Zassoursky (in Nordenstreng, 2006, p. 171) distinguishes four modes of the relationship between centers of power and media: propaganda machine, independent media, media-political system, and instrumental relationship.

The differences in the models of state-media relations in different political environments suggest that there is no universal model that can be used for the analysis of the relationship between the media and the state, applicable in all contexts. In democracies various forms of media ownership are not only enshrined in law, but also work in practice; in non-democracies media freedom is a mere sham and in reality, it is stifled. Thus, the roles of media in democracy and non-democracy are not the same as political regimes impose certain limitations on the media operations. The models proposed for contemporary democracies rather indicate what the media’s role should be in relation to the state, but using these models as a universal baseline for analysis would be misleading.

A better understanding of the media-state relationship calls for a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which media seek to influence political agendas and policy-making. Driven by the desire to bolster their legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of audiences (Schudson, 1996), the media seek to redefine themselves as an independent, powerful actor that can impose pressure on the state to ensure its commitment to instigate action when and where it is required.

In order to develop public credibility and trust and be accepted as a legitimate source of information, the media need to meet certain societal obligations. First of all, the media as “carrier of news and
former of opinion” (McQuail, 2003) are expected to provide citizens with reliable and accurate information so that they can make rational choices with respect to societal significant issues. This reliable information supplied by the media is directly related to those who are in power. Hence, the media fulfill the role of a watchdog monitoring the exercise of power. Further, the media are expected to bring the voices of the public to the attention of the state. Although the media’s capacity to fulfil their obligations depends on the ideological climate and cultural context in which the media operate (McQuail, 2003), media in democratic and authoritarian states alike will strive to meet their obligation, albeit to a varying degree, as the media have to attend to their own legitimation, integrity and credibility with audiences (Schudson, 1996).

Summarizing this complex set of relationships, it can be noted that the media in their interaction with the state have an ability to oppose it, negotiate with it, but also to resign themselves to state control. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to state that the media-state relationships should be understood in opposition to one another, but it would also be wrong to contend that the media is a partner of the state. Rather, these observations suggest that the media-state relationship is context-dependent and that its examination depends on the circumstances of a specific case.

### 2.1.2. The relationship between media and market

The idea of the free market in respect to the media operation is typically explored in opposition to a media environment controlled by the state. The notion of the free market is commonly associated with competition which the market encourages in order to make the media more accessible for all segments of society, representing different interests and points of view that are otherwise restricted by the state regime. Nevertheless, a closer scrutiny of the market-driven media reveals that they can act in the public interests only under certain conditions (McManus, 2009), but in most cases they rather promote private interests (Curran, 1996).

The idea that media should serve the public interest becomes an obstacle on the way to media commercialization, defined by McManus as any action intended to generate profit. Media’s inability to accommodate public service and return maximization was already indicated by Marx (in Vartanova, 1996) who warned of the media in a free-market society being the servant of its proprietor. With the rise of media conglomerates the media’s public-watchdog role was replaced by the private one (Curran, 1996). While the idea of a free market implies a guarantee for the media against the constraints imposed on their operations by the state, the free market imposes its own constraints on media freedom. To a large extent the content of market-driven media coverage is dominated by entertainment; public affairs remain on the margins of reporting along with stories that could create
financial risks or entail high costs such as investigative reporting (McManus, 2009). An emphasis on entertainment over politics allows media corporations to divert public attention from substantive issues (Curran, 1996; McManus, 2009). This is not the only example of how the profit-driven media compromise diversity. A content diversity problem is accompanied by a lack of newspapers’ variety. Although the number of published newspapers and journals has increased considerably in recent years, the ownership of the media has been centralized in the hands of a limited number of conglomerates, so it is difficult to argue that these sources are diverse. Furthermore, there’s the problem that access to media industry in a free market system is contingent on one’s ability to pay for it. The high costs of market entry create oligopolistic market domination (Curran, 1996).

Vartanova (1996), in her article about the emergence of media enterprises in Russia in the 1990s, suggests that even in the free market the state maintains a defining presence through the licensing of the mainstream media. At the same time media conglomerate owners are not looking to break ties with the state, but they rather seek to maintain close ties. The state and media owners cooperate for mutual benefit. First of all, media owners in their search for profit will not work against the state’s interests as this can lead to restrictions imposed by the state. Second, media conglomerates seek to exercise their influence over the state. As Curran (1996, p. 95) notes, most communications conglomerates are in the hands of a single shareholder or family who has his/its own ideological commitments. These conglomerates use media to promote their own political interests, which is particularly evident in the American presidential election period when media outlets endorse political candidates. Third, media corporations rely on the state as a source for the news (Herman & Chomsky in Schudson, 1996).

However, not only profit orientation of media conglomerates and its liaison with the state challenge media freedom in the free market. Media dependency on advertising and sponsors impedes the media as a platform for the public sphere as well. As McChesney (in McManus, 2009) notes, advertisers define the news content as they become the media’s most important customers. Baker (in McQuail, 2003, p. 293) agrees with McChesney, stating that “advertisers, not governments are the primary censors of media content in the United States.” Thus, the media become a closed system for those who control them, denying a voice to anyone who might have dissenting views. Instead of offering readers a forum for the exchange of opinions, the media have to work to advertisers’ profits by helping them create their commercial messages and disguise them as news.

Although it has been suggested that the free market is equipped to contribute to the diversity of voices and views through the diversity of ownership (Vartanova, 1996), in fact the latter, in combination with high market entry costs, has restricted competition between news outlets, limited consumers’ choice
and reduced the chances for consumers to bring their influence to bear on those who currently hold power. Nevertheless, media operating in free markets can still serve public interests. McManus (2009) suggests a number of actions that could be taken to ensure media acting in the public interest. Thus, he urges governments to help citizens to become media literate. Media education helps citizens to critically examine information the media provides them with, but other than that it strengthens their agency to participate in the public sphere. Further, McManus suggests to stimulate quality journalism by subsidizing the media infrastructure so that it takes the burden of profit away. State-funded subsidies are also necessary to investigative reporting that enables media to act as a watchdog over the actions of vested interest groups. Finally, McManus underscores the need to regulate advertisers’ influence over content by taxing media advertising, which in turn will be used to subsidize public affair reporting.

A clear contradiction between the media’s role in encouraging citizen participation in the political life and the media’s objective of making profit, suggests that regulation of the media by market forces doesn’t have undisputed advantages over state regulation. It appears that in both cases citizens have to struggle for their right to participate in decision-making processes relevant for their communities.

### 2.1.3. The relationship between media and civil society

Even though the ways of looking at the relationship between media and society differ among scholars, they can be roughly divided in two main groups: those who look at the media as a public mouthpiece and those who believe that the media shape public opinion. McQuail (2006) suggests that there are two more ways to approach the media-society relationship. One is that this relationship is multidimensional and that is why we cannot say with certainty who influences whom. Another approach indicates a lack of influence in either direction, as “society and media are two independent complexes of social and cultural practice” (McQuail, 2006, p. 47).

Prior to commencing an examination of the complex media-society relations, we need to clarify what is meant by ‘the media’ and what constitutes ‘the society’. Having clarified these two notions, we can explore where the media and civil society engage with each other and on what issues.

According to the definition proposed by McQuail (2013), media, in the broad sense of the term, are an industry and a self-regulatory institution. The media as an institution implies they are subject to certain rules recognized not only by media professionals, but also by society at large (Nordenstreng, 2000). As outlined by McQuail, “these ‘rules’ generally support notions of wider responsibility and public
accountability and, in turn, serve to foster the trust essential to the performance of a public informational role” (p. 17).

As to civil society, McQuail (2003) defines it as the aggregate of non-governmental associations and institutions that manifest interests of the public and check and monitor the actions of the state. When we consider the work of Reichardt (2004), we see that McQuail’s understanding of civil society is quite broad. Reichardt draws our attention to the fact that the concept of civil society takes on different meanings in different historical periods and that it should be seen as “a concept in flux with changing meanings, actors and adversaries” (p. 46). Nonetheless, he claims to have identified a number of shared common characteristics of civil society despite its historical contexts. First and foremost, the term civil society is always understood in its contradictory connection to the state. Second, civil society is not synonymous with the notion of consensus. As Reichardt notes, some conflicts and inequalities are inevitable in a civil society, since the latter pursues a variety of interests. Third, civil society does not always serve democratic purposes: civil mobilization can be utilized for repressive ends and society fragmentation. Fourth, civil society is the space of power where the struggle of societal consensus takes place. Fifth, there is a need on the part of civil society for pluralistic and democratic media, independent from the state authority and/or commercial interests.

A brief glimpse at these two definitions already reveals a few points of intersection between the media and civil society. I refer to the media accountability for their activities to the public (which is equated with civil society by McQuail (2003)), and the importance of the independent media for civil society.

Why are media activities so important and why should they be of concern to civil society? Why does civil society want to maintain control over the media? And why do the media accept obligations to serve to society? These questions help to further explore the relationship between the media and civil society.

For the formation of civil society, citizens need access to information of public importance. The media provide a constant flow of information that helps citizens to be kept informed about civic matters and to be able to form opinions and make informed decisions. Through working closely with social, cultural and political elites, the media serve to the public as a tool for monitoring and checking the exercise of power. Furthermore, the media provide a platform for public expression, thereby serving as a channel between civil society and the state (McNair, 2009). Last, but not least, the media have the power to create social cohesion and solidarity which are important for the development of civil society (McQuail, 2013).

As civil society seeks to promote its own agendas through the media, control over and access to media production processes become of vital importance. Civil society calls on the media to carry out
certain tasks on the ground that they ought to serve the people and also requires the media to take responsibility for their performance. Although it is acknowledged that civil society has limited agency and ability to control the media, in the end citizens as voters determine what the state should do with the media (Nordenstreng, 2000). It thus becomes possible for civil society to impose its own requirements on the media. The media are expected to guarantee a certain quality of the information they transmit. This quality is understood as accurate and complete representations of issues and events, representation of diverse and relevant opinions, citizen access to the channels through which they can voice their opinions, facilitation of citizen participation in social life, and protection against harmful propaganda (McQuail, 1977). Besides that, civil society is one of the principle sources of information for the media and also their primary consumer. Therefore, the media cannot simply ignore civil society since this would harm their own interests.

Civil society is not the only mechanism of media control, however. Media are also subjected to state and market control as discussed above. Besides, the media adopt self-regulation of their activities. Self-regulatory media practices are premised on the rules independently defined by media professionals according to which media operate. As outlined by Vartanova et al., “these rules are based on the principles of public well-being, journalistic professionalism, and ethics” (2014, p. 138). They help to ensure public trust vital to the performance of a public informational role (McQuail, 2013). Self-regulation of the media might be one of the possible explanations for the question why the media do accept obligations to serve society. Through self-regulation the media convey a positive public image that in turn helps to establish a strong partnership with civil society and strengthens their position.

With regard to media accountability and responsibility, it is important to note that they do not place the media in a subordinate position to civil society. The media are well aware of their potential for influence and power over civil society. Firstly, the media as a public space for debate create an opportunity for civil society participation in public affairs. Consequently, given the exceptional role of the media as a primary medium of public expression, the media decide “who and what will receive varying amounts of publicity” (McQuail, 2013, p. 19).

To conclude this section, it should be acknowledged that the relationship between media and society cannot be explained from one standpoint only, given that this relationship may be affected and varies greatly according to political, cultural, economic and social contexts. Depending on the context, the media-society relationship can be collaborative or result in tense confrontations. Watershed moments of political change represent a serious challenge to this relationship. For example, during transformations in the political system the media are expected to serve as conduits of information about the strategy for political change being implemented by the state, and at the same be a channel
for discussion. Unfortunately, in day-to-day practice that is rarely the case. For instance, as pointed out by Sükösd (2000), during the democratic transitions of the late 1980s in Eastern Europe the media supported the opposition’s efforts to delegitimize the communist regime; this was not done in order to accommodate civil society initiatives, but rather in the interests of the media. The media helped the opposition forces because, on the one hand, they had overlapping agendas, while on the other because “many of the issues on this agenda could be viewed as valence issues overwhelmingly favorable to them [i.e. to the media]” (Sükösd, 2000, p. 144). At around the same time during the Gulf War the media in the United States worked to the advantage of the state and also for the good of media conglomerates being a profitable industry (McQuail, 2003). During the 1994 Rwandan civil war, the media were a voice of the government and military officials and played a significant role in deepening divisions among the country’s ethnic groups (Straus, 2007). Although these examples could suggest that civil society is totally marginalized and has no influence on the media, Schudson (1996) warns that media practices change over time, in response to the changing context. This means that while in one situation the media will be a voice of the powerful, in another they will serve civil society empowerment.

With these points in mind, I now turn to a discussion of citizen participation opportunities in the media and participatory journalism practices. The following section will be structured around scholarly debates over the concept of participation in the context of media and main terms and notions involved. Next, this section deals with key characteristics and formats of participatory journalism and with the role attributed to this phenomenon by the state and the media. Further, this section offers an analysis of how the media accommodate and integrate contributions from the public and which barriers to media access the public faces. In the final part, the role of participatory journalism from the standpoint of conflict management is explored.

2.2. Participation: concepts, prerequisites and practices

The aim of this section is to explore the concept of participation in the context of media. However, first I address participation in its broader sense. This broad understanding of participation will help explain why citizens opt for the media as an opportunity to participate in decision-making processes in the sphere of politics. Arguably, the media are not the only way of participating in politics for the populace; voting, lobbying, joining civic associations, trade unions and political parties are alternatives. Nonetheless, citizens choose the media sphere to voice their opinions and to interact with the state. What does encourage them to enter the media and claim their right to express their views and influence decisions? I will address this and some other questions in this section.
Reflecting on the nature of participation, Carpentier (2011a) asserts that ‘participation’ is a fluid notion as it depends on its political, social and cultural context. He also contends that the articulations of participation in the academic debates take on a different meaning in different societal fields, such as art or communication. Nevertheless, Carpentier underscores the need to achieve “the necessary fixity that protects the concept of participation from signifying anything and everything” (Carpentier, 2011a, p. 351) for its further analysis. He argues that this fixity can be reached through the use of the strategy of ‘thick’ theoretical description. At the same time, he suggests to use the same strategy “to show the fluidity, contingency and diversity [...] of the signifier participation” (Carpentier, 2011a, p. 10). Given this apparent contradiction in Carpentier’s argument, I prefer to look into the distinctive characteristics of participation in order to achieve at least some conceptual stability of participation.

Virtually all debates on participation include a reference to the notions of interaction and access. Moreover, these notions are often used interchangeably with the notion of participation, suggesting that they constitute the same phenomenon. It is, however, an inaccurate claim. The concepts of interaction and access “are only necessary conditions for participation, and in themselves insufficient to speak of participation” (Carpentier, 2008, p. 5). Carpentier emphasizes that solely participation can be understood as a practical involvement in decision-making processes, while the concept of access only implies presence in various organizational structures and interaction – in other words, the possibility of participation.

Having distinguished these three concepts, we can now explore basic elements of participation. The first such element is the degree to which participation is allowed for. Carpentier (2011a, 2011b) defines participation as a struggle for the distribution of power between the actors involved in decision-making processes, and distinguishes two participatory intensities: minimalist and maximalist. The former is understood as a participation limited to access and interaction. Carpentier refers to participation in elections as an example of a minimalist form of participation, emphasizing that it can be seen as only nominally participatory (2008). In contrast, in a maximalist form of participation the power relations between different actors involved in decision-making processes are more balanced. This form provides the basis for a partnership on an equal footing, where pluralist views are not only accepted but actually encouraged. This view of participation resonates with the Habermasian ideal of a public sphere where all actors have an equal voice despite the competing nature of their demands.

Dahlgren (2006) singles out two elements of participation: reason and passion. He argues that these two elements are prerequisites for participation. For citizens wanting to participate in the political processes, some motivation is needed. This motivation might be of a rational or of an affective nature. While many scholars regard reason and passion as opposed to each other, Dahlgren argues
they are interconnected: “reasons often incorporate passions: especially in societal and political matters, values, arguments, ideologies” (Dahlgren, 2006, p. 26). Moreover, he considers passion to be prime reason: Dahlgren emphasizes that without passion there is no participation.

Having identified the common ground of participation beyond the domain of a specific societal field, I now want to address citizen participation with respect to specific practices, but first one substantive reservation regarding these practices needs to be made. Given that this study focuses on participatory journalism and its role in conflict resolution, I will briefly address only political practices as they are of direct relevance for this particular research. Furthermore, to address all practices of participation is simply beyond the scope of this thesis, as participation has an “infinite number of materializations”, as suggested by Carpentier (2011a, p. 15).

As pointed out by some scholars (Wahl-Jorgensen, 1999; Dahlgren, 2006), we live in times where political participation and engagement are in decline. In light of this situation, determining what form of participation has the greatest potential and appeal for citizens is particularly pertinent for stimulating citizen involvement in public affairs. Political participation encompasses a range of forms that vary according to how political participation is theorized. In terms of a narrow definition, political participation is understood as “a minority activity” (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994). Viewed from this perspective, political participation includes forming and joining organizations, political parties, trade unions, participation in pressure groups and public meetings, but also more radical forms of participation such as coups, insurgencies and revolutions. A broader conception of political participation refers to a voluntary activity that concerns government and politics and which is not restricted to specific stages in the policy-making processes nor to particular areas of politics (Van Deth, 2010). Examples of such include discussions on political issues, interest in political affairs (reading newspapers and watching TV news), and voting in elections. All these forms of participation are exercised under common conditions. First of all, as has already been mentioned, participation requires motivation. Another condition for the realization of participation is the availability of resources. One refers to material means – the costs of participation, another one deals with time and civic skills (Arkhede Olsson, 2004). Besides that, recruitment plays a prominent role as it may contribute to or hinder participation. Recruitment in this case is articulated as a mobilizing force which aims to engage civil society to participate in politics. All of the above conditions are interrelated: having the willingness to politically participate is not sufficient when necessary resources are lacking. At the same time, while skills, time and money are necessary prerequisites for political participation, they may not be sufficient for ensuring that citizens are motivated to participate.
As the majority of the political practices require certain skills and resources, their absence impedes citizens’ ability to participate. That is when the media become an indispensable tool for participation as they offer opportunities, both to reduce the costs of participation and to decrease the need for citizens to organize collective activities and to maintain physical presence in any such activities in order to act together. The media have transformed from a source of information into a source of empowerment, a public space for debate and an influencing power.

In the following section I will discuss the role the media play in the development of political participation. I explore the ways in which the public can access the media and the barriers it faces when entering the media territories. Then I will assess the way in which the media present the public and what messages the public articulate through the media. From there, in the next section, I address in more detail participatory journalism as an alternative way of reporting and, finally, examine the use of participatory journalism in conflict management.

2.3. Participation within media

When it comes to political participation, scholars are concerned with the media’s ability to accord citizens a voice in the discussions of political issues and to give them the opportunity to influence the decisions that affect them. At the same time, scholars emphasize that not all media systems offer the same scope and nature of participation to citizens. The aim of this section is to define what opportunities for participation each media organization has to offer, what forms of participation they provide, and how these media integrate the public in their space. Furthermore, in this section I examine for what purpose the public uses particular media organizations.

An appropriate starting point for the analysis of participation within the realm of media might be the question: ‘what does participation within media deal with?’ In a media context, participation is considered in terms of the process of media production. When we examine participation within mainstream media where media production is restricted to media professionals (journalists), then by ‘participation within media’ we mean giving non-professionals (citizens) the opportunities to participate in the production of media content. I place particular emphasis on mainstream media because of the scope of my research. Carpentier (2011a) distinguishes two forms of participation. Participation ‘in’ the media is premised on the production of content and involvement in decision-making processes of non-professionals within media organization. Carpentier defines this form as micro-participation, but nevertheless he underlines its importance as it contributes to the establishment and strengthening of participatory society. Participation ‘through’ the media, or macro-participation, in turn implies engaging in public debate and taking part in decision-making in the variety
of public fields. From this perspective the media are seen as a public space for a participatory process where individuals make collective decisions through a dialog (Carpentier, 2011a). In addition to these two forms of participation, Carpentier makes another distinction: maximalist and minimalist. These forms emanate from his debate on participation and participatory intensities described above. Virtually Carpentier “migrate[s] the maximalist and minimalist model of democratic participation into the media sphere” (Carpentier, 2011a, p. 64). In line with this model, the minimalist form of participation constitutes a symbolic form “where the media are seen to be contributing to communality” (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2008, p. 6) while restricting public involvement of citizens in political communication. The maximalist form of media participation is associated with a high intensity of participation “where nonprofessionals are effectively involved in the mediated production of meaning (content-related participation) or even in the management and policies of content producing organizations (structural participation)” (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2008, p. 6).

Carpentier (2011a) argues that different types of media organizations have different participatory potential. Based on an analysis of mainstream, community and alternative media, he concludes that the first mentioned media production is restricted to media professionals while the latter two offer citizens the opportunities to participate in journalistic processes and give them authority to influence news making. The major difference between these organizations are the resources which already have been referred to in this section. Mainstream media are the professional system with established journalistic processes and practices that make the media production the province of media professionals who possess specific skills and competencies required for creating and interpreting news. People without proper journalistic experience are subject to the restrictions of media professionals, who “are often in positions to decide about the degree of power to be delegated and the intensity of participation that is allowed (for)” to non-professionals (Carpentier, 2011a, p. 68). In contrast, alternative media are “available to “ordinary” people without the necessity for professional training and excessive capital outlay” (Atton, 2009, p. 265). However, I argue, first, that mainstream media are not a space that is exclusively the domain of the professional journalists and, second, that mainstream and community and/or alternative media organizations should not be seen in opposition to one another. Further insight into these media systems will support my claims and will also help to identify the forms of participation that these media organizations provide.

The commonly accepted definition of mainstream media is that they are “legitimate channels for the expression of “the” public opinion” (Carpentier, 2011a, p. 20), access to which is commanded by profit-centered news conglomerates who determine credibility of sources and the newsworthiness of a particular story (Kenix, 2009). Kenix clarifies that mainstream media “rely on professional reporters and are heavily connected with other corporate and government entities” (Kenix, 2011, p. 3). Indeed,
mainstream media are often accused of privileging the interests of an elite over the public. This in turn led many to believe that mainstream media are a partner of the state and that they are always compliant with state interests. Furthermore, there is a widespread criticism of the mainstream media’s objectivity and neutrality. Nonetheless, mainstream media have certain attractive aspects that make “social movements and organizations strive to obtain time or space for their ideas in mainstream media” (Peschanski, in Coyer, Dowmundt & Fountain, 2007, p. 156).

Given the material structures of mainstream media organizations, they have economic resources available to ensure a higher volume of coverage, to support original (first-hand) information gathering and to improve journalists’ professional expertise. Moreover, mainstream media have the capacity to exert pressure on decision-makers. Pointing to the case of the Vietnam War, Robinson (in Cottle, 2006) observes that the mainstream media can, under certain conditions, take the side of the dissenting party and exert influence on government policy.

Robinson is not the only scholar who challenges the idea that mainstream media are an exclusive space for elite debates. Coyer et al. (2007), Kenix (2009) and Wahl-Jorgensen (1999) are among those who argue that mainstream media have opportunities for dissenting voices and views. Mainstream media involve citizens in the exercise of participation by adopting user generated content in the process of news production. Examples include letters to the editor, studio call-in programs and user (reader) comments on newspaper websites. The important thing to remember, however, is that mainstream media are a profitable industry which explains their interest in providing a space to citizens for debates on public issues. The above-mentioned participation options allow the media to reach out to a larger audience and thus increase their profit. Another explanation as to why mainstream media intend to promote public participation is that they, being a self-regulatory institution (McQuail, 2013), have to encourage it to strengthen their social and political legitimacy (Reich, 2011).

Regardless of their motivation for providing participation spaces, mainstream media, according to Atton (in Fenton, 2007), incorporate alternative voices in three ways: through collision when the distinctive perspectives and representations of the mainstream media come together; through incorporation of alternative voices into professional journalism when alternative media sources and mainstream media sources challenge each other in the pursuit of human interest for competition and conflict; and through dissidence “where alternative news sources become newsworthy to the mainstream by dint of their alternativeness” (Atton, in Fenton, 2007, p. 144).

Now it has become clear how alternative voices gain access to the mainstream media and why people choose them to disseminate their messages, the question arises what these messages are and why people want to have their voices heard through the mainstream media. As suggested by Shoemaker
and Reese, “media content may serve as either a catalyst for or a brake on [the] change” (1996, p. 60). Based on this claim, we can hypothesize that citizens will seek to produce their own media content in order to gain a foothold in the information environment and to assert their right of participation in the decision-making processes in the eyes of those in power. In other words, the mainstream media are used by citizens as a site for struggle over hegemony of a ruling elite. In addition, citizens contest journalists’ exclusive rights over the content. “User-generated content” (Coyer et al., 2007) articulates citizens’ lived experiences of a particular event such as war and thus supplements mainstream media coverage with emotions that resonate with the factual nature of news produced by professional journalists. Viewed this way, “user-generated content” provides an alternative interpretation of events and suggests additional solutions to the problems of society.

When it comes to alternative media, some scholars argue that they emerged due to increased distrust in official sources of information (Tuchman, 1978). Others believe that alternative media arose to challenge hegemonic mainstream media practices (Singer et al., 2011), such as editorial filters or commercial dynamics. The belief that alternative media create opportunities for talking back to mainstream media constitutes common ground to these debates.

Alternative media offer various participatory formats. Although Reich (2011) points out that the emergence of these formats is an ongoing process, one can name some of the most prominent among them. These are citizen and guerrilla journalism, civic and community journalism, and finally participatory journalism. Although these terms describing participatory formats are often used interchangeably, there are nuances and differences between them. Part of these differences results from the extent of participation of ordinary people in the production of media content, another part is related to the space where participation takes place. Later on, I offer a close look at different practices of alternative media.

The term ‘citizen journalism’ refers to the process when ordinary people engage in the act of gathering, writing and disseminating news and information on various issues concerning them. In other words, “the people formerly known as the audience” (Rosen, in Singer et al., 2011, p. 2) become active participants in the creation of news content. This citizens’ content is published on the Internet (on news portals and blogs) and sometimes in the print media.

‘Guerrilla journalism’ is often associated with citizen journalism, but in contrast it involves an element of confrontation. It is a manifestation of dissidence with respect to the existing government and social order. Guerrilla journalism is exercised by both professional journalists and non-professionals who have gained the skills required for gathering, filtering and extracting relevant information and its further publication. They write stories on underreported and neglected topics in order to “wrest
control of the news away from the corporate media outlets” (Allimadi, in Sakharovskaya, 2012, p. 222). Although guerrilla journalism is of concealed nature as this practice of reporting entails many risks for the journalists, it is meant to cause public resonance (Allimadi, in Sakharovskaya, 2012).

In ‘civic journalism’ the role of reporters is assigned to journalists who “accurately portray the views of people in their communities dealing with the issues that are the central focus of the news coverage” (Noor, 2016, p. 204). Here the goal of journalists is to facilitate community dialogue and to encourage civic engagement. Journalists support citizen voices in being heard and “not simply [being] used as storytelling devices to open or close news stories, as is often seen in media coverage nowadays” (Noor, 2016, p. 204) and thus provide them with an active role in debates on socially significant issues. With regard to the coverage of community news, the mainstream media are reluctant to cover these issues as these are costly in gathering on the one hand, while on the other they are second to entertainment and human interest stories in competition for public attention (Bertsch & Lubeck, 2009). For these reasons, citizen journalism usually takes place in a digital environment through blogs, social networks, forums etc.

‘Community journalism’ shares common ground with civic journalism, implementing its core values at the community level with the primary focus on the citizens who make up that community. Community journalism as practiced by professional journalists is focused on local news and information about community life that are ignored by the commercial and public media. Community journalists ply their craft in various media: local newspapers, local independent radio, special-interest magazines, and discussions forums.

‘Participatory journalism’ encourages citizens to join journalists in a more interactive discussion. This form of journalism represents collaborative and collective action (Singer et al., 2011). The production of information in participatory journalism is a process which involves both citizens and professional journalists. Readers, listeners and viewers all become active participants in the creation of news content. As Gillmor (2004) aptly points out, the boundary between the audience and the producers of news becomes blurred. The stories that have been produced together by citizens and professional reporters are published in online and printed newspapers in different sections such as comments on stories, letters to the editor and message boards. Among other distribution platforms available for participatory journalism contributions are discussion forums, blogs, vlogs, webzines and internet radio and television.

In summing up the discussion on participatory potential of different media organizations, I want to emphasize that it is wrong to see mainstream and alternative media as opposites. A description of mainstream and alternative media practices points clearly to the similarities in how these practices are
operationalized. Thus, both organizations follow a similar pattern of how they facilitate participatory processes. Contrary to popular belief, alternative media do not always encourage public participation in content production, as illustrated by the examples of civic and community journalism. These two alternative media formats represent a one-way form of communication typical of the mainstream media. Furthermore, it is incorrect to suggest that mainstream media do not want to surrender their control over content production. The case of user comments on newspaper websites (Reich, 2011) shows that mainstream media do incorporate user (reader) voices and thus enable two-way communication between journalists and audience members. What should also be born in mind is that alternative media do not always use their own channels of communication opting for mainstream media to voice their opinions, as the latter is able to ensure a higher volume of coverage.

What mainstream and alternative media organizations also have in common is that they both offer citizen participation in media content creation by means of participatory journalism. The difference is that the media organizations use different ways to bring citizen-produced media content to the public’s notice. In the subsequent section I will address in detail the appropriation of citizen media content by mainstream media and discuss the forms participatory journalism takes. Next, I will explore the extent to which participatory journalism in mainstream media gives agency and authority to citizens to influence the making of news and, as a result, political processes and decision making. In the final part of this section I will examine the use of participatory journalism in conflict management.

2.4. Participatory journalism and mainstream media

With the rise of new communication technologies, citizen participation in the production of media content has taken a new turn. Although the Internet fosters citizen participation in politics as no other communication technology does, it would however be wrong to contend that only this mode of communication participation is credible and deserves enhanced attention. As noted by Carpentier and De Cleen (2008), we should not underestimate the importance of the old media for several reasons. First of all, they challenge the affordability of the new media by emphasizing that “[the] old media still play an important role in the everyday lives of many people” (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2008, p. 7). Furthermore, they claim that in most cases the production process of news, regardless of the technologies used, has a capitalist economic foundation and therefore serving the participatory needs of society is not the first priority for the new media. Finally, Carpentier and De Cleen are skeptical about the participatory potential of new media technologies, as their “participatory nature is dependent on the power (im)balance between a professional media elite and the nonprofessionals who become involved, not by the technology as such” (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2008, p. 8).
The rise in computer use and the expanding use of the Internet has led some scholars to believe that print news media are dying and with it the mainstream media are losing their momentum. Kenix (2011) contests this view and claims that despite the losses in number and readership, the mainstream media in all their forms of expression remain a viable institution that can mediate a powerful impact, including on government decisions. The format of delivery of news is changing, but for the most part citizen confidence in the mainstream media as an effective and competent communication institution remains unchanged.

In this section I will first explain why mainstream newspapers merit special consideration as a platform for ordinary citizens’ voices. Then I will explore how the media appropriate citizen contributions to content. In particular I will outline the rules and norms that guide journalists managing citizen contributions. Further, I will explain how citizen participation in making news affects political processes and decision making. Finally, I will assess the role of participatory journalism in conflict management.

We are living in an era of the pervasiveness of mainstream media (Kenix, 2011). News reporting takes a variety of forms, ranging from broadcast talk shows to studio call-in programs. Some have argued that particular forms of reporting demonstrate a greater potential for the political participation of ordinary people in media-provided spaces than the ones offered by the mainstream media (Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2006). Why do people choose to use mainstream newspapers for debates about public affairs? In my view, these newspapers, whether in print or Web editions, generate confidence among citizens, owing to their long history. As noted by Singer et al. (2011), the newspaper industry has demonstrated resilience over the last 200 years, from the establishment of telegraph communication to the introduction of the mobile phone. Furthermore, in the less digitized markets, print newspapers remain the principal space for citizen voices to be heard. Another reason for interest in newspapers is the fixity of information they disseminate. In contrast to digital media, print newspapers “give the same stories in the same textual environment” (Chovanec, 2017, p. 516). Digital media provide an opportunity to customize content that makes the information obtained via the Internet dubious.2

Mainstream newspapers have several specific ways of presenting citizen content. Online newspapers provide the following spaces for publishing user-generated content: the commentary field (a space following a journalistic article for adding comments), reader’s pages (a separate page where content is incorporated as directly provided by the audience), debate forums (a space provided for interactions

2 I have to acknowledge, however, that these are just assumptions that are not supported by clear empirical evidence. My research is not based on interviews with those who have used mainstream newspapers for their contributions, so I had to draw my conclusions regarding the rationale for their choices based on relevant writings about mainstream newspapers.
between the users regarding a media text), and reader’s blogs (a space for user-generated content, separate from editorial content) (Ihlebæk & Krumsvik, 2014; Chovanec, 2017). Letters to the editor are a participation channel provided by print newspapers. As the use of the letters section for public debates in times of war is the focus of this research, I would like to elaborate upon this form of citizen contributions to clarify its nature and potential for engaging in dialogue with those who currently hold power.

Letters to the editor are the oldest form of public access to the political media, which has proved to be timeless to the present day (McNair, 2000; Wahl-Jorgensen, 1999). Written by laypeople, these letters express their viewpoints on a certain event, a statement made by a politician or a news item that has appeared in a newspaper with regard to that event or statement. Letters to the editor provide several functions, one of which is to communicate public opinion to politicians. Scholars’ opinions remain divided, however, as to whether or not these letters can serve as a barometer of public opinion.

McNair (2000) ascribes to the letters the role of an index of readers’ opinions with the reservation that editors and journalists can create the appearance of ‘public opinion’, by selecting for publication those letters that resonate with their own interests and preoccupations. Reader and Moist (2008, p. 826) share the conviction that the letters to the editor “are products of editorial gate-keeping” and therefore they rather represent editors’ professional values than the state of public opinion. Similarly, LaVally (2009) questions the belief that these letters represent public sentiment. In her view, the letters are poor indicators of broad public opinion, because they are a minority activity on the one hand and, on the other, they are subject to editorial control. Orlov and Livshin (1998) have taken a somewhat different view regarding the letters to the editor as a means of measuring public opinion. They argue that the letters reflect a society’s mindset, even though not in a comprehensive way. They are useful for understanding certain characteristics of mentality and its dynamics. Furthermore, Orlov and Livshin assert that the letters are a source of information about public attitudes toward government. Besides that, the letters present citizens’ views of certain events and identify their hierarchy of social values and priorities. Ultimately, all these authors point out that both journalists and politicians, to some extent, draw upon layperson letters to measure the climate of public opinion.

There is also broad agreement on the temporal nature of the audience participation within print media. Arkhipov (2015), McNair (2000) and Chovanec (2017) all emphasize that the dialogical interactions that arise between the act of participation and the media text do not occur in real time. There is a temporal distance between the article that stimulates the debate and the feedback that follows. This means, firstly, that the act of participation (most of the time) takes place in response to a newspaper article, i.e. the audience is invited to react on journalist content rather than to offer their
own topic for discussion. Secondly, since the interaction is asynchronous, “letters, and the debates which they engender, lack spontaneity and are more likely to be calculated, manufactured assemblages of opinion” (McNair, 2000, p. 111).

What also impedes authentic expression of public opinion are the journalistic norms and routines which govern access to the letters page and maintain control of the content of the public contributions. Not only professionalized journalistic practices are subject to newsroom rules: citizen contributions to content also should meet certain requirements, such as authenticity, relevance, quality of the argument, newsworthiness, reliability, brevity and literacy (Reich, 2011). When letters to the editor do not satisfy these requirements, they either get excluded from publishing or become the subject to editorial moderation. In this case the editor or journalist can shrink the size of the original letter, postpone the release of content by the newspaper, add a heading, opening remarks or comments to the letter and also apply a specific layout (Arkhipov, 2015). Thus, the application of journalistic standards in managing citizen content changes the letter’s authorship. The letter no longer represents the effort of a single author, but becomes a product of a joint venture between the reader and journalist or editor.

Despite these constraints imposed by editors and journalists, the public seeks political participation in the print media. These media take on the role of intermediary between political actors and the public in shaping debates about the significant political issues. In certain circumstances newspapers become a surrogate form of public feedback, communication and leverage on the state as other forms of interaction between the public and the state are not available. As some authors point out (Altschull, 1995; McNair, 2000; Orlov & Livshin, 1998), the state in turn encourages this form of communication as it is the most convenient and the least risky. This is particularly true for authoritarian societies where this means of communication creates a sense of democracy and dialogue.

It is likely that letter writing is not, in itself, an efficient way to communicate public concerns to those in power, neither is it to influence their decisions that have a strong impact on society, but involving the mainstream newspapers as a voice of the public enhances citizens’ chances to be heard. This is because of the nature of the mainstream print media that are able to set the agenda for serious policy discussions. As noted by Rotberg and Weiss, “print is a medium especially well-suited to convey context and meaning and to explore ranges of opinions” (1996, p. 174). The public uses the print media as a platform for its attempts to turn attention of the state to popular demands for cooperation on the major political issues of the day. Readers reporting first-person eyewitness accounts on salient events seek to convince the state that they have the right to decide on possible avenues for dealing with current and potential challenges presented by the experienced events. Given that laypeople and
experts such as professional journalists and politicians “know [...] different things in different ways” (Patrona, 2017), readers’ input provides an alternative interpretation of events and suggests additional solutions to the problems of society.

Apart from the mainstream print media’s ability to stimulate meaningful political debates, they may lend themselves to stage social changes. Kenix (2011) provides a record of the cases that illustrate the powerful effect mainstream print media had in instigating social change. By articulating itself on the pages of mainstream newspapers, the public uses the media’s capacities to manifest its ability and willingness to participate in discussions of issues of their concern and to influence the decision-making processes of the state with respect to those issues. According to McNair (2000), politicians cannot remain indifferent to public opinion expressed on the pages of newspapers: they might respect or fear it, but it would not be reasonable to ignore “the sound of the crowd”.

What effect does public participation in the creation of media content within mainstream media have on policymaking in times of war? The existing literature on media and conflict focuses mainly on the role of the media, produced by professionals within mainstream media organizations (Li, 2004; Esenov, 2012; Groebel, 1995; Tumber, 2009; Gilboa et al., 2016; Straus, 2007; Baghdasaryan, 2013) or by amateur media producers outside these organizations (Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2006; Volkmer & Firdaus, 2012). The role of participatory journalism within mainstream media is a blind spot for the researchers concerned with media-conflict interactions. I assume that the lack of interest in this subject is associated with the belief that this form of participation has limited potential as a transformative force, compared with citizen participation in the blogosphere or with contributions of professional journalists to conflict transformation. On the first argument, it is anticipated that the Internet provides individuals with the possibilities to debate events without restrictions and therefore guarantees that the news produced by the users is the articulation of true public opinion. On the second argument, professional, trained journalists are for good reason considered competent like no others in screening, packaging and refining the news. Yet, that is precisely why the study of underexplored potential of readers’ letters may yield different and meaningful results. Firstly, being subject to editorial moderation and filtering processes, letters to the editor are a more reliable source of information than user-generated content from social media platforms. Secondly, letters are the articulations of readers’ experiences of a particular event or social circumstances which make their reporting an authoritative account of those events in contrast to the detached narrations of the events as provided by professional journalists. Of course, we need to bear in mind that editorial moderation entails some changes in stories from newspaper readers, but we must also take into consideration the positive impact of journalistic intervention. As McNair (2012, p. 81) aptly pointed out, “on its own, user-generated content is limited in its capacity to enable our understanding of complex events”. In
times of war, when information flows become chaotic and distorted, the application of journalistic standards in managing readers’ input may assure focus and quality of the content. Further, it may transform fragmented public opinion into a strong common narrative capable to affect public policies. At the same time, when readers join journalists in the discussion about political affairs in times of war, they use newspapers not only for the dissemination of personal accounts, but also to offer solutions that can help to redress the current situation. This eligibility of readers for offering solutions is what mainly distinguishes them from professional journalists. The point is that journalists should alert the public about problems, but they should not advocate or criticize any possible solution as their “primary aims [...] as most generally practiced are to interest and inform, and not to make propaganda” (McQuail, 2013, p. 208).

Based on the literature review presented in this section, it can be concluded that in scholarly circles there is still no clear understanding about the role of participatory journalism in conflict management. Therefore, it is worth empirically addressing and evaluating the effect the readers’ letters have on policymaking with reference to conflict settlement. To obtain evidence on the issue at hand, I will conduct research on the role of participatory journalism in conflict management, building it upon the research questions brought up in the introductory chapter. In the next chapter I will discuss the methods used to examine participatory journalism exposure and content.
3. Methodology

3.1. Theoretical points of departure. Strengths and limitations of the chosen method

Since participatory journalism and its role in conflict settlement are at the heart of this research, it can be said that this study is concerned with media content and its impact on its audience. This research focuses specifically on the mainstream print media and on the content produced by newspapers’ readership. There is a variety of approaches to content research, but all of them generally fall into two groups: quantitative and qualitative. Since this research doesn’t deal with large amounts of text, it was not necessary to quantify the content. As the goal of this study is to identify how the conflict is discussed by the readership and how the ways of debating about the conflict effect conflict-response policies, qualitative research is of greater value for this particular case. Qualitative content analysis allows the study of the meaning-making process. It emphasizes the role of shared social meanings that have a direct impact on cultural and political content of news (Reese, 2010).

There are several qualitative forms of analysis suitable for content research. Pan and Kosicki (1993) suggest the agenda-setting and media bias traditions for treating the news articles. Von Seth (2011) advocates speech act and modality analysis within a discourse analysis framework. Guided by the advice of Craggs (2016), who states that the choice of a type of analysis depends on the sort of questions a researcher wants to address, I opted for framing analysis as it can help in addressing the research questions at hand. This form of analysis is particularly suitable for answering the ‘how’ questions mentioned above, as framing analysis is designed to enhance understanding about how certain events are presented and how they are discussed in the media.

Tuchman (1978) compares news frames to window frames, suggesting that both limit what we see. According to this author, the news media set the frames of reference for the audience that shape their understanding of the everyday world. The media, first, select topics and events to cover and to present to news consumers; then they provide explanations to these occurrences and issues. In other words, frames are intended to indicate how the reported events need to be interpreted and discussed by the public; they “suggest(s) what [...] the essence of the issue (is)” (Gamson & Modigliani. in Brewer & Gross, 2010, p. 159). The frames have “the power to shape – and distort – public perceptions; the power to promote – or marginalize – competing perspectives on public problems; and the power, therefore, to promote or inhibit the political goals of various societal groups” (Lawrence, 2010, p. 278).

There are several reasons for my interest in the framing analysis. First, in my particular case framing analysis allows to trace the ways in which the readers of two societies in conflict present their ideas about the issue, its causes and possible solutions. Second, this sort of analysis can capture the impact
that the readers’ framing of the conflict has on policy solutions. The example Reese (2004) gives of war frames and their importance to foreign policy and intervention decisions during the Gulf War, is a demonstration thereof. Third, in the view of the fact that frames are “embedded in a web of culture” (Reese, 2010, p. 21) and that they “draw upon a shared store of meanings” (Ibid., p. 18), it would be interesting to explore whether the Armenian and Azerbaijani readerships’ positions towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict solution vary considerably or whether their positions in this respect coincide on certain issues or at some point of time. Finally, the very possibility of the frame being altered over time is attracting my interest, as this study is concerned with an analysis of articles over a period of thirty years. For both countries this period was one of significant social and political changes, such as the implementation of the reform policies of perestroika and glasnost launched by the Soviet leader Gorbachev during the second half of the 1980s, the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the reemergence of the independent republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia, which together formed the backdrop for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Although Van Gorp points out that “a frame changes very little or gradually over time” (2007, p. 63), he agrees that under certain conditions a frame can undergo a change. Such a change can be attributed to changing circumstances as those mentioned above. Besides that, a frame may change as a result of changes to the identity of the actors who advocate specific issue positions (Gandy Jr., 2017).

There are several methodological challenges for framing analysis. Three of them were put forward by Van Gorp (2010). He points to the challenge of reliability and validity of framing analysis posed by the researchers who are conducting it. Van Gorp contends that the persons who are doing the analysis “are also individuals and it is difficult for them to withdraw from their own cognitive knowledge” (Van Gorp, 2010, p. 90) in later stages of the analysis. In order to improve the reliability and validity of the results, the author suggests to use the procedure of the inductive analysis, which is a systematic qualitative approach to frame analysis. The second challenge suggested by Van Gorp is that this approach is time-consuming. In this respect, Van Gorp advises researchers to limit the number of articles for analysis to ensure that they gain insight into the underlying, culturally embedded frames. The third refers to the cultural background of the researcher. Van Gorp points out that it can become an obstacle to identifying the frame. Being a member of a cultural group under scrutiny may result in the researcher’s incapacity to detect the most obvious frames. To address this problem, the author recommends to examine frames on the issue over a period of time and not just at a given point in time, as over the years some changes in the use of frames can be observed.

I try to tackle these challenges of framing approach by undertaking specific steps. To ensure the reliability and validity of the results, I use the guide as provided by Van Gorp (2010). This procedure ensures a systematic qualitative approach to frame analysis. The application of the qualitative data
analysis software Atlas.ti is an additional way to secure that frames are identified in a systematic manner and that research conclusions meet the standards of validity and reliability. With regard to the number of articles for analysis, I intend to limit it to 60 articles. In the next section I will explain how and why these number of articles have been chosen. Now it suffices to note that such a newspaper sample, on the one hand, appears sufficient to present a general picture of how the conflict has been perceived by the readership of the two newspapers and to examine what role the frames surrounding the conflict played in directing foreign policies of two societies in conflict, and, on the other, the number of articles selected for analysis seems appropriate to a novice researcher’s experience.

3.2. Data gathering

Two newspapers were selected for this analysis: the Azerbaijani Bakinskiy rabochiy (“Baku worker”) and the Armenian Kommunist (“Communist”), in 1991 renamed Golos Armenii (“Voice of Armenia”). Both newspapers are published in the Russian language.

These newspapers were founded during Soviet times and still exist today, which provides the sample with material continuity. During the Soviet period they were daily organs of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the respective republics. Nowadays, both newspapers are pro-government, although Golos Armenii is an independent newspaper (Andresyan, 2014) and Bakinskiy rabochiy is an official newspaper of the administration of the President of the Azerbaijan republic (Russia’s international news agency, 2009). In 1991 Bakinskiy rabochiy had a daily circulation of 63,980 issues, whereas in 2018 this has dropped to 3,560 issues. In 2013, the circulation of Golos Armenii was 2,000 issues a day (Alekseyenko, 2013). As to the data available for earlier years, it shows that in 2005 Golos Armenii had a circulation of 3,500 issues (Bagdasarian & Yunusov, 2005), while in 1972 Kommunist had a circulation of 45,000 (Wikipedia, n.d.).

Of interest is the fact that during the first year of the conflict both newspapers have criticized each other’s publications, throwing mutual accusations of bias and partiality in the coverage of the conflict and the history of the Nagorno-Karabakh region (see for instance, Kommunist, #271 of 19.11.1988, #275 of 24.11.1988 or #280 of 01.12.1988; Bakinskiy rabochiy, #274 of 25.11.1988 or #275 of 26.11.1988). Despite mutual criticism, both newspapers quoted each other’s articles to develop their own points. This suggests that these two papers may be regarded as equivalent or comparable in terms of quality of publications.

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3 Based on the information presented in one of Bakinskiy rabochiy issue of 1991 (printing order 2819).
4 Based on the information presented in Bakinskiy rabochiy, #10 of 18.01.2018.
This study’s sample comprises of 60 articles selected from 1988 to August 2018. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict broke out in 1988 and is still ongoing in 2020. Given that 32 years are a long period of time, it was not possible to analyze media content for the whole period. For that reason, it was decided to restrict sampling to ‘hot’ phases of the conflict. Thus, the sampling has included:

- Major military incidents (acts of war directed against enemy combatants and the civilian population);
- Refugees flows (collective evacuation and expulsions of civilians for reasons related to the conflict);
- Security arrangements (debates and negotiations).  

The objective has been to examine how the readership of two newspapers portrayed the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh at the peak moments of the conflict and confront these depictions with the decisions taken by the authorities around the same periods. In this way I want to identify whether or not the government decisions were in line with the readership opinions on a solution to the conflict expressed in the letters.

The sampling frame included the newspapers published three days before and after each incident taking place in the course of a ‘hot’ phase of the conflict. Such time limits were set in view of two considerations. First, media reports about a particular event are often preceded by speculations about its possible developments. Second, the speed of newsgathering and reporting in print media in the late 1980s and the early 1990s was significantly different from that of the mid-1990s, when the Internet offered a new venue for collecting and reporting a story. Thus, this approach to sampling allows to cover most publications related to the incidents of ‘hot’ phases of the conflict.

The sample was collected mainly in the National Library of Russia in Saint-Petersburg. The exceptions are digital versions of the newspapers published in the period between 2014 and 2018 as their print versions were not available in the library. Although the objective of this study has been to analyze all letters to the editor published during ‘hot’ phases of the conflict, it was not possible due to the following reasons. First of all, the National Library’s newspaper collection doesn’t have full coverage for the concerned period: many issues of Bakinskiy rabochiy and Kommunist/Golos Armenii are missing. The library has the following holdings of Bakinskiy rabochiy issues on paper: from 1988 to 1992, from 1997 to 2008 and for the year 2013. In case of Kommunist/Golos Armenii, the holdings include the years 1988-1992, 1996, 1998-1999, 2001-2007, although there are some missing issues over these periods. The highest number of missing issues is for the year 1991. That year the supply of

Appendix II gives an overview of the key events that constituted the sampling period of this study.
newspapers to the library from the neighboring republics had dwindled almost to nothing. The collapse of the Soviet Union posed serious challenges, not only for the news media in the former Soviet republics forcing newspapers to decrease their circulations (Altschull, 1995), but it also resulted in disrupted postal services. Thus, according to a Bakinskiy rabochiy article (#226), delays and disruptions in newspapers’ delivery from Azerbaijan to Russia occurred due to the lack of cooperation of the publishing house with the Azerbaijani Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications under current economic circumstances.

It was not possible to compensate missing hard-copy issues with the use of newspapers on microfilms as Bakinskiy rabochiy and Kommunist/Golos Armenii were not available in this format in the National Library of Russia.

Another obstacle to articles search was the absence of an electronic database for the selected newspapers that could enable a search by search terms. Therefore, to select articles for analysis I had to read through paper versions of the newspapers and choose relevant articles manually, having preliminary selected the newspapers based on their date of publication. Such a search for the articles might cause overlooking some publications.

Finally, the main criteria for selection was a type of publication. Since this study is concerned with how participatory journalism impacts conflict resolution efforts, I selected all letters to the editor appearing in Bakinskiy rabochiy and Kommunist/Golos Armenii which were devoted to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. While it might seem surprising that this has been applied at the last stage of selection, this adopted sampling criterion helped to shape the scope and focus of this study. My original plan was to carry out discourse analysis of the coverage of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by Bakinskiy rabochiy and Kommunist/Golos Armenii in order to explore the differences in how this conflict was defined by the media outlets. But, after reading these two newspapers for three weeks, I realized that readers’ letters published in these newspapers themselves are worthy of special attention. That’s when I limited my sample of newspaper articles to letters to the editor and decided to construct an analysis of how the readership of the concerned newspapers perceives the causes of conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and how this impacts conflict resolution efforts.

Before I start my analysis of readers’ letters, a brief introduction to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict follows so as to provide the analysis with the background historical and societal context.
4. Historical background of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict

The contemporary phase\(^6\) of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan began in February 1988, when the first mass protests demanding the transfer of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region from Azerbaijan to Armenia started in Karabakh. Soon the rallies spread to the Armenian capital of Yerevan (Kaufman, 2015). On February 20, 1988, a regional parliament of Nagorno-Karabakh responded positively to this demand. A few days later two Azerbaijanis were killed in a brawl between a group of young Azerbaijani men and Armenian villagers in the neighborhood of Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh’s capital (De Waal, 2014). This incident elicited a violent response in the Azerbaijani city of Sumgait where a series of rallies protesting the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh resulted in violent pogroms against Armenians. During these pogroms, hundreds of Armenians were injured and 26 were killed at the hands of Azerbaijani mobs (De Waal, 2005). The violence was partially led by Azerbaijani refugees evicted from Armenian-controlled areas. This incident prompted the Soviet authorities to take the situation under control: Moscow introduced a change in leadership of the local communist parties (Cheterian, 2008). Nevertheless, it did not solve the problem. Instead, the situation continued to deteriorate: the number of refugees continued to increase – tens of thousands of Armenians left Azerbaijan fearing further anti-Armenian violence and more than 200,000 Azerbaijanis were expelled from Armenia (Shafiyev, 2007). Moreover, a series of demonstrations continued in both Baku and Yerevan. Later these protests occasionally escalated into clashes resulting in death on both sides.

In November 1989, Armenia proclaimed the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia. This statement led to a massive wave of attacks on Armenians in Baku. Anti-Armenian violence resulted in the death of ninety Armenians and in the mass flight of thousands of Armenian refugees into Yerevan (De Waal, 2014). Along with this, the opposition Popular Front of Azerbaijan was about to overthrow the communist authorities in the Azerbaijani SSR. Civil unrest in the republic prompted Gorbachev to send troops into Baku to stop inter-ethnic hostilities and to reestablish Communist Party authority. As a result of the hostilities, 130 citizens of Baku were killed and several hundred were injured (De Waal, 2014).

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\(^6\) It needs to be noted that the Armenian-Azeri conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh goes back to the early nineteenth century when, following the Russo-Iranian war of 1826-28, the Karabakh Khanate became a protectorate of Russia. 1918 was another landmark year for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, when the region became the object of dispute and armed confrontation between the newly formed Republic of Armenia and the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic.
The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked an escalation of violence between the two republics. The number of violent clashes between the Azerbaijani and Armenian population of Karabakh was on the rise. In an effort to regain control over the territory, Azerbaijani security forces, in cooperation with Soviet army and police units, launched ‘Operation Ring’ on April 30, 1991. The operation’s official aim was to check the registration of the inhabitants of towns and villages across the region, but in practice it was launched with a different objective. The goal was “the disarmament of the Armenian militias [...] and suppression of independence-minded Armenians” (Zurcher, 2007, p. 168). The operation failed. Armenian forces defeated the Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh and then occupied seven regions outside the area. Later that year a peace plan was signed, but this did not bring the expected result.

In 1993, the UN Security Council called upon both sides to cease hostilities and directed the Armenian military to withdraw its forces from Karabakh immediately (Broers, 2005). In May 1994, Russia brokered a cease-fire agreement and the two belligerent countries signed a truce (Broers, 2005). From December of the same year on the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe under the auspices of the ‘Minsk Group’ chaired by Russia, the USA and France, attempted to find a resolution to the conflict, but unsuccessfully. Both parties of the conflict have shown reluctance to talk and take steps toward peace in good faith. The main sticking points in negotiations that remain unsettled are: the fate of the seven Armenian-controlled Azerbaijani districts adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh; international security guarantees that are a precondition for the return to stability and security within the conflict; and the status of the remaining territory in the conflict zone, now populated mostly by Armenians.

The large-scale military confrontation between Azerbaijan and Armenia in 1991-1994 led to 30,000 of deaths (Shafiev, 2007) and to an almost complete ethnic cleansing on both sides; Nagorno-Karabakh has become a self-proclaimed independent republic protected by and connected to Armenia through a corridor through Azerbaijani territory.

The conflict, considered to be frozen, reignited in 2016. On April 2, heavy fighting erupted in Nagorno-Karabakh, threatening to escalate into full-blown war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Though a ceasefire was declared shortly after, the situation continues to be tense and unpredictable.

Throughout 2017 Azerbaijan and Armenia reported military casualties in sporadic clashes (Global Conflict Tracker, n.d.).

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7 These seven regions around Karabakh are Kelbajar (1,936 km²), Lachin (1,835 km²), Kubatly (802 km²), Jebrail (1,050 km²), Zengelan (707 km²), Aghdam (842 km²) and Fizuli (462 km²) (De Waal, 2014, p. 373).
On October 16, 2017, the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents met in Geneva, discussing a possible settlement of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. The meeting resulted in an agreement “to take measures to intensify the negotiation process and to take additional steps to reduce tensions on the Line of Contact” (Kucera, 2017, para. 2), but no concrete statements were delivered.

When in April 2018 Nikol Pashinyan was elected as prime minister of Armenia, the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict took on a new turn. In his statements on Nagorno-Karabakh, Pashinyan made it clear that his approach toward the solution of the conflict is uncompromising: he is unwilling to consider any return of land to Azerbaijan (De Waal, 2018; Crisis group, 2018).

Considering the major developments in the conflict over the last thirty years and the current state of affairs, it is impossible to predict the outcome of the conflict, although the danger of future escalation is still real and can certainly not be ruled out.

In the next section, I will analyze the selected letters to the editor. The purpose of the analysis is to understand how the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh has been framed by the readers of the newspapers Bakinskiy rabochiy and Kommunist/Golos Armenii and how these frames contributed to conflict process and outcome. I will address these questions by means of a framing analysis, based on the work of Van Gorp (2010).
5. Data analysis

This chapter contains a framing analysis of 60 letters to the editor published in the newspapers Bakinskiy rabochiy and Kommunist/Golos Armenii in the period between 1988 and 2018. The idea is to explore the positions on the unresolved Karabakh conflict as advocated by the readership of two societies, compare the propagated ideas, define the factors shaping these ideas, and check whether or not they are subject to change over time. Further, this chapter investigates the relevance of participatory journalism for decisions made by the Azerbaijani and Armenian governments with reference to conflict resolution.

The analysis takes place in two stages. The first stage employs an inductive approach suggested by Van Gorp (2010), so as to reveal the main themes in the data. An inductive analysis starts with a coding process that helps in identifying a problem definition, its causes and possible solutions (i.e. reasoning devices). Furthermore, during this stage framing devices are identified. These are specific linguistic structures that make certain images appear in people’s minds, to ensure credibility of a statement and to enhance its expressiveness. During the second stage of the analysis a deductive strategy is used to validate the reliability of the results of the first phase of the analysis. The deductive strategy is based on Galtung’s theory on peace and war journalism (2002), which serves as a platform for the assessment of earlier identified frames.

Given the historical and comparative nature of this research, particular attention is devoted to the similarities and differences between the discourses on the conflict and its solution as adopted by two societies and the changes in rhetorical patterns that have taken place during the period under review.

This chapter is made up of five sections. In the first, I discuss the factors influencing participatory journalism practices in the media in Azerbaijan and Armenia. The objective is to reveal constraints for participatory journalism and thus answer the first sub-question of this research. In the second, I examine the coverage of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This examination starts by outlining the coding procedure. In particular, I establish the identities of the persons who were driving the discourse on the conflict (sub-question 2). Then I explore the elements that constitute frames as defined by Entman (1993) and Pan & Kosicki (1993). The employment of predefined frame elements in this research, helps, on the one hand, to ensure the validity and reliability of the analysis as their presence suggests the representativeness of the findings, and, on the other hand, to address the third research sub-question dealing with discursive resources being used in the readers’ letters for the discussion of the conflict. In the fourth section, I attempt to assess whether the frames concerning the Nagorno-
Karabakh conflict resolution deduced from the available letters have contributed to the decisions made by local governments in that regard (sub-question 4). In the final section, I conclude by addressing framing implications of participatory journalism for political agendas and policy-making in Azerbaijan and Armenia.

5.1. Participatory journalism practices in Azerbaijan and Armenia: constraints and incentives then and now

The vantage points from which the participation of popular masses in media operations might be explored are journalistic conventions and norms and a particular context in which media practices take place. The first two define not only the way professional journalistic work is done (Paulussen, 2011), but also the standards against which citizens’ content is assessed. The second point in turn defines both the normative principles of journalism and the degree of citizen participation in public affairs through the media.

First, I investigate how journalists at the Azerbaijani Bakinskiy rabochiy and the Armenian Kommunist/Golos Armenii, guided by conventional journalistic practices, managed readers’ letters. To start with, it is important to recall that any news material designated for publication in journalistic spaces is subject to selection and editing by editors (Reich, 2011). Newspaper editors use their professional expertise to identify which contributions are newsworthy. If an input provided for publication does not meet the selection criteria, it gets rejected or modified. The analysis of the letters to the editor published in the period of “the mass disturbances”, referring to 1988 (Novikova, 2012) suggests that those were accepted for publication without significant changes in the content. There is no direct evidence that media professionals did not moderate readers’ contributions at all, but the supposition that letters retained the nearly original format seems to be confirmed by the following fact. Throughout the first half of 1988 letters to the editor had a generic structure which included a statement, an argument, an evidence and a summarizing, whereas in subsequent periods (from late 1988 onwards) letters were published in a curtailed form. Editors were breaking them down into separate components for subsequent citations. Yet, already in early 1988, some readers’ content moderation could be observed. Thus, almost all letters presented in the newspapers during that period were given a title or heading. These headings were of two sorts: those supplied to each single letter, or common headings supplied by editors to selections of letters for the quick reference of their readership. Here are a few examples of common titles:
Not a single mother would agree to see her children threatened by national factionalism in exchange for the firm ties of friendship (Bakinskiy rabotschiy, #51 of 01.03.1988)

And another one from Kommunist, #49 of 28.02.1988:

The hour for reason and sober decision.

As for headings given to each individual letter, they clearly resonate with common titles as both include a reference to Gorbachev’s appeal in the form of a direct quotation or a paraphrasing:

[We should] display civil maturity (Bakinskiy rabotschiy, #51 of 01.03.1988)

[We should] strengthen brotherhood among peoples (Kommunist, #48 of 27.02.1988)

[We must] safeguard our brotherhood (Kommunist, #50 of 29.02.1988)

Our only path (Kommunist, #51 of 01.03.1988)

Further, both newspapers that year had one publication of selected letters to the editor preceded by editor’s opening remarks:

Let us think once more about what was said by Mikhail S. Gorbachev in his appeal to the working people, the people of Azerbaijan and Armenia. [He said] that emotions do not help to address issues affecting the fates of the peoples, and that is what people of our Republic reflect on today. (Bakinskiy rabotschiy, #51 of 01.03.1988)

Working people of Armenia received an appeal by Mikhail S. Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, with deep appreciation. (Kommunist, #49 of 28.02.1988)

The discursive agenda of both newspapers is evident. They both supported the promotion of the Communist Party’s decisions regarding the social unrest and conflict arising. Some studies suggest that this media’s ‘solidarity’ with the Party indicates that in 1988 the Soviet media were still reluctant to report these controversial issues unbiasedly despite the new openness in Soviet journalism brought by Gorbachev’s reforms. For example, McNair (2006) argues that the Soviet media in that period continued the trend developed in the era of Brezhnev when the media were required to “propagate the themes of internationalism and ethnic harmony, downplay the scale of the disorder, emphasis the ‘normality’ of life” (McNair, 2006, p. 61) in situations of strife and unrest. I believe, however, that it is a generalization and it does not fully hold true for the newspapers at stake. Proof of that is the fact that Kommunist published its readers’ appeals to do justice in relation to the status of Nagorno-

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On 26 February 1988, Gorbachev issued his “Appeal to the workers of Armenia and Azerbaijan,” which was read out in the two republics by visiting Politburo members. The day after this appeal was published in Bakinskiy rabotschiy and Kommunist.
Karabakh. Such calls carried a great potential to worsen the relation between Armenia and Azerbaijan and to further aggravate the conflict, but this did not prevent the newspaper from publishing them. It is therefore evident that the newspaper enjoyed a certain degree of independence from Party control. If that is so, then a general consensus demonstrated in the letters around Gorbachev’s call for the restoration of order is indicative of the editorial line of the two papers and not of the Party’s grip on what and how the media should cover. I think that the decision to support Gorbachev’s appeal in both cases was strategic. The Armenian Kommunist sheltered the nationalist sentiments from the attention of party leaders in Moscow behind the proclamations of support for Gorbachev’s decisions and the Azerbaijani Bakinskiy rabochiy demonstrated commitment to the principles advocated by Gorbachev in order to prove that the people of Azerbaijan are open for cooperation “within the framework of the democratic process and legality.” This is not to say that the editorial boards of both newspapers could set their own agenda without any pressure from above but to stress the fact that they could bring alternative perspectives on the events unfolding in Nagorno-Karabakh and Sumgait into play as new social conditions allowed for the public expression of discontent and dissent.

By the end of 1988, the organizing principle of the Bakinskiy rabotschiy letters’ page has changed. The newspaper editors no longer composed letters into groups anchored on a consensus of opinion amongst readers. Instead, they brought together various questions under a single article headlined ‘Answers to our readers’ questions’ (#276). This way of managing readers’ contributions further limited the scope of reader participation in media-provided space: media professionals gave the floor to readers to be there, but they did not give them the opportunity to say something. Media professionals took on the role of authoritative brokers producing and distributing knowledge to the public. This is especially evident in the way the editor built up his argument. It was drawn on statistics about the work carried out in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast by various Azerbaijani state structures in order to alleviate the fate of Azerbaijani refugees from the region. By bringing statistics into his argument, the editor strengthened his own credibility and underlined his status as a person with expertise. This attitude towards readers’ contributions generates an interesting paradox: the newspaper denies readers permission to speak, whilst various authors (Altschull, 1995; Hollander, 1994; Grigoryan & Rzayev, 2005; McNair, 2006) point out that the period between 1987 and 1990 was characterized by a significant escalation in opinion expression on almost any matter and virtually in any form. For what reason then did Bakinskiy rabotschiy remain averse to opening up access to content production to its audience? The exacerbation of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan provides

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9 Excerpt from the “Appeal to the workers of Armenia and Azerbaijan” by Gorbachev.
one possible explanation for the inability or the unwillingness of the newspaper to accommodate input from its readers. As the earlier discussion on the media role in conflict-prone settings shows, in situations of war and conflict, the media, forcibly or voluntarily, become a tool for disseminating messages of political actors (Cottle, 2006, Christians et al., 2009; Gilboa et al., 2016). In the face of November 1988 developments – the mass expulsion of Azerbaijanis from Armenia, followed by the mass demonstrations in Baku – the Azerbaijani government had to make a statement on its position on the conflict and the article ‘Answers to our readers’ questions’ served the purpose. In fact, it was a report on the state priorities under the circumstances as the article was based on the information provided by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan. An article that was supposed to reflect public concerns in fact prioritized issues of the powerful.

The new approach to accommodation of readers’ contributions that arose by the end of 1988, nevertheless did not lead to an irrevocable oppression of the public in the media sphere. As the year 1990 shows, editors of the Armenian Kommunist had to reconsider their newsroom norms and strategies again; where in 1988 there was no place for stories about ethnic tension between the two peoples, two years later editorial routines had changed.

Thus, in mid-January 1990, following the anti-Armenian pogroms in Baku, Kommunist printed two letters under the titles ‘Hear the voice of one crying’ (#16) and ‘Let us all unite!’ (#13) that provide an example of aggressive discourse. In the first letter, the author depicts the Azerbaijani Popular Front members as thugs, barbarians and the Black Hundreds11. In another, the author condemns “the acts of vandalism and genocide” in Baku and called upon Armenians to “put an end to the aggression.” Yumatov (2012a) points out that such rhetoric in the period leading up to the collapse of the Soviet Union became increasingly common in the press on both sides. Nevertheless, the results from this study do not support Yumatov’s statement: there was no inflammatory rhetoric identified in the letters published by Bakinskiy rabotschiy in 1990. The reason why the Armenian outlet has chosen to ignore the rule governing global journalism ethics, which prescribes to reject inflammatory input from publication (Reich, 2011), is rooted in the aspiration of the Armenian media as a whole to adapt their practices to a rapidly changing political environment. Previous studies on the press in the South Caucasus show that Armenians have traditionally been at the forefront of new developments in journalism. Thus, Freedman & Shafer (2014, p. 180) note that Armenian journalists were “among the first to use the press to fight for nationalism”. Consistent with this portrayal, Kommunist engaged in

11 “Russian reactionary, antirevolutionary, and anti-Semitic groups formed in Russia during and after the Russian Revolution of 1905. […] They conducted raids (with the unofficial approval of the government) against various revolutionary groups and pogroms against the Jews.” Encyclopedia Britannica. Retrieved on May 10, 2019, from https://www.britannica.com/topic/Black-Hundreds
disseminating inflammatory content to discredit the enemy and to foster ethnic solidarity. The newspaper striving to remain at the forefront of the debates on what was happening in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, made it possible for its readers to present radical statements that in other circumstances would be outlawed by the journalistic principle of unbiased coverage (Reich, 2011).

“The bloody three-year war” (1991-94) (Novikova, 2012) had affected expressions of opinion in reader letters. Four out of five publications from the sample dating back to 1991 are in fact journalistic texts in the form of a commentary. A notable example of such coverage is an article titled ‘Presidential elections: reflections on the letters to the editor’ (Bakinskiy rabotschiy, #171 of 05.09.1991) written by Izabella Orudjeva, one of the newspaper’s journalists. As its title suggests, the article is an overview of the letters received from readers. It begins by describing the overall situation in Azerbaijan. Orudjeva notes that despite all the difficulties the Republic had encountered, Azerbaijan has gained its national harmony. According to the journalist, this was largely a consequence of the steps that Mutilibov has taken to date to ensure stability in the Republic. In support of this claim, the author cites a letter praising Mutalibov’s leadership during the painful times for Azerbaijan, describing him as a patriot and an educated person who deserves trust and respect. Then she concludes:

\[ I \text{ have chosen this letter as the first because it resonates with my impressions of the President’s speech during the extraordinary session of the High Council of the Republic. } \]

Then the journalist again speaks of Mutilibov’s remarkable performance and political abilities and brings to our attention a quote from a letter:

\[ \text{Mutalibov garnered public confidence and credibility without making hollow promises (V. Rustamov).} \]

From here onwards, the article is built upon the alternation between quotes from letters and the journalist’s personal reflections. At a first glance, one might think that this is an act of advocacy in support of the readers’ views. Consider the following example:

\[ \text{I. Orudjeva: The readers from Baku, Sumgait, Ganje, Shekhi, Agdam and other cities and parts of the Republic say the same with hope. [...] We all remember that the former leaders of the Republic used to make empty promises.} \]

\[ \text{S. Bandurovskiy: The present stable situation in Azerbaijan is the work of Mutalibov for all the Azerbaijani people.} \]

\[ \text{I. Orudjeva: The President’s hard-won position deserves great respect, doesn’t it?} \]

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12 Ayaz Mutalibov, the Azerbaijani Party boss in 1990, on September 8, 1991 was elected Azerbaijan’s first president.
Bus depot staff: We lend him (Mutalibov) our support for his effort made to ensure the economic and political independence of the Republic.

What this ‘alteration strategy’ in fact does is that it, first, helps in guiding public understanding of the issue at stake. The journalist opens up a positive perspective on the image of Mutalibov and makes it impossible for the public to move beyond this perspective: the debate is anchored in the relevancy for the journalistic framework. Second, this strategy serves to establish the newspaper’s legitimacy in the eyes of audience. Since the view of the journalist is accorded with the one of the readership, as evidenced through numerous direct quotes, the newspaper is accepted as being a legitimate source of information. Third, this strategy is aimed at depriving citizens’ contribution of its status of “separate and distinct from professionally produced content” (Hermida, 2011) since, unlike journalistic input, readers-generated content needs to be sorted out and requires further comment.

In 2016 the way in which Bakinskiy rabochiy and Golos Armenii used to integrate readers’ contributions has changed. While in the previous period both newspapers followed the same journalistic routines when dealing with readers’ letters, in 2016 they adopted different patterns of managing reader-generated content. For example, on May 16, 2016, Golos Armenii published a single letter free of editorial introduction and concluding note. On April 6, 2016, Bakinskiy rabochiy printed an article that accommodated 16 letters to the editor. This article had a general introduction for the quick reference of the readership and an individual introduction to each single letter that included the author’s name, his/her place of residence and a brief summary of the contents of the letter. Thus, Bakinskiy rabochiy, as in the previous period, continued to adhere to the principle of subordination of public content to the agenda set by the media professionals. The letters again have been grouped around one common theme and all of them again portrayed the political leader and the decisions taken by him as worthy of respect and admiration. Thus, the newspaper editors engineered a consensus that Aliev – the fourth president of Azerbaijan since 2003 – not someone else, may lead Azerbaijan to victory in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

What both newspapers had in common in this period is that they both published bellicose statements made by their readers. Whereas at the outset of the conflict there was no hint of hate speech in readers’ letters (either because editors studiously sanitized it or because it was unthinkable for readers), in 2016 war rhetoric was flourishing in letters to the editor.

When summing up the discussion of how journalists at the Azerbaijani Bakinskiy rabochiy and the Armenian Kommunist/Golos Armenii managed readers’ letters, it can be noted that journalistic norms and routines do not always impede expression of public opinion as it has been anticipated. While aiming to govern access to the letters page and maintain control of the content of the public contributions, these norms and routines adhere to occupational pragmatism when journalists see a
possibility of exploiting input from the audience to attain their own objectives. Furthermore, media professionals are more likely to allow readers to introduce their voices into the discourse of news, even when the material produced by readers contravenes journalistic norms and standards (such as hate speech ban) if these voices coincide with the discourse structured by the current regime. Otherwise citizen participation practices remain subordinated to journalists’ “dominant occupational ideology” (Heinonen, 2011, p. 53), which allows citizens to contribute, but not to what is news.

The remainder of this section addresses the role of the context in which public participation through the media occurs. Political, cultural, economic and social contexts need to be taken into consideration when studying newspaper operations as the environment in which media professionals perform journalistic tasks impacts their professional ideology and work routines. The latter engendered by a specific context defines the scale of citizen participation in media production and determines the degree of agency the audience has over media content. Therefore, my aim is to explore how the changing environment affected normative behavior of media professionals and how this in turn influenced citizen participation opportunities in the media.

Both Azerbaijani and Armenian societies in the period from 1988 to 2016 went through a structural change. Regime changes inevitably affected news production. Totalitarian regimes and their demands for the subordination of the media to the Party were followed by a transitional period with less strict censorship. In the subsequent period, the two countries have had different developmental paths, which affected the independence and autonomy of mainstream media organizations differently. The further analysis assesses the vicissitudes of audience participation in media against the backdrop of political turmoil and ongoing conflict.

The year 1988 was marked by a series of events, some of which were of fundamental relevance to the Soviet Union as a whole while others were decisive for Azerbaijan and Armenia in particular. Thus, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict unfolded in parallel with the course of the reform of ‘openness’ (glasnost) and of ‘restructuring’ (perestroika) launched by the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in the second half of the 1980s. The glasnost campaign had brought about far-reaching changes in Soviet media, the key among them being the lifting of the ban on reporting on politically sensitive topics. For instance, Kommunist on February 27, 1988 (#48), published an article on mass demonstrations in Yerevan, although civil unrest was only briefly mentioned and it was not the main theme. According to McNair (2006), such an event was still taboo as a subject for publication in the Soviet media. Even so, the very fact that this incident was given media coverage served as a call for the newspaper audience to voice their vexing question of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. A concrete case in point is the above-mentioned article that illustrates the first open signs of Armenian territorial claims through the media.
Three letters to the editor published under the headline ‘The hour for reason and sober decision’ emphasize that the Karabakh issue is a long-standing problem that needs to be tackled. That is why the authors of the letters hoped that the Communist Party at the plenary meeting on national policies would undertake a comprehensive examination of this problem and will find a just solution to it. A similar statement was made by five out of six authors whose letters appeared in Kommunist on February 28 (#49). These statements were that the special commission established on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue must find a just solution to it. However, the lifting of the ban did not mean that the Party ceased to exercise control over the media completely (Grigoryan & Rzayev, 2005). For this reason, the Kommunist readership or its editorial team had to disguise the demands for Nagorno-Karabakh by appealing to the principles of perestroika and glasnost that called for the open discussion of unresolved problems inherited from the past, such as nationality policy and minority rights. This way of laying out concerns was originally adopted by the leaders of the Karabakh movement for unification with Armenia and has proved to be effective. In his book ‘Black garden’, De Waal (2014) describes how a 1983 petition on Nagorno-Karabakh was made. He underlines the importance of the way a petition is presented. Recalling a statement made by a member of the Karabakh movement, De Waal points out that the appropriate expressions of loyalty to the Soviet system are crucial to success. Yumatov (2012b, 2013) made similar observations concerning the way the Armenian media used to structure their publications on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue in the first half of 1988. In his study of Sovetskiy Karabakh publications he noted that the nation’s own interests were a refrain in the coverage of the issue. This was accompanied by a reference to the "Leninist" national policy that was encouraging nations to build their economic and cultural life independently. The third component of the structure was the expectation that the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, being guided by the principles of the "Leninist" national policy, would solve the Karabakh problem. According to Yumatov, this was a typical scenario for Armenian press coverage of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue.

As to Bakinskiy rabochiy, its readership was not so enthusiastic about new democratic opportunities. During the first half of 1988 there were no letters published that challenged Armenian claims for Karabakh. Instead, the readers insisted that the Armenian and Azerbaijani peoples are brothers and that Karabakh is the homeland for both of them.

What it demonstrates is that Armenian citizens proved to be more responsive to new developments in the country. Kaufman (2015) notes that Armenians seized the opportunity afforded them by

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13 While the newspaper “Soviet Karabakh” in 1988 had been the organ of the Regional Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party, the newspaper’s editorial team, which was predominantly Armenian, supported the idea of reunificating Nagorno-Karabakh with the Armenian SSR.
Gorbachev’s reforms. They mobilized quickly to make their deep-rooted grievances publicly known and they did it by all means available to them, one of which was the articulation of claims through the press. In contrast to Armenian citizens, Azerbaijanis initially followed a pattern established by the Communist Party that prescribed to respond to dissent recalling that internationalism is the basis of welfare of the Soviet Union. Only by the end of 1988 Bakinskiy rabochiy published a response to the claims and accusations that had appeared on the pages of Kommunist. Even though this was not the case where Azerbaijanis have been accused of the appropriation of Armenian territory and reluctance to transfer it to Armenian control,¹⁴ the criticism and denial of allegations showed that Azerbaijani media organizations and society were undergoing significant changes. According to Kaufman (2015), the Azerbaijani media adopted a new strategy in light of the events unfolding in Azerbaijan in November 1988. Protest rallies in Baku, Kirovabad, Nakhichevan and mass expulsions of Azerbaijanis from Armenia led to a change in media discourse on the Karabakh issue. They enabled more open discussion of the conflict and prompted the media to dispute Armenian accusations. Both Kommunist and Bakinskiy rabochiy cases show that increased interest in articulation of concerns and interests by the readership was the result of a new social reality in which overall news coverage was more informative and oriented towards promoting public opinion on the pressing issues. This was a fundamental departure from past ‘Brezhnevian’ journalism that used to serve the interests of the Party only and avoided touching upon sensitive issues (McNair, 2006).

In 1990, a new media law was adopted. It granted citizens the right to establish private media outlets. Being deprived of financial support from the state, they had to turn to the issues of concern to an overly politicized civil society in order to ensure subscriptions (Altschull, 1995). That is when nationalist appeals began to appear in the press. Thus, during this period the readers of Golos Armenii started to openly articulate hatred towards Azerbaijanis and demand that the public condemns the “callous” (#13) actions of “the thugs from Azerbaijan” (#16). In contrast to Golos’ focus on the Azerbaijani atrocities, Bakinskiy rabochiy readership had another issue of concern. A letter published by the newspaper on January 25, 1990 (#16), illustrates the worry about the peaceful coexistence of Azerbaijani and Russian peoples in the Republic. Abolished censorship enabled an open discussion of long-standing grievances, as in the case of the Armenian newspaper, and it encouraged a dialogue between members of Azerbaijani civil society to find solution to the domestic problems in the case of Bakinskiy rabochiy.

The period leading up to the fall of the Soviet Union was characterized by a growing criticism of the Soviet apparatus and local authorities in the media. Golos Armenii coverage has been affected by this

¹⁴ #276 of 27.11.1988 addressed the allegations against by the Azerbaijani SSR authorities of failure to supply construction materials to the Nagorny Karabakh Autonomous Region.
trend. Issue 117 of July 5, 1991, includes four letters. Three of them criticized the newly adopted Armenian language policy which readers considered ill-advised. The author of the letter published on April 30, 1991, lashed out at the Azerbaijani Communist Party officials “who at the meetings of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR blatantly trampled on the principles of morals and who protected furiously their ‘heroes’ of Sumgait, Baku, Kirovabad, Khodjalu” (#83). Criticism of public authorities had reached an unprecedented level and had become the practice in the media across the Soviet Union, but not for Bakinskiy rabochiy. The newspaper was filled with praise for Mutalibov being the best presidential candidate for Azerbaijan according to the readers and editors. Despite losses suffered by the Republic in September 1991, the letter page was overflowed with gratitude to Mutalibov concerning his “thoughtful and responsible approach to combating the emerging problems” (#171). Why did Bakinskiy rabochiy side with the government in a situation where liberal pluralism was endorsed and debate on prohibited topics was allowed? Since in 1991 the level of press freedom in Azerbaijan was comparable to that of Armenia (Grigoryan & Rzayev, 2005), it would be logical to assume that the tone of Bakinskiy rabochiy publications was not defined by Party or/and state control. It seems that Bakinskiy rabochiy newsroom management was not able to recognize new developments and reality on the ground and therefore did not take advantage of the policy of glasnost as an instrument for achieving political aims. Besides that, in the period from 1988 to 1991 the Azerbaijani newspaper’s content in general was different from that of Kommunist/Golos Armenii. Bakinskiy rabochiy placed an emphasis on preserving the unity between Azerbaijanis and Armenians (in 1988) and among different ethnic groups within Azerbaijan (in 1990-1991). The Armenian outlet, by contrast, stressed the need for a change. Another distinctive feature of the Kommunist/Golos Armenii agenda was a manifestation of nationalism, though veiled conforming to the ideology requirements of that era.

By 2016 the media landscape in Azerbaijan and Armenia had undergone a series of changes. These transformations resulted from a combination of political, economic and technological developments. The political climate in Azerbaijan since the early 1990s and to this day has deteriorated in terms of freedom of expression and other human rights. The government imposed sanctions on criticism of the regime. Various domestic and foreign observers decried the tightening of media working conditions in the country and reported multiple cases of persecution and harassment of journalists. Open Caucasus Media in 2017 reported that “some independent media [...] have been completely economically stifled. Others [...] have been closed by force” (OC Media, 2017). The economic situation in the country gave additional power to the State to control the media, as economic power was concentrated in the hands

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15 In September 1991, the Armenians recaptured the Shaumian region of Azerbaijan, north of Nagorno-Karabakh. In addition, on September 2 Nagorno-Karabakh announced its secession from Azerbaijan.
of President Aliyev, his family and the oligarchs (Freedom House, 2015). As to Armenia, the combination of economic pressures\(^{16}\) and ongoing transformations in the political arena have created obstacles to journalistic practices similar to those in Azerbaijan. Print media in Armenia have been subordinated to objectives laid down by political forces and accused of adopting a biased approach to reporting on political parties (Iskandaryan, 2015). According to an annual report presented by Reporters Without Borders, Armenian journalists in 2016 had been victims of police violence for acts of dissent (OC Media, 2017). As for the proliferation of social technologies and the Internet use, they changed the media landscape in both countries, but over time, social media also have become subject to restrictions, especially in Azerbaijan.

The following example illustrates the dependent position of the Azerbaijani media towards major political actors. On April 6, 2016, *Bakinskiy rabochiy* published 16 letters to the editor (#60). All of them were written in response to the renewed fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan that threatened to erupt into a full-blown war. The general introduction to these letters presents the main argument about the incident:

*There is an unprecedented social cohesion in Azerbaijani society since Armenia carried out another provocation at the frontline, which prompted a resolute response by our military forces.*

The newspaper seeks to portray the Azerbaijani society as a society in which all persons live in agreement and which is of one mind about the government commitment to the use of force in the war against Armenian occupation. Proof of this are the letters that followed the introduction and presented similar arguments about the incident. Thus, a reader from Ganje argued:

*I am writing this letter at my soul’s behest. I want to fight for my country to liberate it from the enemy. We can no longer endure injustice and occupation of our territories by the enemy.*

Here’s another example; a reader states:

*I am very proud of the battles taking place on the front line and the advance of our troops. However, I find it heartrending to witness these events as a bystander because I am an Azerbaijani citizen who was born in Kalbajar\(^{17}\) and I feel homesick. It will be an honor for me as for a native of Kalbajar to fight for freedom of our land. Mr. Commander-in-chief, I am looking forward to your mobilization order.*

\(^{16}\) In the early 1990s the country experienced an economic collapse caused by the withdrawal of Soviet financial support and a conflict with neighboring Azerbaijan. To this day, the economy of the country is to a larger extent dependent on investment from Russia and the United States.

\(^{17}\) A district of Azerbaijan occupied by armed forces of Armenia in 1993.
Both letters echo comments by the Azerbaijani authorities, who have made clear that they will recover the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and other occupied territories at all costs, including the possibility to reconquer them by force. Not one letter opposed this dominant view, though some experts (Dyner & Zasztowt, 2016) argue that this solution to the conflict should have raised public skepticism and outrage. The fact is that the oil price crash of 2014 has had a negative impact on the country’s economy and since then the situation in Azerbaijan has not improved but rather worsened. Under such conditions, launching a new military operation would further deteriorate living conditions of a large part of the population and could escalate social tensions. However, despite these concerns the Bakinskiy rabochiy readership demonstrated genuine support for the government’s stance on the issue and made a call to arms to “defend the integrity of [their] territory” (#60). What this demonstrates is that the newspaper being an official outlet of the administration of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, acted as its “mouthpiece and amplifier” (McQuail, 2003). The newspaper’s editors selected for publication only those letters that accorded with the standpoint of the government.

This section started by outlining the role of journalistic conventions and norms that constrain citizen participation in media operations. The study found that newsroom norms, although suggested to be universal in nature and not conditioned by geographical and political realms (Paulussen, 2011; Singer, 2011), are evolving and that this evolution occurs unequally, even when two news organizations operate under equal conditions. A case in point is the reform of glasnost that removed the ban from many topics that previously could not be debated in the Soviet press. That is when the Armenian Kommunist demonstrated its ability and will to act in the pioneering spirit of the reforms under way. The Azerbaijani Bakinskiy rabochiy on the contrary appeared to be inflexible and conservative and could not adopt to a new situation for a considerable period of time. As a result, this ability to adapt successfully to a changing social environment enabled the Kommunist’s readers to present their grievances that were previously ignored by the Party officials.

Further, the analysis revealed another factor shaping citizen participation in media operations. It is concerned with occupational pragmatism of news organizations. Media professionals are not only ready to extend access to media-provided spaces to citizens to express their views about specific issues, but they are also ready to make concessions in handling the content generated by the audience. The Kommunist case, when the newspaper neglected the responsibility to dismiss content inciting hatred in 1990, demonstrates that practical considerations play an important role in dictating newsroom staff decisions. Thus, the public interest in a sensitive topic encouraged the newspaper editors to acts in contravention of ethical principles of journalism.
Finally, the study identified the relationship between a tightening grip on the media by the state and a decrease in the informativeness of readers’ letters. Rigid control of the information flow on the part of the government creates a situation in which the media have to engage in self-censorship. This, in turn, leads the latter to the imposition of restrictions on readers’ input. As a result, the letters published are not informative of social realities; instead, they disseminate the ideas that tally with dominant state interests.

The next section focuses on the framing of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the letters written to the editors of Kommunist/Golos Armenii and Baksinskiy rabochiy. The section is concerned with answering the sub-questions 2 and 3 of this research.

5.2. Frame analysis

This section describes the research design I use. Some technical details, such as data retrieval techniques and sampling, have already been discussed in the chapter on Methodology. Therefore, the section starts with outlining the coding procedure. In addition to defining what the data are about, I pay particular attention to whose point of view the codes reflect. Further, I explore how the persons who were driving the discourse on the conflict have identified the problem definition, its causes and possible solutions. The next step is to recognize the dominant frames in the letters on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Following this phase of the analysis, Galtung’s theory on peace and war journalism (2002) is addressed in order to validate the findings and to ensure that the identified frames are comprehensive. At the end of this section, I turn to a discussion of methods and discursive resources used by the readers in their debate on the conflict.

5.2.1. Coding procedure

In preparation for this phase of the analysis, I was considering to do the coding in line with grounded theory practice. I thought that grounded theory would offer a perfect strategy for my own research, explaining the collected data and directing further analysis. However, when I started working with ATLAS.ti software for framing analysis, I came to realize that the strategy suggested by Strauss & Corbin (2001) and Charmaz (2006) would prevent me from identifying frames constructed by newspapers readers. Grounded theory encourages the researcher to form hypotheses in parallel to the process of coding by labelling bits of data according to how the researcher understands it, not to what actually has been said. In other words, the use of coding based on grounded theory would mean a shift away from the goal of getting the citizens’ voices heard. For this reason, I opted for coding that summarizes
the basic topic of a passage in a word or in a short phrase, and that is not aimed at interpreting the letter writers’ implicit meanings at an early stage of coding.

The first round of coding started with the identification of basic characteristics of all articles. This included the date of publication and authorship. The first characteristic is important, as it bears reference to the context that sets the stage for public debate and discussion in the letter section of the specific newspapers. The second characteristic is indicative of who is driving the debate on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. With respect to the role of context for participatory practices through the media, this issue was partially addressed in the previous section. I will go into more detail on this subject later on, when I examine the dominant frames in the letters on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. That is also when I will address the second round of coding. Now I would like to elaborate upon the coding that helped identify authors of the letters submitted to editors of Bakinskiy rabochiy and Kommunist/Golos Armenii respectively and those media professionals who moderated the readers’ submissions.

5.2.2. Letter writers

Some scholars (LaVally, 2009; Tarrant, 1957) have argued that people who write letters to the editor have a number of distinguishing characteristics. Letter writers are believed to be older, higher educated and wealthier than those who do not engage in letter writing. With respect to age, this statement cannot be verified in this study, since information relating to the age of letter writers was not provided in the publications. The same applies to income level. As to education, we can draw tentative conclusions in this regard from the information available on the writers’ occupation. Almost all letters published in the period from 1988 to 1991 were printed with the author’s name and his/her occupation. These personal characteristics were taken into account when coding data. Table 1 contains a list of occupations of letter writers as of 1988. The first column presents the information about the Azerbaijani letter writers, the second column displays data on the Armenian letter authors.

The data show that (skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled) workers appear to be slightly underrepresented in relation to professional employees in case of Azerbaijani letter writers; three out of eight published letters were written by non-professionals18 (a farm team leader, a plumber and a telephone operator). These findings fit well with the literature on the socioeconomic status of letter writers mentioned above. The data on the publication of letters on Kommunist letter pages suggests that non-

18 By ‘non-professionals’, I mean personnel that perform labor, which does not require education in a specific field of study.
professionals were fairly represented: the newspaper published nine letters written by non-professionals and seven by professionals while in two cases the occupation of letter writers could not be identified. These findings are in contrast to LaVally (2009) and Tarrant (1957), who find that the views of higher educated letter writers are prevalent on letter pages.

Table 1. Professional status of letter writers in 1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1988</th>
<th>LETTER WRITERS AZERBAIJAN</th>
<th>LETTER WRITERS ARMENIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Farm team leader, hero of socialist labor</td>
<td>Dairymaid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Honored artist, chairman of the governing board of the union of theatre workers of the AZSSR</td>
<td>Dairymaid, a member of District Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>National poet</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Plumber</td>
<td>First Secretary of District Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Radio engineer, Deputy of Azerbaijan’s Supreme Soviet</td>
<td>Fitter foreman, Deputy Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR (Russian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Secretary of the Party’s Committee (Armenian)</td>
<td>Occupation is unknown (x2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Head of a state university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Telephone operator (Armenian)</td>
<td>Honored teacher of the Republic of Armenia, Deputy of the Supreme Soviet of Armenian SSR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Honored teacher of the Republic of Armenia, Party and labor veteran</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Industrial complex employee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Merited master of sport, Olympic champion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Tailor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Typesetters in the publishing house of state publishing house of The Armenian Communist Party</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>University student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Instructor of the Central Committee of Leninist Communist Youth League of the Armenian SSR (Azerbaijani)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Production enterprise employee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 1990 sample comprised three letters, two of which were published in Kommunist and one in Bakinskiy rabochiy. The former published a letter written by a fruit sorter and another by a teacher. The latter chose for publication of a letter from a Russian woman, resident of Azerbaijan, whose occupation was not specified. The 1991 sample incorporated 11 letters published in Bakinskiy rabochiy, three of which were written by professional employees (a doctor, a lieutenant colonel and a university professor) and one by a group of bus depot workers. The remaining letters provided no indication of what the occupations of the letter writers were. With respect to Golos Armenii, the newspaper published four letters and only one of them contained a reference to the writer’s occupation, who was a doctor. As to the remaining three letters, one was written by a person who wished to remain anonymous, one letter was printed only with the writer’s name and another letter was written by a retiree, whose professional background was not mentioned. Thus, the data over 1990 and 1991 reveal that the editors of both newspapers printed roughly equal numbers of letters written by non-
professionals and professionals. Taken together, these findings run counter to the literature suggesting that letter writers are found to be above average in education (LaVally, 2009; Tarrant, 1957), provided that higher occupational positions are associated with a higher education.

In 2016, the residence information replaced information about writers’ occupation. Such a change in the identification of letter writers is not coincidental. It stems from the political and historical contexts in which letters were written and published. During the Soviet era, popular participation in the administration of the state through public debate in media-provided spaces was encouraged and promoted (Altschull, 1995; McNair, 2006). Publishing readers’ letters was mainly aimed at demonstrating the accessibility of the media to the masses, which was considered unthinkable in “the mercenary bourgeois press” (McNair, 2006, p. 18) of the Tsarist era. Secondly, the publication of letters to the editor was intended as “the broad integration of [readers] collective experience and wisdom to solve problems of social development” (Hudec, in Altschull, 1995, p. 215). Thus, by publishing letters written by people in all walks of life both newspapers were accommodating participation within the limitations of the Party’s ideological requirements to the Soviet media.

Since 2016, the letter writers from my sample have been identified with the ethnic group to which they belonged and/or their place of residence. An explanation as to why the writers’ ethnic identity came into focus in 2016, almost thirty years after the outbreak of the conflict, can be found in Kaldor’s New and old wars (2016). The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan has emerged under socialism. The Soviet socialist state promoted the ideology of internationalism and multiculturalism, which had sought to overcome national divisions and strengthen friendship between the peoples (Karpenko, 2013). According to Kaldor, the erosion of inclusive socialist ideology gave rise to identity politics, which entailed the labelling of conflicting groups in order to create boundaries of exclusion or inclusion. The letter writers’ ethnic identity is a stark example of the categorization of people on the basis of ethnic labels to which Kaldor refers in her work. When we consider the data on who wrote the letters to the editor in 2016 (see Appendix I), we see that the letters published in Bakinskiy rabochiy were written by the authors of Turkic origin: Azerbaijanis, Turkish and Turkmen. The newspaper editors also deemed it necessary to mention the authors’ city and country of residence. The intention, in my opinion, was to show on the one hand, the unity of Turkic peoples, and, on the other, to create a sense of security: that Azerbaijan in the war against Armenia can count on the aid and assistance of the Azerbaijani diaspora and brotherly peoples. The case of Golos Armenii is not fairly representative, as the 2016 sample comprises only one letter. The newspaper’s editors did not mobilize ethnic labels for political purposes, as in the Bakinskiy rabochiy case, but the very fact that

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19 For further details on the identification of letter writers in the 1990, 1991 and 2016 samples, please refer to Appendix I.
the letter writer has been identified according to the criterion of residence (the letter writer was a current resident of France) can be seen as an implicit identity labelling. France is known as a significant center of Armenian settlement since the massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in 1915-1917 (De Waal, 2014). Therefore, a reference made to France can be understood as an act of identification with the Armenian diaspora that provides political and social support to Armenia.

Concerning the letter writers’ ethnic identity, it needs to be noted that some sort of categorization had occurred in 1988 as well, but it was a different type of categorization and it was used for purposes other than a demarcation of ethnic boundaries between Azerbaijanis and Armenians. For instance, Bakinskiy rabochiy on March 1, 1988 (#51) printed two letters written by Armenian women. Both letter writers explicitly declared their ethnic origin. One woman wrote, in the introduction to her letter, that she was born to Armenian parents. Another writer started her letter by mentioning that she is a representative of the Armenian people. Similarly, the author of a letter published in Kommunist on March 1, 1988 (#51), in the opening of his letter wrote that he was an ethnic Azerbaijani. What distinguishes the 1988 ethnic categorization from the 2016 labels is that the former served the purpose of the consolidation of the USSR’s peoples, while the latter was intended to enable further division among two societies in conflict. Consider the following example in which the author, who openly identified herself as an Armenian, talks about what brings the people of Azerbaijan and Armenia together:

We used to play together, go to school together. As time passed and we have grown up we started working together. [...] We live and work together. (Bakinskiy rabotschiy, #51 of 01.03.1988)

Here is another example: an Azerbaijani reader shares a similar view of a peaceful coexistence between the two peoples:

Several generations of our family are living here [in Armenia], but we had never been made to think that we are outsiders here. (Kommunist, #51 of 01.03.1988)

Now let us take a look at the 2016 sample examples of how letter writers have been identified:

People of the sisterly country of Turkey and from other countries of the world express their support for and the wish to fight for the liberation of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. In his letter to President Ilham Aliyev Bulent Yalcın from Mersin (Turkey) writes ... (Bakinskiy rabotschiy, #60 of 06.04.2016)

Not only citizens of our country express their readiness to serve in the armed forces of Azerbaijan, but also Azerbaijanis based abroad. Here is what Ruslan Alekperov from Moscow writes ... (Bakinskiy rabotschiy, #60 of 06.04.2016)
Editors at *Bakinskiy rabotschiy* have contributed to the homogenization process as described by Kaldor (2016) in her work on identity politics mentioned above. They placed an emphasis on ‘togetherness’ of Turkic peoples and thereby forged the polarization between them and the others with whom Azerbaijanis do not share close ties. Had the letters been signed by their authors (i.e. would they be free of editorial introduction indicating writers’ ethnic descent and residence), the boundary between *us* and *them* would most probably be less evident.

LaVally (2009) mentions that requiring letter writers to include their personal information with the letter may restrain traditionally marginalized writers, such as women and ethnic minorities, from submitting letters as they may be subjected to harassment by others in their community. As the role that gender plays in participation is beyond the scope of this thesis, I will not address this issue any further. I will, on the other hand, like to elaborate on the issue of ethnic minority marginalization in the media. Cottle (2006) undertook an extensive study of the representation of minority groups in mainstream media. His argument is that minority perspectives are underrepresented in news content. This observation is especially relevant in the context of war, when the range of story ideas becomes limited because of what the majority has to say. This is evidenced by the fact that in 1988 both newspapers printed letters submitted by members of an opposed ethnic group, while in the subsequent years *Bakinskiy rabotschiy* did not publish any letters written by Armenians and *Kommunist/Golos Armenii* presented not a single letter written by an Azerbaijani. According to Cottle, mainstream media carry out symbolic annihilation of minority groups in a space for public debates, in order to “undermine group claims for public recognition and social acceptance” (Cottle, 2006, p. 192).

In this sub-section I investigated the characteristics of letter writers. The most important finding concerns the role these characteristics play when decisions are made about which contributions from readers should be published. The data show that the characteristics have a varying relevance in the course of time.

While in the 1980s and 1990s editors expressed the desire to hear the opinions of individuals from different occupational backgrounds, in 2016 they placed a higher priority on reflecting the interests of the readers of a certain ethnic background. As a result, ethnic minorities’ voices have been omitted. The lack of minority perspectives on letter pages reinforces concerns (LaVally, 2009; Cottle, 2006) about their low participation in media-provided space.

### 5.2.3. Letter moderators

As the aim of this sub-section is to establish the identities of the persons who were driving the discourse on the conflict on letter pages of the newspapers, it is necessary to take into account the
identities of those news professionals who moderated letters submitted to Bakinskiy rabotschiy and Kommunist/Golos Armenii. Of particular interest are those journalists who (implicitly) co-authored with letter writers. I refer to the publications that appeared in both news outlets in 1991 in which journalists tested their personal reflections on certain topics against the readers’ opinions on the same issues. These publications were already touched upon in the previous section of the data analysis chapter, in which the role of the context for public participation through the media was addressed. These four publications are the only ones that disclose the identities of their authors. The identity of the editors to whom the letters have been submitted remained anonymous in all other publications.

The reason why the journalist’s identity merits special attention in this study of public participation in media operations is that it affects the creation of content. When a journalist assumes responsibility for content moderation with a view of improving the quality of readers’ contributions in terms of their structure and arguments, and especially when he/she is convinced that reader-generated content needs to be mixed with material produced by media professional (as is the case under consideration), the journalist enters into a process of co-creation. And since the journalist’s personal background, his/her adherence to professional norms and routines and his/her perception of the audience define the outcome (McQuail, 2013), they are critical for the co-creation process. The examples below illustrate how the journalist’s identity influences public agency in media operations.

Let us first examine the identity of Grigoriy Dolukhanov whose article entitled ‘Review of the letters. Can we find a common language?’ was published in Golos Armenii (#117) on July 5, 1991. Having graduated from the Baku State University, Dolukhanov worked as a journalist in Armenia from 1988 to 1991. In addition to the post of the leading journalist at the Leninakan (Gyumri) bureau of the newspaper Golos Armenii, he held the position of editor-in-chief. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Dolukhanov moved to Ukraine for permanent residence where he continued his work as a journalist.

Although the available information about Dolukhanov’s background is scarce, his approach to accommodation and integration of letter writers’ contributions shown in the above-mentioned publication suggests how the journalist views the newspaper audience and what he thinks about public contributions from the standpoint of professional journalistic norms and routines. Let us now turn to

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20 For further details, see Section 2.4.
21 Wikipedia. Retrieved on July 26, 2019, from https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%94%D0%BE%D0%B8%D1%83%D1%85%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2_%D0%93%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B3%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B9_%D0%AD%D0%B4%D1%83%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%87
the relevant article and first try to understand what Dolukhanov thinks of the individuals who submit letters to *Golos Armenii* and how he perceives audience participation in news making.

The article headlined ‘Review of the letters. Can we find a common language?’ is devoted to the newly adopted language policy in Armenia. The article has Russian-speaking refugees coming from Azerbaijan as central characters. These refugees are articulated as victims of the new policy. In Dolukhanov’s words, they are forced to “swim against the tide” (#117) because of the decisions and actions taken by the authorities on the language issue. In reviewing the letters on this matter, the journalist describes the letter writers who questioned the newly adopted law in the same terms as the refugees. To Dolukhanov these writers, despite being “locals who were educated in Armenia”, are also thought to be the ones who “swim against the tide”. Dolukhanov holds the view that “these people in their letters express the important idea that any restriction on the citizens’ constitutional rights and freedoms is repugnant to the principles of democracy”. By stating this, Dolukhanov points to the conclusion that anyone who speaks in favor of the newly adopted language policy puts in question these principles and therefore is opposed to the building of a democratic state in Armenia. Further, he denounces the supporters of the newly adopted language policy for lack of patriotism:

*Well, there may be differences of opinion about any issue. Everyone has a right to express his voice, but let us not do any statements “on behalf of someone else”, let alone to do it “upon an order of someone else”. It would be more fair and patriotic to speak on your own behalf and not to hide behind others. Also, do not make statements on behalf of “many Armenians”. Let everyone speak for himself and in whatever language. (Golos Armenii, #117 of 05.07.1991)*

The way in which the journalist portrays proponents of the policy suggests that his perception of the individuals writing to the newspaper is determined by the perspectives that these individuals have on a particular subject. For Dolukhanov, the public is not homogeneous. For him those who share his point of view enjoy a favorable treatment, while those who attempt to counter his argumentation are disapproved and condemned. However, it must be acknowledged that Dolukhanov does not impede access to the newspaper’s letter page and content production for those audience members who support the policy opposed by the journalist. The mere fact that the journalist gives coverage to a supporter of a controversial policy indicates that Dolukhanov rejects censorship and strives to ensure a balanced access for all points of view on disputed issues. Dolukhanov explains his position on why he included the publication a letter expressing support for the opposed language law:

*I, for my part, do not deem myself authorized to conceal the content of the letter addressed to me by S. Mkrtumian. (Golos Armenii, #117 of 05.07.1991)*

Moreover, the journalist acknowledges that:
It is possible that my opponents prefer to write letters to other newspapers — this is their right. (Golos Armenii, #117 of 05.07.1991)

Now let us turn to how Bakinskiy rabotschiy journalists handled readers’ stories and try to understand their reasons and motives for handling them in the way they did it. As previously mentioned, in the Azerbaijani outlet three publications appeared on the letter page in which journalists implicitly co-authored with letter writers. One such publication was prepared by Izabella Orudjeva. Unfortunately, I could not find any information on who she is. Further, her stand on the issues covered in the article is concealed behind the public opinion. Thus, Orudjeva, when elaborating on the economic and social situation of Azerbaijan, speaks for all residents of the Republic. When it comes to journalistic duties, Orudjeva speaks on behalf of her colleagues. Consider the following examples:

The political, social and economic crises are now rocking our country. [...] Is that what we expected from perestroika? What has deceived us? [emphasis added]

Until recently we journalists had to arrange such letters [to the editor]. We used to call people to get their names and then write laudatory articles on their behalf. But we are not the same anymore. [emphasis added]

The journalist sets forth her own personal judgement when the issue concerns selection of letters for publication. Orudjeva explains what led her to include one of the letters to the article under the title ‘Presidential elections: reflections on the letters to the editor’ (Bakinskiy rabotschiy, #171 of 05.09.1991):

I have chosen this letter as the first because it resonates with my impressions of the President’s speech during the extraordinary session of the High Council of the Republic.

But then she adds straightaway that:

And [it resonates] not only with my [impressions]. Does the rally that I would call “Consent rally”22 which took place at Azadiq Square last Friday not indicates the same?

Orudjeva supports her argument by referring to the wisdom of her fellow citizens. She attempts to show that her view of the President cannot be mistaken as it is widely shared by the population. As can be seen, Orudjeva’s allegations are less confrontational and judgmental than the ones made by Dolukhanov. At the same time, it does Orudjeva no credit as she favors only those letters that propagated ideas she agreed with. On the letter page covering the debate on the presidential elections was no single letter representing a different standpoint, i.e. there was no letter that would defend another presidential candidate for Azerbaijan or a letter in which the author would criticize Mutilibov.

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22 The journalist most likely meant Azerbaijani independence supporters rally that preceded the session.
In this connection, analysis of the other two co-authored publications presented in Bakinskiy rabotschiy is of special interest as it can help understand how the newspaper journalists are thinking about letters’ selection and letter’s moderation and whether it is a matter of organizational pattern that prescribes a certain approach to readers’ contributions or not.

Dilber Axundzade, another journalist of Bakinskiy rabotschiy, edited two articles included to the sample used for this study. Both articles are a compilation of excerpts from readers’ letters accompanied by the journalist’s explanations and comments. Unlike Orudjeva, Axundzade does not depict herself as being ‘we, the citizens’; neither does she identify herself with other media professionals. Instead, her ‘visibility’ is reduced to presenting the Bakinskiy rabotschiy team:

*The workday at the editorial room started with a phone trilling.* [emphasis added] (Bakinskiy rabotschiy, #177 of 13.09.1991)

*Letters and telegrams are laid on the table of the editorial.* [emphasis added] (Bakinskiy rabotschiy, #169 of 03.09.1991)

*I would like to thank all of those who have contacted us with their wishes, all of those who have called the editorial board to share their joy.* [emphasis added] (Bakinskiy rabotschiy, #169 of 03.09.1991)

As to her posture toward the letter writers, it can be described as empathetic. The following example, demonstrating that the journalist shares the readers’ wish to inform the Soviet community about the deportation of Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia, is typical of Axundzade’s approach:

*To get onto the front page of magazines and newspapers is not easy. People do not get a chance to tell the truth about the unfolding events. It is hard to get even the most persuasive and relevant reader’s letter published. All this occurs as the constant, unduly and false allegations against the Republic are made. Caught in a frustrating deadlock, the readers submit their letters to "Bakinskiy rabochyi". They do it despite the fact that they understand that the lie has been spread throughout the country while it was opposed only in the Republic where people already know the truth.* (Bakinskiy rabotschiy, #169 of 03.09.1991)

However, it is evident that Axundzade’s role is not just to render the audience a platform for debate and manage the quality of the participants’ contributions. Axundzade highlights what is an important story. She encourages her audience to pay closer attention to the topical issues prioritized by the editorial. These issues are the presidential elections (#177), support for presidential candidate Mutalibov (#177 and #169), the declaration of independence of Azerbaijan (#177 and #169), the

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deportation of Azerbaijanis from Armenia (#177 and #169), human losses incurred as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (#177), and, finally, social issues (#177 and #169). It is noteworthy that the recurring themes were presented in both articles in the given order: praise for Mutalibov being the best presidential candidate for Azerbaijan was followed by the discussion of the recently adopted declaration of independence of the Republic. Next in order was the theme of the Azerbaijani deportation. Rounding off the list of topics were social problems such as water supply issues, problems related to social security, newspaper subscription issues, etc. It is not a coincidence that, over a period of ten days, Mutalibov was the central theme in both articles. During the period when Azerbaijan was suffering human and territorial losses in a fierce fighting for Shaumian region, it is absurd to read the letters expressing gratitude for “the presidential decrees that have contributed so much [to achieving a better life for his peoples]” (#177). The mere fact that the newspaper on its letter page prioritized the praise for Mutalibov over other topics in terms of space and content position, shows that the journalist managed readers’ contributions so as to comply with the discursive agenda of the newspaper. This in turn suggests that for Axundzade letter writers are a source of material that she would embed in her publications but she would not let letter writers make news.

In this sub-section, I have tried to highlight several examples to suggest that journalist’s identity, not only external restraints and routine forces, seems to influence the extent to which readers can voice their concerns on the letter page. The key finding is that the characteristics of the people who moderate letters to the editor may have an impact on the letter writers’ ability to debate, but to a lesser extent than newspaper organizational forces. Although the attainment of independence from the Soviet Union and the emergence of new independent newspapers in Armenia and Azerbaijan set the ground for the development of a free press, not all news outlets demonstrated a willingness and readiness to respond and adapt to changing circumstances. Thus, the Bakinskiy rabotschiy journalists in the era of openness approached readers’ contributions in the same manner as they did it under communist rule. For them, readers’ letters remained a valuable source of information as long as its content could reinforce official positions. The newspaper’s journalists did not acquire rights and privileges to accommodate controversial contributions from readers. At the same time, Golos Armenii adopted a liberal perspective toward readers’ input and proved to be more pro-participation. The newspaper’s journalist was apparently granted the right to select for publication those items that he considered newsworthy. He proved to be open to dialogue with letter writers as his publication presented contributions not only from like-minded readers, but also oppositional viewpoints.

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24 In September 1991 Armenians recaptured Shaumian region.
Taken together, these observations lead to the conclusion that disparities in the management of readers’ contributions are determined by the newspaper’s policies about covering certain topics in a certain way. The journalist’s identity can exert control over letters’ selection and editing only when the newspaper sees the potential of audience participation in news-making and encourages journalists to embrace readers’ input. If these preconditions are fulfilled, then it is up to the journalist to decide what is going to happen with the received letters. That is when the outcome is decided by the journalist and it is done in line with his personal background, adherence to professional norms and his perception of the audience.

In the next section I begin the frame analysis proper with an assessment of how the Bakinskiy rabotschiy and Kommunist/Golos Armenii letter writers (and letter moderators) represented the conflict, portrayed its causes and possible solutions to it.

5.3. Identifying frames in the letters to the editor

The goal of this sub-section is to conduct a comparative analysis of frames in the letter sections of two newspapers: Bakinskiy rabochiy and Kommunist/Golos Armenii. I examine the topics brought up by members of two societies in their letters to the editor in response to the Karabakh conflict, as well as how the discourse on the conflict has evolved over a period of time.

In this study I use the concept of framing as provided by Van Gorp, who defines a frame as “a persistent meta-communicative message that specifies the relationship between elements connected in a particular news story and thereby gives the news coherence and meaning” (Van Gorp, 2005, p. 503). In order to form a powerful frame, which is able to influence human conscience, a news story should “promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or a treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993). It is important to note that not all elements need to be present in an article to indicate the direction of the argument. It suffices to have at least two of them present and argumentatively linked (Balks, 2016) to reconstruct a frame. Pan & Kosicki (1993) suggest another method for assessing the presence of particular frames. They identify four signifying elements that indicate the use of frames: the syntax, script, theme, and rhetoric. According to them, these are “tools for newsmakers to use in composing or constructing news discourse as well as psychological stimuli for audiences to process” (Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p. 59).

In the following, I analyze the letters to the editor that appeared in the newspapers Bakinskiy rabochiy and Kommunist/Golos Armenii in the period between 1988 and 2016. I analyze these letters based on the methodological guidance provided by Van Gorp (2010), combining inductive and deductive
framing analysis. The former enables the researcher to denote a frame through a detection of framing and reasoning devices (i.e. signifying elements and causal indicators referred to above), while the latter is designed to validate the reliability of the findings obtained during the inductive stage.

Although I use Van Gorp’s procedure of the inductive analysis (2010) in general terms, for reasons of clarity I had to make some modifications. Thus, I present a descriptive overview of the separate framing and reasoning devices in addition to putting them into a table (a frame matrix) as suggested by Van Gorp. There are several reasons for doing so. First, the two newspapers selected for analysis are published in the Russian language. In order to enable the reader of this research to understand how the frames have been constructed, a translation of text extracts into English is indispensable. Second, taking the view that this is a comparative study of frames, a descriptive overview may be rewarding as it provides an opportunity to identify cross-country and intertemporal differences between devices employed by letter writers.

Given the historical approach, my objective is to gain insight in the prevailing images in letters to the editor and acknowledge the importance of the contexts for organizing public opinion. In addition to assessing the presence of particular frames, I look closer at the methods and discursive resources used in the letters for the discussion of conflict and trace the evolution of the discourse concerning the Karabakh issue over time.

5.3.1. Inductive approach

The intention of an inductive framing analysis is, according to Van Gorp, to identify “the spectrum of conceivable frames that are relevant for the topic under scrutiny” (Van Gorp, 2010, p. 91). He lays down the guidelines that help researchers reconstruct the frames hidden in a text. Thus, Van Gorp suggests to start with an inductive analysis by conducting an open coding of the collected source material. During the second phase, the codes are to be arranged around the “Axes of Meaning” (Van Gorp, 2010, p. 95). In the third phase, selective coding takes place. This three-step procedure makes it possible to detect the framing and reasoning devices a text contains and subsequently to reveal “a repertoire of frames” (Van Gorp, 2010, p. 97) by identifying a relationship between the devices.

For the purpose of this study I followed this same procedure. The unit of analysis and of coding was each letter to the editor from the sample. A total of 60 letters was categorized as follows: 28 from 1988, 3 from 1990, 12 from 1991, and 17 from 2016. The distribution of units of analysis by newspaper was Bakinskiy rabochiy: 34, and Kommunist/Golos Armenii: 26. Chapter 3 describes the criterion for
the selection of letters, while Appendix II gives an overview of the key events that constituted the sampling period of this study.

The inductive analysis of the letters yielded 757 raw meaning units, which coalesced into 48 low-level categories and 22 high-level categories. These units and categories helped to identify causal indicators or reasoning devices such as problem definition, causal interpretation and recommendations of treatment, which allows us to denote frames (Entman, 1993; Van Gorp, 2007). The next step included an inventory of signifying elements or framing devices that are lexical choices made by the author of the text in order to generate particular effects (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

In what follows in this sub-section, I present an overview of the devices identified in the letters to the editor. I have borrowed Reese’s approach for the identification of framing and reasoning devices, which is “concerned with frame building and involves the dissection of the content of the frame, specifically the network of concepts and the unique narrative and myths that make it work” (Reese, 2010, p. 19) and helps “to uncover the culturally relevant and resonant theme that illuminates unique social and political understandings” (Reese, 2010, p. 20). Such an approach to the latent content of texts allows more specific frames to be identified.

5.3.1.1. Reasoning devices

During a first reading of the letters published in 1988, I found that most of them shared one commonality: in their writings the authors were concerned with an explanation for what was happening in their surrounding world. While these attempts to understand the nature and the causes of the unfolding events seem to be a natural response to the recently erupted conflict, data analysis of the subsequent sampling periods revealed that letter writers continued to devote substantial space to a discussion of the origin of the situation. Further immersion in the data highlighted the prominence of the portrayals letter writers created to depict themselves and their counterparts in talks on the conflict. These ‘self’ and ‘other’ portraits were indicative of whom writers considered responsible for the conflict. Another observation that arose from my reading of the data was that a majority of the letter writers had a solution to the Karabakh issue.

If initially these writers’ statements seemed to be subthemes under the overarching theme of the Karabakh issue, after completing the coding procedure, they have transformed into a guideline for how to interpret the issue of the Karabakh issue. Tables 2.1 through 2.4 provide an overview of definitions of the conflict, its causes and solutions as suggested by letter writers to the newspapers. The data is divided into four periods, in order to make the contrasts and patterns in the argument.
about the Karabakh conflict over time visible. Each table is accompanied by comments intended to provide the reader with some background necessary for understanding of how the frames have been constructed.

Table 2.1 provides an overview of differences and similarities in coverage of the Karabakh issue in *Bakinskiy rabochiy* and *Kommunist* letter sections in 1988. The main line of letter writers’ reasoning in that period was built around Gorbachev’s appeal to the workers of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Given the large number of quotations from the appeal, it is conceivable that Gorbachev’s speech had a powerful impact on the letter writers and determined the perspective from which letter writers viewed what was happening in and around Nagorno-Karabakh.

Table 2.1. *Reasoning devices identified in the letters to the editor published in 1988*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REASONING DEVICES</th>
<th>BAKINSKII RABOCHIY</th>
<th>KOMMUNIST/GOLOS ARMENII</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PROBLEM DEFINITION</td>
<td>Clear definitions: “debauchery”, “acts of hooliganism”, “unrest” and “interethnic discord” (#51)</td>
<td>Clear definitions: “Nagorno-Karabakh claims to join Armenia” (#49), “Karabakh issue” (#48, #49, #50 and #51) and “dispute” (#51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Definitions provided by the state: “unlawful acts”</td>
<td>Definitions provided by the state: “inherited national challenges” (#48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAUSAL INTERPRETATION</td>
<td>“the Soviet Union (external) adversaries”, “dissension”, “unresolved problems”, “fervor” (#51), “disinformation” (#276) and “rumors” (#51 and #276)</td>
<td>“complex national issues” (#48), “unresolved problems” (#48, #49, #50 and #51) and “long-standing concerns” (#48 and #51), “dissension” (#48, #49 and #51), “absence of reliable information” (#49) and “distrust” (#48, #49 and #51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CULPABLE AGENTS</td>
<td>“immature persons” and “bystanders”</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TREATMENT RECOMMENDATION</td>
<td>Treatments suggested by the state: “get emotions under control”, “maintain calm”, “act with prudence” and “display civic maturity”</td>
<td>Treatments suggested by the state: respecting friendship and fraternity among Soviet peoples, restoring social order, displaying civic maturity and restraint, remaining calm, preserving tolerance, returning to work and to normal life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Priority solution: preserving the brotherhood between Azerbaijani and Armenian people</td>
<td>Priority solution: preserving the unity of Azerbaijani and Armenian people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alternative solutions: “take a proactive stance” for improvement of affairs and to do peace through art (#51)</td>
<td>Counter-solution: find a just solution to the petition for transfer of the Nagorno-Karabakh region to Armenia (#51)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the local and central media coverage on ethnic clashes in Armenia and Azerbaijan was initially poor (Kaufman, 2015; McNair, 2006), those bits of information that were selected for print, such as the previously mentioned appeal, became a frame of reference for the newspapers’ readers, which they

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25 For example, the categories “dissension” and “unresolved problems” have been derived from Gorbachev’s appeal as well as the categories “disinformation” and “rumors” that came to the use of letter writers at the end of 1988 when the gradual extension of the republican news agenda has been observed (McNair, 2006).
used to organize the fragmented information they had on the events of February 1988. Apart from the lack of coverage of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, there was another obstacle for the public in the search for their own definition of the situation, which explains why they tended to rely on the definitions provided by the state. In the USSR, before the glasnost campaign began, a particular image of social reality existed where nationalist sentiments had no place (McNair, 2006). Clashes in Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh had put in sharp focus the need to define these events and the Karabakh issue. Furthermore, it was necessary to determine the guilty party. In early 1988, letter writers did not articulate explicitly whom they blamed for the conflict. Special emphasis at that time was given to ‘self-presentation’, which allowed the writers to highlight their positive properties and to suggest that bad properties were to be associated with another party. To illustrate the point, consider the following examples. In response to the reports on the first wave of ethnic clashes over the disputed oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh, letter writers of both newspapers presented an account of the events, which portrayed them and their compatriots — whether as observers or demonstrators — in sympathetic terms. In Kommunist letters published in early 1988 Armenians were presented as “individuals with high moral character” (#48 and #49), “willing to help”, “just” (#51), “honorable” (#49), “credible and trustworthy” (#48) and as “peaceful people” (#51). The way in which Azerbaijanis letters writers portrayed themselves and their fellow citizens revealed that they had a more critical view. Although the Bakinskiy rabochiy letter writers praised the people of Azerbaijan for “respecting the traditions of others”, for being “internationalists”, “communists” and for promoting the principles of multinationalism, they nonetheless condemned the unlawful behavior of the compatriots involved in the Sumgait riot and criticized those who passively witnessed violence occurring during those events.

As to the articulation of solutions to the conflict, in 1988 suggestions concerning what had to be done to resolve the Karabakh conflict were echoing Gorbachev’s statements over the Armenia-Azerbaijan dispute, as can be seen in Table 2.1. The principal distinction between the complimentary solutions offered by the Bakinskiy rabochiy and Kommunist letter writers was in emphasis. Bakinskiy rabochiy letter writers focused on the preservation of brotherhood of the Azerbaijani and Armenian people. Many Bakinskiy rabochiy letter writers stated that Azerbaijanis and Armenians are a single fraternal family (#51) and stressed they will “never believe that the centuries-old tradition of friendship between the [...] brother people may end” (#51). Kommunist letter writers emphasized the importance of preserving the unity of Azerbaijani and Armenian people. Here, the idea of unity was articulated as

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26 For further details on the self- and other-presentation samples, see Appendix III.
cohesion, internationalism, national consensus, adherence to the principles of socialism, mutual support and commonality of traditions. In addition to support of Gorbachev’s plan for ending the unrest and calls for a strengthening of brotherhood and unity between the two peoples, letter writers suggested some other initiatives to overcome the discord.

Table 2.2 contains feasible reasoning devices discovered in letters to the editor published in 1990. The table shows remarkable differences in the way Armenian and Azerbaijani letter writers approached the issue of Karabakh in that period. Thus, for the Bakinskiy rabochiy letter writer the current developments in Baku were prioritized over the Armenian–Azerbaijani confrontation over Karabakh. For Golos Armenii letter writers, in contrast, the confrontation was under intense scrutiny.

Table 2.2. Reasoning devices identified in the letters to the editor published in 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REASONING DEVICES</th>
<th>BAKINSKIY RABOCHIY</th>
<th>KOMMUNIST/GOLOS ARMENII</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| PROBLEM DEFINITION | No claims about what was actually happening between the people of Azerbaijan and Armenia (#16) | • “explosive situation” and “aggression” (#13)  
• “genocide”, “violence” and “provocation” (#13)  
• “fanatical hysteria”, “shame” and “desperate situation” (#16) |
| CAUSAL INTERPRETATION | “rumors” (#16) | • “property loss exposure”, “coercion”,  
“persecution”, “discrimination” and “atrocities” (#13)  
the movement for the “national reunification” of Karabakh with Armenia (#13) |
| CULPABLE AGENTS | – | Azerbaijani “vandals” (#13), “angry mobs”, “barbarians”, “thugs”, “religious extremists under the banner of Islam” who “should be condemned” (#16) |
| TREATMENT RECOMMENDATION | – | • “act as one” in the fight against “genocide” and “the acts of vandalism” by Azerbaijanis (#13)  
• “progressive mankind” to condemn the appalling suffering of the Armenian people in Azerbaijan (#13) |

Golos Armenii letter writers presented multiple definitions of the conflict, provided a comprehensive account of the conflict’s root causes and suggested potential solutions to it. Thus, they claimed that what was happening in Baku and in areas adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh was “genocide”, “violence” and “provocation” (#13). It was suggested that the “property loss exposure”, “coercion”, “persecution”, “discrimination” and “atrocities” experienced by the Armenian population attributed to the emergence of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan (#16) with blame being put on the Azerbaijani “vandals” (#13), “angry mobs”, “barbarians”, “thugs”, “religious extremists under the banner of Islam” who “should be condemned” (#16). In this regard, it was necessary for the Armenian

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27 Russian residents leaving the city in fear of new pogroms.
people to “act as one” (#13). Further, Golos Armenii letter writers called on “progressive mankind” to condemn the appalling suffering of the Armenian people in Azerbaijan (#13).

Table 2.3 depicts the letter writers’ reasoning about what was going on in and around Nagorno-Karabakh in 1991. It was during this period that letter writers of both newspapers came to define the situation in the same terms (i.e. as “Karabakh issue”). At the same time, they presented different accounts on the causes of the conflict. Thus, while Armenian letter writers addressed only one root of the conflict, Bakinskiy rabochiy letter writers, in contrast, offered extensive insights into the issue roots.

Table 2.3. Reasoning devices identified in the letters to the editor published in 1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REASONING DEVICES</th>
<th>BAKINSKIY RABOCHIY</th>
<th>KOMMUNIST/GOLOS ARMENII</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PROBLEM DEFINITION</td>
<td>“Karabakh issue”</td>
<td>“Karabakh issue” (#117)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| CAUSAL INTERPRETATION | • the central government was blamed for “incompetent decisions”, “halfway measures of reform”, “tardiness” and “impotence” (#171) that paved the way to the current situation  
• “rumors”, “provocations” and “lies” (#171) about events in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan and Armenia  
• the Armenian militants were blamed for the unfolding in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast events as those were “ignoring the law” and were “not living on the land” (#177) of Karabakh Armenians being “cut off from their roots” |
| CULPABLE AGENTS | the Armenian “gunmen-bandits” (#177), “extremists” and “separatists” who forced Azerbaijanis to engage into the conflict (#171) and who have been unwilling to recognize the rule of law and constitution of Azerbaijani republic” (#177) “unscrupulous”, “hypocrite”, “furious” and of “flouting moral principle” Azerbaijani people (#83) |
| TREATMENT RECOMENDATION | • reject diplomatic deals with separatists (#171)  
• strengthen military capacity of Azerbaijan (#171)  
• strengthen national cohesion (#169) -- |

In addition, Azerbaijani letter writers were actively engaged in accusations against the Armenians. They lamented that “the world [was] not concerned about the killing of civilians in Azerbaijan, but it [was] concerned over the deportation of Armenian heavily armed militants […] who have been unwilling to recognize the rule of law and constitution of our [Azerbaijani] republic” (#177). The political discourse

28 The author refers to the Armenians who were living in Azerbaijan before the Karabakh events.
developed by the Armenian elites on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, according to Bakinskiy rabochiy letter writers, was seen as provocative and deceiving (#177). In this respect, Azerbaijanis considered themselves to be unfortunate victims whose “voice is not heard” (#177).

Azerbaijani letter writers were also at the forefront of the debate on how to address the Karabakh issue. They made several recommendations thereon, while in 1991 Golos Armenii letter writers did not express any opinion as to how the ongoing conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh could be solved or approached.

In 2016, the coverage of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict by the readership of the specific newspapers rendered new judgments about the Karabakh issue. Table 2.4, below, shows the main ones.

Table 2.4. Reasoning devices identified in the letters to the editor published in 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REASONING DEVICES</th>
<th>BAKINSKIY RABOCHIY</th>
<th>KOMMUNIST/GOLOS ARMENII</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PROBLEM DEFINITION</td>
<td>“injustice”, “provocation”, “occupation” and “struggle against the enemy” (#60)</td>
<td>“war”, “injustice” and “genocide” (#NA of 18.05.2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAUSAL INTERPRETATION</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CULPABLE AGENTS</td>
<td>“enemy”, “insidious enemy”, “insidious Armenians”, “ravid enemy”, “Armenian invaders” and “occupiers” (#60)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TREATMENT RECOMMENDATION</td>
<td>• rally around the president Aliev and the army for protection of the homeland and for liberation of the occupied territories (#60) • inform international community about what was happening in and around Nagorno-Karabakh in order to “make [Azerbaijani] voices heard” (#60)</td>
<td>• the need for a (new) government that would demonstrate its concern for its army (#NA of 18.05.2016) • wage the war by any means, whether by providing material support or by waging information war (#NA of 18.05.2016)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Golos Armenii letter writer adopted the definitions of “war” and “injustice” (#NA of 18.05.2016) when addressing Armenia’s current relations with Azerbaijan. In referring to what was happening in “Artsakh”29 some decades ago, a letter writer addressed the subject of genocide. Azerbaijan letter writers did not restrict their view of the renewal of hostilities in April 2016 to the notion of war. For them the events of April and all preceding events in and around Nagorno-Karabakh were an expression of “injustice”, “provocation”, and “occupation”. While both Golos Armenii and Bakinskiy rabochiy writers had explained how they understood the nature of the unfolding events, they refrained from diagnosing their causes.

The 2016 sample revealed two contrasting patterns concerning the culpability of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict party. Whereas the letter to Golos Armenii presented no accounts of to whom

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Armenians attribute responsibility for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and how they conceive their own role in it, the Bakinskiy rabochiy letter page was full of allegations against Armenians and reflections on Azerbaijanis’ own identity.

Letter writers’ suggestions concerning the possible solutions to the Karabakh problem in 2016 showed a remarkable similarity, focusing their attention on military action.

This sub-section pulled together the arguments on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict put forward by the readership of two newspapers: Bakinskiy rabochiy and Kommunist/Golos Armenii. Letter writers expressed their opinions concerning what the conflict is about, explained in detail the causes of the conflict and suggested how it should be dealt with. In the following sub-section, I will provide an overview of the linguistic means used by letter writers to project the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

5.3.1.2. Framing devices

Signifying elements, or framing devices, refer to specific language so as to set up parameters of the meanings that the receiver of the information will attribute to a discussed event or a problem (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Signifying elements include metaphors, exemplars, depictions, catch-phrases and visual images “from which lessons can be learned” (Picard, 2015, p. 126). In this sub-section I assess the presence of signifying elements in Bakinskiy rabochiy and Kommunist/Golos Armenii letter pages. I take a closer look at the content of the letters to the editor about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in order to see how the conflict was discussed and how the ways of debating about the conflict have transformed over time.

In 1988, ethnic clashes in Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh were one of the most mediatized events that dominated news agendas of many Soviet newspapers (McNair, 2006). It is not surprising that the dispute also generated considerable public interest. What is striking is that at the outbreak of the conflict writers of letters to the editor did not seek to unleash emotions inflicted on them by the emerging disturbances. Instead, they quoted redundantly extracts from the appeal of Gorbachev to the Soviet republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan concerning the dispute. A call for strengthening the internationalist cohesion of the Soviet peoples proved to be particularly popular with the Armenian letter writers (#48, #49, #50 and #51). Another source of quotation for the Kommunist writers was the wisdom of the crowds. The Kommunist writers’ reliance on authority sources also has been expressed through pointing at members of the Armenian social elites – “the eminent persons from the field of science, culture and art” – who took part in the demonstrations and “expressed their views [on the Karabakh issue] in a spirit of glasnost and democracy” (#49). The
criterion of authority plays a central role for the Armenian letter writers in the construction of their argumentative line. This is illustrated by the way the writers emphasize the authority of their sources. Thus, for instance, they underline Gorbachev’s competence and positive personal qualities. When the Kommunist letter writers make a reference to Gorbachev’s speech, they present him as a person in whom the audience can believe. Gorbachev is described as a “honest” (#49), “thoughtful” (#48, #49 and #50), “sensible” (#51) and “wise” (#48, #49 and #51) man. The character of Gorbachev leaves no choice to the Armenian people but to “listen [to his appeal] with emotion” (#50 and #51) and “welcome [it] wholeheartedly” (#50).

While the above examples suggest that the Kommunist letter writers sought to represent the Karabakh issue in a disengaged fashion, given that their arguments were based on official reports on clashes in Armenia and Azerbaijan, their accounts of the unfolding events were not lacking in emotion. Armenian “legitimate” (#49) claims to Karabakh have been articulated with a hope that they will be addressed and that “the voice of reason will win” (#48 and #51). In 1990, the Golos Armenii letter writers’ rhetoric on the Karabakh conflict became far more emotional. Writers invoked various metaphors to describe the actual state of affairs. Letter writers were concerned with “the fate [of the Armenian people]” (#16). There were calls for combating violence “with a fearless heart”, “clear mind” and “as an entity” (#13). Furthermore, writers used a language which can be associated with the Christian faith. The letter title ‘Hear the voice of one crying’ by itself makes a direct reference to the Holy Bible30. Another explicit reference to the Bible was made in a letter where the author described her runaway from Baku during the anti-Armenian pogroms as a “miraculous escape”31.

In 1991, the Golos Armenii letter writers continued to employ metaphors in the discussion of the fate of the Armenian people. Thus, what was happening to the Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan was seen as “the will of fate”. The refugees themselves were depicted as being “torn from their homeland against their will” (#117). Furthermore, in 1991 the lexical repertoire of the Golos Armenii letter writers was extended to the practice of naming places in the disputed region. For example, the Azerbaijani name “Karabakh” was replaced by the Armenian version “Artsakh” (#83) and the Azerbaijani spelling for the town of “Khodjaly” was changed to the Armenian spelling, e.g. it became “Khodjalu” (#83).

Similar signifying elements were found in the 2016 letter to the editor. Its writer was reflecting on the fate of Armenians living in countries other than Armenia. She noted that these people, “while trying to fight an information warfare, blame[d] [them]selves for enjoying the comforts of [their] own

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30 A phrase used in the Gospels to refer to John the Baptist. It is quoted from the Book of Isaiah (40:3).
31 Holy Bible, act 12. Peter’s miraculous escape from prison.
houses. Nevertheless, [they] realize that [they] may find themselves caught up in a real war. [They] are ready for that. [They] have accepted [their] destiny” [emphasis added] (#NA of 18.05.2016.). In addition to the continuous use of metaphors concerning the fate of Armenians, the Golos Armenii letter writers maintained the application of Armenian toponyms to the occupied territories of Azerbaijan surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh (#NA of 18.05.2016.).

Reviewing the 1988 Bakinskiy rabochiy letters on the subject of ethnic unrest in the republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan, one can note some commonality between the Kommunist and Bakinskiy rabochiy coverage of these events. The Bakinskiy rabochiy letter writers, like their Armenian counterparts, organized their accounts on what was happening around the speech of Gorbachev given at the end of February 198832. There is however a difference in the degree of consideration given to Gorbachev’s appeal. First of all, the number of references to the speech by the Azerbaijani letter writers was smaller than those of Armenian writers. Second, the Bakinskiy rabochiy letter writers have chosen different themes Gorbachev prioritized in his appeal. Whereas for the Kommunist letter writers Gorbachev’s indication that “the hour for reason and sober decision has struck” was the most important theme in the speech, for the Bakinskiy rabochiy letter writers greater importance was attached to a call to respect Soviet friendship (#51)33.

The practice of developing arguments about what was happening in and around Nagorno-Karabakh by relying on social elites’ opinions thereof was equally common in the case of the Bakinskiy rabochiy letter writers. They quoted various Armenian and Azerbaijani writers, poets and composers whose works were encouraging social cohesion (#51).

What made the Bakinskiy rabochiy letters’ discourse on the Karabakh issue special was the tendency to present it from an emotional perspective. This occurred through using positively charged emotional language. Here are two examples. One writer, when describing his thoughts about the recent developments in the two neighboring republics, wrote that when we face challenges it is important to remember that “no matter who you are, no matter where you have come from [...] We have built a new world in which all people are brothers [...] We must safeguard this world” [emphasis added] (#51). In a similar vein, another writer described the coexistence of Armenians and Azerbaijani: “all of us are living under one roof; we all are living under the same sky” (#51). Furthermore, in their description of the events and parties in the conflict the Azerbaijani letter writers resorted often to the use of such

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33 The original quote states: “Not a single mother would agree to see her children threatened by national factionalism in exchange for the firm ties of friendship, equality, mutual help—which are truly the great achievement of socialism.” Ibid.
words as ‘soul’ and ‘heart’: “an open-hearted woman”, “we support his appeal with all our heart”, “we use the word ‘soul’ to call each other”, “I feel attached with all my heart to my coworkers of different nationalities”, “the brotherly souls [of Armenian and Azerbaijani people] have been translated into music” (#51).

In the 1990 Bakinskiy rabochiy sampled letter, the writer paid scant attention to the Armenia-Azerbaijan relationship. Instead, the author was concerned with an outflow of Russian residents from Baku. However, the discussion brought up an interesting idea concerning the city itself. The writer portrayed Baku as a “blessed land”. Such representation of the city deems it possible to draw parallels with the representation of the Holy Land, or Israel, which suggests sufferings and heroic deeds of the local population in order to retain ownership of their land. The fact that Baku is now “hung with black flags” and its “streets [...] are filled with mourning flowers” (#16) seems to be a proof of that.

The next year, when the conflict turned from its latent phase into an open military confrontation, further themes featured in the Bakinskiy rabochiy letters’ repertoire of framing devices. Letter writers employed terms of natural events for depicting the current state of affairs in the Republic in view of the unfolding Karabakh conflict. One writer suggested that “political storm has plagued the country”, and that “pearls of thunder and high frequency currents pass through the factory floor and through the Parliament” [emphasis added] (#171). Furthermore, letter writers were actively using metaphors to encapsulate their observations. Thus, one author invoked the metaphor of “broken destinies” (#171) to refer to those people who have been affected by the political “turmoil” (#171) in the Republic. In the debate about the inaccuracies in the reports of the central media organs on events in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, one writer claimed that “[t]oday a lie has a stronger voice than the truth, but this does not mean that the truth should remain silent. All of us need the voice of truth as a breath of fresh air” [emphasis added] (#169).

The escalation of hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2016 favored the appearance of new tendencies in the debates taking place in the Bakinskiy rabochiy letter page. This was marked by the introduction of a new referential strategy. Letter writers adopted a label “Turkic” to refer to ethnic and religious allies of Azerbaijan. ‘Turkism’ has become a new source of inspiration and a unifying symbol. Besides that, the Bakinskiy rabochiy letter writers started to employ idioms of fighting and battling, such as “to the last breath” and “shoulder to shoulder” and metaphors such as “teach the lesson” (#60) when addressing the Azerbaijani military advances during the 2016 Nagorno-Karabakh clashes. There was also an Allah-evoking reference made on the issue of Azerbaijani military advances and losses. The author referred to Allah for blessing the Azerbaijani people and for reposing the souls of those who had fought for their homeland. This example also illustrates a return to the use of the word ‘soul’ that
was actively employed in the letters printed in *Bakinskiy rabochiy* in 1988. In contrast to the previous period, in 2016 the word ‘soul’ was no longer used in a positive context, but mostly in reference to the men who lost their lives during the clashes.

Whereas in the previous sub-section I was concerned with the question which perspectives on the Karabakh conflict were adopted by the readership of *Bakinskiy rabochiy* and *Kommunist/Golos Armenii*, in this sub-section I have been particularly interested in the ways these perspectives were constructed. That, in essence, is my attempt to address the third research sub-question of this study, which is dealing with discursive resources used in the readers’ letters for the discussion of the conflict. Therefore, the remainder of this sub-section is devoted to the analysis of differences and coherences within the discourse on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the specific newspapers. In parallel, the evolution of the discourse concerning the issue over time is being assessed.

The letter writers’ articulations of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict were prominent in both newspapers in 1988. In both cases, Gorbachev’s “Appeal to the workers of Armenia and Azerbaijan” was the starting point for establishing the debates about the Karabakh dispute. Armenian writers focused on consequences of the upcoming plenary meeting of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on national policies for the solution to the dispute. In this sense, Gorbachev’s appeal served as a source that could justify the ‘legitimacy’ of Armenian claims. As the Soviet leader signaled that the Party was ready for “a frank, sincere discussion of various ideas and proposals”, the *Kommunist* letter writers used this statement as an invitation for further debates on the issue. I would like to recall that in 1988 Gorbachev enjoyed indisputable authority and was seen “at home and abroad as a leader who has sought to make the Soviet system more efficient and humane” (Taubman, 1988, p.1), therefore anchoring claims to Karabakh on Gorbachev’s statements was a powerful mode of persuasion. While Azerbaijani letters writers also quoted Gorbachev’s appeal, their rhetoric was less powerful than of their counterparts. An emotional narrative of Karabakh being the homeland of both Armenians and Azerbaijanis (#51) and their calls for a strengthening of cohesion and unity between the two peoples (#51) resulted in an ambiguous claim to legitimacy.

Strong arguments drawn upon reasoning were one of the essential distinguishing marks between the persuasive strategy used by the *Kommunist/Golos Armenii* letter writers and the more emotional mode used by the *Bakinskiy rabochiy* letter authors. In subsequent years, the rhetoric of the Armenian letter writers became quite emotional, but it remained firm with regard to what was ‘theirs’. Armenian claims to the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh were made through the practice of giving names to the place they occupied. Thus, “Karabakh” became “Artsakh”. Peteet (2005) argues that the practice of naming is aimed at establishing control and ownership over the occupied places. In the case of the
It is remarkable that the Armenian letter writers managed to combine the strict view regarding Nagorno-Karabakh ownership with the “martyr-narrative”. They routinely portrayed Armenians as a martyr nation (the victims of vandalism and genocide (#13), of violence carried out by Muslims, subjected to ethnic discrimination (#16)), stressing that Armenians resigned themselves to their fate (#117). Such self-presentation gives the impression that Armenians have little control over the situation in and around Karabakh. However, the apparent contradiction between the two narratives (martyrdom versus determination to fight for what is ‘theirs’) has a certain logic. The "martyr-narrative" evokes sentiments of loss, reminds the audience of the cause of suffering and justifies hostility against the perpetrator (Kaufman, 2015).

The most representative framing devices that I came across during my investigation of Bakinskiy rabochiy letters to the editor were metaphorical, idiomatic and proverbial expressions that provided the context for audiences to interpret the state of relations between the conflicting parties. The use of such expressions, as some suggest, is aimed at bringing the receiver of the information “into some kind of alignment” with the message the sender intends to convey (Drew & Holt, 1988, p. 412). Further, the Azerbaijani letter writers were inclined to use emotional language in response to events surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh. This can be observed at the very beginning of the conflict when the language was sentimental and conciliatory, calling for a strengthening of cohesion and unity between the two peoples; in 2016 when the language had become inflammatory, motivating Azerbaijani people to fight. Literature suggests that emotional appeals, especially those concerned with ethnic issues, tend to simplify and exaggerate problems (Cottle, 2006; Kaufman, 2015). The fact that little reflection was given to exploring the real root causes of the conflict at its outset supports this statement, as well as the fact that in recent times overly strong emotional language of the Azerbaijani letter writers leaves almost no window for forging an agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia. In conclusion, my findings suggest that the Azerbaijani letter writers draw their argument for the Nagorno-Karabakh territorial claim with the use of mental pictures and associations in contrast to a more concrete rhetoric of their Armenian counterparts.

The focus of this sub-section was on the linguistic choices of the Bakinskiy rabochiy and Kommunist/Golos Armenii letter writers in the description of the events taking place in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. The focus of the following sub-section is on the linkage between the identified reasoning and framing devices, which informs the construction of frames.
5.3.1.3. Frames

The purpose of the preceding two sub-sections was to present framing and reasoning devices identified in the Bakinskiy rabochiy and Kommunist/Golos Armenii letters to the editor. The objective of this sub-section is to establish logical chains of framing and reasoning devices across the separate letters to the editor in order to identify an overarching master narrative (frame). For this purpose, the identified devices have been regrouped in a frame matrix shown in Table 3.

Table 3. **Frame matrix for the Karabakh issue with their representative reasoning and framing devices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Problem definition</th>
<th>Problem source/cause</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Possible solutions</th>
<th>Choice of vocabulary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Diplomacy   | The dispute over the contested region of Nagorno-Karabakh is a threat to cohesion. | Soviet nationalities policy.                | Anti-social elements.               | Resolve the dispute within the legal framework.                                    | • Appeals to authority in the form of citations of the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and the local social elites.  
• Metaphorical, idiomatic and proverbial expressions: "the voice of reason will win"; "all of us are living under one roof; we are all living under the same sky".  
• Lexical choices: legitimate request, soul, heart, friendship, fraternity, unity. |
| Militarism  | The war over territory.                                                              | Armenia's defiance of the law / injustice inflicted by Azerbaijan. | The Soviet leadership; the Azerbaijani policy of discrimination and oppression / the Armenian nationalist ideology. | Military response.                                                                  | • The use of religious references.  
• Terminology: refugees, genocide, religious extremists, discrimination, vandalism, separatism.  
• Place-names: Artsakhs; Khodja.  
• Metaphorical, idiomatic and proverbial expressions: "the will of fate", "broken destinies", "lies have short legs", "to the last breath", "shoulder to shoulder", "teach the lesson".  
• Lexical choices: storm, pearls of thunder, Turks, vandals, angry mobs, barbarians, thugs, provocateurs, gunmen-bandidos, enemy, invaders. |

As seen from Table 3, the data yields two archetypal frames\(^\text{34}\): the diplomacy and the militarism frames. The table lists the dominant interpretative patterns for the representation of the Karabakh conflict including a general definition of the conflict, its causes, the attribution of responsibility and the possible solutions. The last column of the table shows framing devices that make up the frame. It must be noted that for reasons of clarity only the most representative framing devices have been presented in the matrix. The remaining devices have been laid out in the sub-section 1.2.

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\(^\text{34}\) The point needs to be made that, although the analysis produced a diversity of frames (these included “unification vs. independence”, “victim vs. perpetrator”, “truth vs. propaganda” frames), I limit this research just to the frames presented in the matrix. There are two reasons for doing so. First, as will become clear in the forthcoming discussion, the diplomacy and the militarism frames can be understood as umbrella frames that encompass other denoted frames. Second, an in-depth discussion of all identified frames is beyond the scope of this thesis.
Both frames concentrate on the territorial claims. At the heart of the first dominant frame, the frame of diplomacy, is the idea that the dispute over the contested region was a result of the ambiguous and contradictory Soviet policy on nationalities. In particular, the Armenian letter writers insisted that the policy issues called for a discussion and required a revision. The Azerbaijani letter authors in turn were prone to engage in the discussion, but under the condition of maintaining the status quo. The overall message transmitted was to resort to legal measures for settlement of the dispute in order to avert the escalation of tensions and a further deterioration of the situation. This frame has its own vocabulary, which refers to friendship, fraternity and unity. It often takes the form of citations of the political and social elites.

The second frame, the frame of militarism, is associated with another logic: there are no calls for entering into negotiations and finding a non-violent conflict solution, but incitements to military action. Both the Golos Armenii and Bakinskiy rabochiy letter writers provided their accounts of the atrocities and injustice they have suffered from the opposing party. Azerbaijan was accused of Armenian genocide and discrimination and Armenia was blamed for a violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Mutual accusations were presented in terms such as separatism, refugees flow, extremism and vandalism. As to the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, Armenian writers voiced Armenia’s right to this area through the imposition of Armenian names to the occupied territories. For the Azerbaijani letter writers, the status of Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas was non-negotiable. Both the Armenian and Azerbaijani letter writers expressed their readiness of going to war in order to defend their rights to the disputed territory. The logical consequence of this reasoning is that only a victory will put an end to the dispute.

According to the analysis, the two frames are almost equally evident in letters to the editor in both newspapers. At the outbreak of the conflict, the frame of diplomacy was especially present in letters. It contributed to the search for a compromise solution to the discord over Nagorno-Karabakh. The Kommunist/Golos Armenii letter writers emphasized the necessity of a nationality policy reform to respond to the articulated need to unite Karabakh with Armenia. The Bakinskiy rabochiy letter writers expressed their willingness to negotiate, provided Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity and sovereignty would be preserved under the compromise. As a compromise was not reached and the conflict escalated, those views were quickly replaced by the perception that an agreement on the Karabakh status could not be achieved by diplomatic means. The Golos Armenii and Bakinskiy rabochiy letter writers offered incompatible ideas about the Karabakh issue. While the Armenian letter writers argued that the decisions of the Azerbaijani authorities concerning Karabakh had no legal weight in Karabakh proper (#83), the Azerbaijani letter writers reminded that Nagorno-Karabakh was the land of Azerbaijan and that nobody could ever steal it from the people of Azerbaijan (#171). The frame of
militarism became convenient for both letter writers to interpret the aspirations of dominance. It created the feeling that war was the only solution acceptable to both parties.

In order to confirm or disprove the reliability and validity of the identified diplomacy and militarism frames, a deductive strategy is required. In the next section I first explain how deductive analysis works and lay down the theoretical foundations of my argument for using this approach. Then I turn theory into practice and verify the identified frames.

5.3.2. Deductive approach

The deductive approach is used to test the identified set of frames with the help of already existent frames. Relying on established frames permits researchers to check their hunches and confirm them, on the one hand, and makes the analysis of media texts systematic and general in application, on the other hand (Touri & Koteyko, 2015). For Van Gorp, the deductive approach implies the use of quantitative analysis which “deal[s] with measuring the extent to which inductively reconstructed frame packages are actually applied in a representative sample of texts” (Van Gorp, 2010, p. 99). For the purpose of this study, I opted for another deductive method which also involves working with previous researches moving from the general concepts to specific observations (Macnamara, 2005), but which in contrast to quantitative data analysis not focuses on measuring the frequency with which certain frames occur in a given text. Instead, it is concerned with establishing the presence and use of certain patterns of representation of conflicts, which confirm or disprove the reliability and validity of the identified frames.

The best-documented patterns of conflict representation in media coverage are peace and war frames identified by Galtung (2002; 1988; Joseph, 2014; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2007). In the context of conflict studies, his concept of peace and war journalism serves as a form of critical analysis of conflict reporting, used to illuminate peace and war perspectives built into it (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2007). As described by Galtung himself, peace and war journalism are “two ways of looking at a conflict” (Galtung, 1998, p. 7). The former stands for conflict resolution. It explores the root causes of conflict, shows its context, identifies all parties involved, acknowledges alternative responses, and gives a voice to various stakeholders. Overall, it is “a balanced and more comprehensive portrayal of conflict” (Joseph, 2014, p. 238). War journalism, by contrast, does not take any account of the context leading to conflict, ignores its causes, reduces the number of conflict parties to just two, conceals peace initiatives and favors official sources over the grassroots voices. Galtung (1998) compares this type of journalism with sport reporting concerned with the question “who wins?”
For the purpose of this study, I resorted to Galtung’s theory on peace and war journalism (2002). Seen as two media frames, peace and war representations of conflict can be used as reference points for an assessment of the reliability and validity of the identified diplomacy and militarism frames.

Galtung (in Lynch & McGoldrick, 2007, p. 251) introduced a model for understanding how conflicts are reported. In this model, he identifies the evaluative criteria for analysis of conflict reporting. The following Table 4 summarizes representative elements of both peace and war frames derived by Galtung:

Table 4. Galtung’s table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peace/Conflict Journalism</th>
<th>War/Violence Journalism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I. Peace/conflict-oriented</strong></td>
<td><strong>I. War/violence-oriented</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore conflict formation, x parties, y goals, z issues</td>
<td>Focus on conflict arena, 2 parties, 1 goal (win), war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General ‘win, win’ orientation</td>
<td>General zero-sum orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open space, open time; causes and outcomes anywhere, also in history/culture</td>
<td>Closed space, closed time; causes and exits in arena, who threw the first stone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making conflicts transparent</td>
<td>Making wars opaque/secret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving voice to all parties; empathy, understanding</td>
<td>‘Us-them’ journalism, propaganda, voice for ‘us’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See conflict/war as problem, focus on conflict creativity</td>
<td>See ‘them’ as the problem, focus on who prevails in war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanization of all sides; more so the worse the weapons</td>
<td>Dehumanization of ‘them’, more so the worse the weapon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive: prevention before any violence/war occurs</td>
<td>Reactive: waiting for violence before reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus only on visible effect of violence (killed, wounded and material damage)</td>
<td>Focus on invisible effects of violence (trauma and glory, damage to structure/culture)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II. Truth-oriented</strong></td>
<td><strong>II. Propaganda-oriented</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expose untruths on all sides / uncover all cover-ups</td>
<td>Expose ‘their’ untruths / help ‘our’ cover-ups/lies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>III. People-oriented</strong></td>
<td><strong>III. Elite-oriented</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on suffering all over; on women, the aged, children, giving voice to voiceless</td>
<td>Focus on ‘our’ suffering: on able-bodied elite males, being their mouth-piece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give name to all evil-doers</td>
<td>Give name to their evil-doers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on people peacemakers</td>
<td>Focus on elite peacemakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IV. Solution-oriented</strong></td>
<td><strong>IV. Victory-oriented</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace = nonviolence + creativity</td>
<td>Peace = victory + ceasefire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlight peace initiatives, also to prevent more war</td>
<td>Conceal peace initiative, before victory is at hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on structure, culture, the peaceful society</td>
<td>Focus on treaty, institution, the controlled society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aftermath: resolution, reconstruction, reconciliation</td>
<td>Leaving for another war, return if the old flares up again</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Guided by Galtung’s criteria, I present an assessment of the identified diplomacy and militarism frames.
5.3.2.1. Assessment of the diplomacy frame

Using representative elements of peace journalism from Galtung’s model, I examined the diplomacy frame for the presence of those elements. First, the vision for peace was addressed. Such a vision offers insights into the unconscious dimensions of conflict formation\(^{35}\). A strong correlation was found with the following elements of the vision for peace: creativity to find a solution to the conflict, empathy and voice opportunities for every party involved in it and a focus on the conflict’s invisible effects. The low degree of correlation was identified with the remaining elements. Thus, conflict formation received insufficient coverage in letters to the editor in the specific newspapers. Letter writers did not seek to understand the deeper dimensions of the conflict by themselves; instead, they disseminated the explanations provided by the political and social elites. With regard to the lack of proactive reporting, it is difficult to determine the degree of reporting proactivity as the sampling frame of this study has specific inclusion and exclusion criteria\(^{36}\). Therefore, the absence of accounts of what was happening before the Karabakh dispute erupted, does not mean that letter writers did not provide them.

Second, the truth criterion has been examined. The analysis revealed that the letter writers’ representation of their fellow citizens’ role in the conflict was truth-orientated in the sense that letter writers did not tend to whitewash the deeds of those involved in violence. Here I am referring to the *Bakinskiy rabochiy* letters condemning the unlawful behavior of the “immature persons” implicated in the pogroms at Sumgait and criticizing the “bystanders” who passively witnessed violence that occurred during those events (#51).

Third, as to the grassroots orientation, it proved to be an essential element of the letters to the editor within a diplomacy framework. Letters by their very nature are a form of public expression of common concern (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2001). For the letters framing the Karabakh dispute from a diplomacy perspective, public concern related to the disruptions of social order in both republics and the potential further suffering of the populations. Letter writers brought their insights about what had to be done to prevent the situation from deteriorating further. A focus on the potential outcomes together with the writers’ attention paid to possible solutions to the dispute (the fourth and last element of peace journalism) shows significant correlation between peace journalism practice and the frame of diplomacy.

To conclude, the assessment of the diplomacy frame found correlations among the majority of peace journalism representative elements from Galtung’s model and the representation of the Karabakh

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\(^{35}\) Here, and in what follows in sub-section 2.1., I refer to the four sections of Galtung’s table on its left-hand side.

\(^{36}\) For further details, see Chapter 3, section 3.2.
conflict by letter writers of the two newspapers. Only two elements received little attention. However, the absence thereof does not mean that the letter writers’ representation of the conflict is not compatible with the tenets of peace journalism. A more likely reason why letter writers did not engage in the exploration of all dimensions of the conflict was their confusion caused by the new circumstances and the lack of information about what was happening in and around Karabakh (Kaufman, 2015; McNair, 2006). What is important is that peace journalism was “intended” (Galtung, 2002, p. 261), with no compromise that would bring peace and war journalism together.

5.3.2.2. Assessment of the militarism frame

Galtung’s categorization of peace and war journalism was also used for an assessment of the identified militarism frame with the aim to establish correlations between the characteristics of war journalism and the letter writers’ accounts of the conflict within the militarism frame.

With regard to the vision of war, all representative elements of this characteristic of war journalism have been identified in letters to the editor portraying the Karabakh conflict from a “militarism” perspective. A first finding concerns the letter writers’ strong tendency to focus on what was happening at a given moment in time without situating events within the context from which they emerged. Suffice it to recall the statements made by both Armenian and Azerbaijani letter writers on the sufferings being experienced without explaining the circumstances, which had led to them37. This tendency suggests a relationship with one of war journalism practices, namely the decontextualisation of conflict that makes conflicts opaque. Further, the analysis showed that letter writers were reluctant to portray the Karabakh conflict in a balanced manner. Sampled letters provided multiple accounts of writers identifying the culpability of the opposing party and proving their own innocence and victimhood. Seeing the other side as the problem is another feature of war journalism. The correlation was also found among the war journalism practice to exclude the opposing party from the discourse and the letter writers’ coverage of the conflict where the ‘Other’ had no voice. The last finding with regard to the vision of war suggests that the letter writers’ focus on physical harm inflicted by the opposing side38 (i.e. death, loss of property, displacement, etc.) corresponds to what Galtung refers to in his war journalism model as the “visible effect of violence” (Galtung, 2002, p. 261).

Another war journalism characteristic exhibited in the letter writers’ coverage of the Karabakh issue within a militarism framework is war propaganda. The following three claims common in war

37 On this issue, see, for example Bakinskiy rabotschiy, #16 of 25.01.1990 or Golos Armenii, #16 of 19.01.1990.

38 See, for example, Bakinskiy rabotschiy, #276 of 27.11.1988 or #60 of 06.04.2016 and Golos Armenii, #13 of 16.01.1990 or #16 of 19.01.1990.
propaganda featured in *Bakinskiy rabotschiy* and *Golos Armenii* samples. A first claim concerns the letter writers’ tendency to appeal to fears in order to mobilize people for a self-defense fight (Kaufman, 2015). In the case of the Armenian writers, they propagated the fear of group extinction drawing routinely on the theme of the Armenian genocide. For the Azerbaijani writers, the loss of sovereignty and territorial integrity was a common theme repeated throughout the discussions. A second claim refers to the promotion of ethnic nationalism, which is intended to serve the same purpose as a propaganda of fear. A nationalist appeal, according to Kaufman, can claim that people are “fighting simultaneously for self-respect (identity), self-interest (material goods), clan survival, clan territory” (Kaufman, 2015, p. 25). A third claim is related to the Azerbaijani and Armenian letter writers’ tendency to expose the lies of each other and not to question their own involvement in the conflict. According to Galtung (2002), the presence of such claims in a text can be classified as a war journalism practice.

When it comes to the analysis of letter writers’ primary sources of information, the analysis shows that letter writers were actively adopting elite narratives on the conflict when discussing what was at stake and proposing a course of action. However, it is worthwhile noting that a strong elite focus was more evident in the case of the *Bakinskiy rabotschiy* letter writers’ accounts of the unfolding events (#171, #177 and #60) than for the representations provided by the letter writer of the Armenian news outlet (#13 and #117). I do not seek to claim that letter writers based all their accounts on the political elite’s war narrative only, but I want to underline that elite influences were particularly strong influencing the way letter writers portrayed the ongoing developments of the conflict and thought of possible solutions to it.

The identified frame of militarism was also analyzed using the last criteria typical of war journalism. This criterion concerns claims on how a conflict is supposed to end. Galtung has found that war journalism propagates victory orientation. Therefore, my analysis was aimed at determining whether or not letters to the editor presented victory as the ultimate outcome of the Karabakh conflict. The analysis showed that most letter writers let victory-oriented criteria frame their letters. The idea that the conflict could not be settled by negotiations, but rather by one side’s triumph over the other side governed in letter sections of *Bakinskiy rabotschiy* and *Golos Armenii*. In the former case, a military option was justified by the need to evict the Armenian occupiers from the Azerbaijani lands and to restore Azerbaijani sovereignty over these territories. As one letter writer put it, “We can no longer endure injustice and occupation of our territories by the enemy” (#60). In the case of the *Golos Armenii* letter writers, the purported injustice and oppression inflicted by Azerbaijan served as a justifiable basis for war. Calls for ending the Azerbaijani aggression against the Armenian population made in

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1990 and 2016 illustrate this point (#13 and #NA of 18.05.2016). The representations of the conflict from these perspectives merit the term war journalism, as their aim is to shape the perception that other means to settle the conflict are ineffective or inappropriate.

In summing up the assessment of the identified militarism frame, it can be concluded that Galtung’s war journalism was apparent in the sampled for this study letters to the editor. Specifically, its practices were used to promote mutual exclusion at different levels. Thus, when discussing the suffering of the people involved in the conflict, both letter writers were emphasizing their own suffering and neither of them was willing to recognize the suffering of the other. Likewise, the articulation of goals of the conflict parties was contributing to the aggravation of differences between them. While the Armenian letter writers were demanding the territory of Karabakh to be united with Armenia, Azerbaijani authors maintained that Azerbaijan’s territorial sovereignty over Karabakh was non-negotiable. Such conflicting narratives produce a feeling that a military action is the only viable solution to the conflict. On these criteria, the analysis proves correlation between the letter writers’ account of the conflict from a militarism perspective and war journalism, which limits alternatives to conflict resolution to warlike means (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2007).

The principal aim of this section was to verify the predefined frames of diplomacy and militarism with the help of deductive approach. Drawing from Galtung’s peace and war journalism model, I carried out the exercise of establishing a correlation between the representative elements of peace and war journalism and the letter writers’ coverage of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Each letter to the editor in which the frames of diplomacy or militarism were employed was screened for the presence or absence of the characteristics indicative of peace and war journalism. The analysis clearly showed the presence of peace and war patterns of representation of conflicts in letters to the editor. Concerns about validity and reliability of the identified frames have therefore been overcome.

In the next section I will address the final sub-question of this research. I will explore the relevance of the letter writers’ debates on the Karabakh issue to the decisions made by local governments with reference to the conflict resolution. In other words, I will investigate if the two forms of reporting, i.e. within the frame of diplomacy and militarism, had any practical implications for the course of events in the Karabakh conflict, and if so, which implications.

5.4. Citizen participation in news making and its impact on political agendas and policymaking in Azerbaijan and Armenia

In the preceding section different patterns of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict representation dispersed by the readership of the Azerbaijani Bakinskiy rabochiy and the Armenian Kommunist/Golos Armenii
have been discussed. This section investigates their relevance for decisions made by the Azerbaijani and Armenian governments with reference to the conflict resolution. The section starts by outlining ‘hot’ phases of the conflict in the context of the letter writers that engaged with the local media to present their accounts about the conflict. I then outline the actions taken and those intended to be taken by the respective governments to resolve the conflict at the peak moments. Finally, I examine whether or not letter writers’ representations of the conflict were significant in directing conflict response policies of the countries under consideration.

This study is organized along three phases of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The first phase is identified as major military incidents. The second phase is concerned with refugees’ flows and the third one is related to security arrangements. These three phases are the peak moments of the conflict. In this section, they serve as the frame of reference for measurement of the national authorities’ responses to the letter writers’ accounts about the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

The main time period of interest lays between the first mass protests demanding the transfer of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region from Azerbaijan to Armenia in February 1988 and the renewal of hostilities over Nagorno-Karabakh in April 2016. This period encompasses the Sumgait anti-Armenian pogroms of 1988 (De Waal, 2005); a series of expulsions of Azerbaijanis from Armenia (Shafiyev, 2007) and of Armenians from Azerbaijan; the anti-Armenian pogroms in Baku in 1990 (De Waal, 2014) and a number of military operations launched in 1991 (Zurcher, 2007).41

In connection with the above-mentioned events, the two governments have taken some steps to respond to the challenges. When mass rallies on the Karabakh issue in the disputed oblast spread to the Armenian capital of Yerevan and later to the Azerbaijani capital of Baku, Azerbaijani officials tried to calm the local population (Kaufman, 2015). Nevertheless, Azerbaijani authorities showed inaction when the rallies escalated into pogroms against Armenians. This led some (Kaufman, 2015; Laitin & Suny, 1999) to conclude that the pogroms were facilitated by Azerbaijani government officials. Armenia’s leaders’ reaction to the pogroms was limited to the suspension of rallies, which failed to prevent the conflict from escalating (Kaufman, 2015). The same was true for the refugee problem created by the conflict: in both republics, officials have been unsuccessful in preventing it (Yamskov, 1991). The passivity of Azerbaijani and Armenian authorities forced Gorbachev to introduce a change in the local leadership (Cheterian, 2008). However, the new leaders were unable to avert further deterioration of the situation (Kaufman, 2015).

41 See Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of these events. Section 3.2 explains the criterion by which some periods and incidents have been covered and others not.
In 1990, in Baku the 1988 scenario reiterated: Armenians fell victims to the pogroms. Azerbaijani officials once again were accused of inaction regarding the attacks on Armenians (De Waal, 2014; Kaufman, 2015). As order broke down in Baku, Moscow declared a state of emergency in Karabakh. Azerbaijani security forces were deployed there in order to “stop [...] the low-intensity war between Azeri and Armenian militias” (Zurcher, 2007, p.168). Instead, they terrorized the local Armenian population into fleeing (De Waal, 2014; Zurcher, 2007). The Armenian response to the violence was to wage a guerrilla war (Kaufman, 2015) by unofficial armed groups against Azerbaijanis.

In an effort to stop the guerrilla, in April 1991 Azerbaijani security forces launched the campaign ‘Operation Ring’ aimed at deporting the Armenian population of Karabakh and other areas of Azerbaijan (Kaufman, 2015). The operation failed to achieve its objectives: after intense fighting, the Armenians managed to recapture the region (Zurcher, 2007). According to De Waal (2014), this campaign marked the beginning of the armed phase of the Karabakh conflict.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in August 1991 gave the conflict an international status, which attracted foreign mediators and engaged them in peace talks over Nagorno-Karabakh. The 1991 discussions in Zheleznovodsk, Russia, resulted in the signing of a declaration that set out a framework for a peace agreement (De Waal, 2014), but the fighting started again shortly after the signing (Kaufman, 2015). It was only in 1994 when a ceasefire was declared. This ceasefire brought stability to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone for nearly two decades (International Crisis Group, 2017a).

In April 2016 a new wave of escalation took place along the Line of Contact. Although a ceasefire was quickly declared, the countries’ rulers were unable to reach any agreement. Armenia’s leader Sarkisian stated that Armenia was not considering the return of Karabakh to Baku’s control. The Azerbaijani president Aliev made it clear that “Azerbaijan never would allow an Armenian state on Azerbaijani territory” (International Crisis Group, 2017a, p. 23).

Now that the major developments of the Karabakh conflict and the governments’ responses to these events have been covered42, it is appropriate to contrast the responses with the aspirations of Bakinskiy rabochiy and Kommunist/Golos Armenii letter writers towards a solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The ideas propagated by letter writers within a diplomacy framework suggest that the writers of both newspapers were seeking a peaceful settlement to the conflict through an inclusive process, where the interests of all parties would be taken into account. They believed that they had a good prospect of solving the conflict through legal means. Letter writers fully understood that dealing with the conflict

42 I refer only to those developments, which had taken place in the time period under consideration.
through other means would mean the deterioration of the situation that was already fragile. As to the governments’ responses to the conflict, the examination thereof indicates that letter writers’ suggestions for social and political action have been neglected. The Armenian and Azerbaijani governments’ attempts to calm the crowds and stop demonstrations cannot be considered as measures aimed at addressing the sources of the discord and engaging in cooperative relations. However, it would be wrong to say that the states had seen no benefit in public opinion in general and in the letter writers’ interpretations and views on conflict resolution in particular. Rather, the problem was the passivity of Azerbaijani and Armenian authorities, as addressed by Kaufman (2015) and Laitin & Suny (1999). The governments’ despondency and confusion caused by the first wave of ethnic clashes in Armenia and Azerbaijan rendered them unable to evaluate carefully the situation on the ground and to reckon with the public opinion.

As far as a militarism framework is concerned, the governments’ approach to the public suggestions for coordinated action and policy proposals indicates a reversal. Letter writers’ calls on the governments to bring about justice (Bakinskiy rabochiy, #171 and #60), to defend the Motherland, to liberate the occupied territories (Bakinskiy rabochiy, #60), to continue the war (Golos Armenii, #NA) and to bring the international community’s recognition of the harm done by the opposing party (Golos Armenii, #16 and #NA; Bakinskiy rabochiy, #169 and #177) were reflecting the public moods of the time and demanding official attention. The reaction of the Azerbaijani government to popular demands was to take a tough stance. First, the Azerbaijani officials condoned violence against the Armenian population during the Baku pogroms in January 1990 (Kaufman, 2015; Laitin & Suny, 1999). Then, the government decided to use repressions of Armenians living in Karabakh and other areas of Azerbaijan in order to expel them from the country. Subsequent intermittent peace efforts deployed by the Azerbaijani government stemmed not from an Azerbaijan’s willingness to make concessions and resolve the conflict by peaceful means, but rather from the need to dodge pressure from the international community. The fact that Azerbaijan is continuously working to advance its military training and equipment (International Crisis Group, 2017a) supports this view. The Armenian leadership’s response to the popular incitements to military action was to fulfil these demands. In 1990, the authorities tolerated and subsequently concealed atrocities committed by Armenia’s illegal armed paramilitaries in Karabakh and Azerbaijani villages populated by Armenians (De Waal, 2014; Kaufman, 2015). In 1991, when the Karabakh Armenians attempted to reach a compromise with the Azerbaijani authorities on the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, the head of the delegation was shot as a collaborator by his fellow Armenians (De Waal, 2014). The route to compromise was closed at that

43 Some (Laitin & Sunny, 1999; Imranli-Lowe, 2015) have argued that the West has a prejudice against Azerbaijan and its role in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh while Armenians enjoy a favorable image and support.
point and Armenian occupation of parts of Azerbaijan continued. In the wake of the April 2016 escalation, the forces of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia began fortifying their defenses on the Armenian-controlled side of the Line of Contact (Grono, 2017). The peace talks that took place in May and June of the same year were more a formality than anything else. As has been previously stated, the Armenian authorities were refusing to compromise on the status of Nagorno-Karabakh (International Crisis Group, 2017a). Therefore, it is conceivable that the Armenian officials engaged in negotiations to safeguard the balance of power between warring sides rather than retreat peacefully.

In this sub-section I was interested in the relationship between letter writers’ accounts of the Karabakh conflict and the political agendas and policy-making in Azerbaijan and Armenia. It is difficult to tell exactly what the relationship between them is. On the one hand, the aspirations of letter writers to achieve a resolution of the conflict by peaceful means within a diplomacy framework did not receive governments’ responses. Even as both governments seemed to be seeking a way out of war, they denied suggestions coming from letter writers, choosing instead to refrain from decisive action. On the other hand, solutions to the conflict articulated by letters writers within a militarism framework apparently fed the agendas of those in power. The data show that the actions taken by the respective governments did not go beyond the letter writers’ calls not to make concessions in negotiations over Nagorno-Karabakh.

The next section combines the findings of this sub-section with the previous results in order to answer the main question of this research.

5.5. Interpretation of results: the main research question

The overall aim of this study is to examine how participatory journalism in the form of letters to the editor impacts conflict resolution efforts. In order to explore its potential, a set of four sub-questions has been formulated. I first investigated the factors shaping citizen participation in media operations such as journalistic conventions and the context in which public participation through the media occurs. Further, I was interested in the identities of the persons who were driving the discourse on the conflict. Third, I examined the methods and discursive resources being used in the readers’ letters for the discussion of the conflict, with a special focus on how they emerged and developed over time. In sub-question four, I was interested in analyzing the relevance of participatory journalism for decisions made by the governments with reference to conflict resolution. With the findings of four research sub-questions in mind, I now turn to the discussion centered on the question of how the readership of the Azerbaijani Bakinskiy rabochiy and the Armenian Kommunist/Golos Armenii perceived the causes of conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and how this has impacted conflict resolution efforts.
The sub-section on Reasoning devices dealt with the question of how letter writers of the concerned newspapers explained the causes of the unfolding events in and around Karabakh in detail. The study revealed that as the conflict was unfolding, the letter writers’ causal explanations gradually changed. When the conflict started, letter writers tended to attribute causality to institutional processes. There was a prevailing agreement among the Azerbaijani and Armenian letter writers that unresolved problems inherited from the past, such as nationality policies and minority rights, were the most fundamental causes underlying the conflict. However, there was a difference between how they understood these problems. For Kommunist letter writers ‘unresolved problems’ implied historical injustices committed against Armenians, while for the Bakinskiy rabochiy writers it was a matter of a revision of the Soviet nationality policy which would eliminate the existing contradictions and prevent the disintegration of Azerbaijan. Two years later and onwards, the Kommunist/Golos Armenii letter writers started to place the blame for inciting the Karabakh conflict on structural conditions such as “property loss”, “coercion”, “persecution” and “discrimination” (#13). For the Bakinskiy rabochiy letter writers group behavior became the root cause of the conflict. In their view, the Armenian “gunmen-bandits” (#177), “extremists” and “separatists” forced Azerbaijanis to engage into the conflict (#171). By the end of the period (June 2016), both letter writers were refusing to address the underlying causes of the conflict. Instead, they became more concerned with a solution to it.

How did the letter writers’ framing of the Karabakh conflict causes condition the relevant governments to think about solutions? Although it is impossible to give a firm answer to this question without access to documentary evidence (including interviews with the local authorities on the matter at stake), some careful presumptions might be made. First, the theoretical knowledge and empirical research in the field of public participation studies focused on the decision-making process through the media addressed in this study suggest that public opinion may be in a position to influence governments. Second, the findings reported in the preceding section, which dealt with the fourth research sub-question, have shown that letter writers’ views of the Karabakh conflict causes could potentially direct conflict response policies. To see this argument in action, consider the following example. The April 2016 escalation provoked heavy casualties on the Armenian side and led to the loss of some Armenian-held territory (International Crisis Group, 2017a). As a result, the Armenian people became doubtful of their leadership’s ability to protect the territory and population of Nagorno-Karabakh. A confirmation thereof can be found in official reports such as that of International Crisis Group (2017a) and in the letters to the editor. For example, a letter dated May 18, 2016 (#NA),

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44 This conclusion is premised on the fact that Kommunist letter writers used to make frequent references to justice in their letters to the editor (#48, #49, and #50).
45 For more examples, see Section 5.4.
describes Armenian sentiments amid the escalation as “anger [that] takes a toll on you”, “grievance arising from injustice”, “hate”, “fear” and “despair”. The same letter points to the leadership’s failure to “supply the army on the frontline with the necessary shells at a crucial moment” and accuses the authorities of not caring for the soldiers. Such statements calculated to produce a pressure on the authorities and encourage them to action proved to be of a great power. The Armenian government familiar with its citizens’ capacity to achieve desired outcomes and fearful of losing control and authority, sought to appease public sentiments. Armenian officials adopted a hardline position against the compromise-oriented approach to the conflict settlement: Armenia’s leader Sarkisian stated he would never allow Nagorno-Karabakh to revert to Baku’s control (International Crisis Group, 2017a).

Why do I argue that the letter writers’ views of the Karabakh conflict causes had a power over the respective governments’ decisions concerning possible avenues toward the conflict resolution? One reason concerns the special status both newspapers acquired within their countries. This status suggests that the specific newspapers served as a frame of reference for the respective governments to form opinions about public moods. For example, at the peak moments of the conflict the newspapers used to publish the readers’ accounts on the unfolding events. First-person eyewitness reports are a valuable source of information to measure the degree of public acceptance of steps taken by the governments with reference to the conflict resolution. An example illustrating this argument is the Bakinskiy rabochiy publication of 16 letters on April 6, 2016, in which letter writers expressed unanimous approval of the decision by Azerbaijan’s government to regain control of at least some territory through military means. These letters appeared in the official newspaper of the administration of the President of the Azerbaijan republic right after the April escalation. This fact suggests that the government that took its citizens to war was seeking the mandate of their support as it was running the risk of losing political legitimacy. Second, there are reasons for supposing that Armenia’s and Azerbaijan’s leaderships appreciate citizens articulating their lived experiences, perceptions and aspirations associated with the Karabakh issue via the mainstream media. This form of citizen participation in public affairs, on the one hand, allows the conduct of polemics and dissent in a legitimate form and format. Public debates in media-provided space help the governments to prevent mass protests in the streets, which in the past have often led to ethnic clashes or clashes between the demonstrators and the police/army unites. On the other hand, public participation in political narrative creates a sense of democracy and dialogue and allows the leaderships to share the responsibility for security incidents or lack of progress in the negotiations with the public in case of their failure to adapt an adequate conflict response policy. This conclusion is based on earlier studies

46 Here I refer to the success of the Armenian mass-led mobilization for transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia.
47 For further details on the newspapers’ status, see Section 3.2.
(International Crisis Group, 2017a; Geukjian, 2016; De Waal, 2014) that recognize the significance and role of public opinion in forming policy towards the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the key explanations and findings of this study building upon the answer to the main research question. Then, I will consider whether they fit the literature and previous research. Next, I will discuss limitations and, finally, outline some implications of this study for future research on participatory journalism and its role for conflict response policy-making.
6. Discussion

The starting point of this study was to explore how participatory journalism in the form of letters to the editor impacts conflict resolution efforts. Beyond this theoretical rationale, there was also a practical reason for doing this study. I wanted to build an awareness among the public on the fact that participation of popular masses in media operations can be used not only for constructive and peaceful purposes, but also to strengthen conflict through hatred and intolerance. By way of illustration, I used the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. I investigated how the conflict was discussed in the letters submitted to two Russian-language newspapers, the Azerbaijani Bakinskiy rabochiy and the Armenian Kommunist/Golos Armenii, in the period from 1988 to 2016. The letters published during ‘hot’ phases of the conflict became the focus of my investigation.

A framing analysis of the content of the collected data enabled two dominant frames: the frame of diplomacy and the frame of militarism. The frames have been studied in a comparative fashion in order to identify cross-country and intertemporal differences and similarities between the ideas propagated by the Azerbaijani and Armenian letter writers. The study revealed that both letter writers approached the conflict in a similar vein. Within a diplomacy framework, the overall message transmitted was to resort to legal measures for settlement of the dispute in order to avert the escalation of tensions and a further deterioration of the situation. For the letters framing the Karabakh dispute from a militarism perspective the primary focus was on a military solution to the conflict. The letter writers of both newspapers viewed negotiations as a zero-sum game and encouraged their respective governments not to make any concessions in negotiations over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Despite the consistencies noted, there were nevertheless differences between how the Azerbaijani and Armenian letter writers approached the conflict within the two frames. Thus, while at the heart of the frame of diplomacy in both cases was the idea that the dispute over the contested region was a result of contradictory Soviet nationality policies, within this frame Kommunist letter writers tended to emphasize historical injustices committed against Armenians, whereas for the Bakinskiy rabochiy writers it was a matter of the revision of the Soviet nationality policy which would eliminate the existing contradictions and prevent the disintegration of Azerbaijan. There were also differences found in the way the Azerbaijani and Armenian letter writers approached the causes of the conflict within the militarism frame. The fear of group extinction was the most fundamental cause underlying the conflict, according to the Golos Armenii letter writers who were drawing routinely to the theme of Armenian genocide. For the Azerbaijani writers, the hostility of the other side was seen as the root cause of the conflict.
With reference to framing effects of the letter writers’ interpretations of the conflict and its causes, the study provided indirect evidence that they may shape opinions of the governments on a solution to the conflict. The success of the letter writers’ framing in feeding the agendas of those in power is driven by a number of factors. One of them is internal to participatory journalism and two are external. The Internal factor concerns the letter writers’ ability to speak a shared language with authorities, which means that the letter writers’ frames around the conflict must resonate with their intended audience. The letter writers’ accounts of the unfolding events might be truthful, factual and authentic, but unless they are compelling and comforting for the authorities, they will not be effective in influencing policy-making processes. This finding is strikingly similar to that reported by Kaufman (2015), who found that emotional appeals to ethnic themes ensure the responsiveness of the audience to which they are addressed. The external factors include the particularities of the social-political context and the failure of the government’s solution to the conflict. With reference to the former factor, the study has shown that in times of instability mainstream media organizations tend to adopt new patterns of managing readers-generated content. They start to minimize their constrains on participatory journalism and become more open for alternative perspectives on the unfolding events. These findings give little support to the visions of mainstream media roles in crisis situations introduced in the literature and discussed at the start of this study. From the perspective of Gilboa et al. (2016) and Cottle (2006), the mainstream media in conflict-prone settings release information favorable for political actors. My findings rather suggest that in a situation of conflict the newspapers instead increased their interactions with the audience. With regard to the latter factor, it implies that if the implementation of the government’s solution to the conflict fails, then the chance for the solutions offered by the public to becomes meaningful for the outcome of the conflict increases. This finding runs somewhat counter to a widely shared view that in non-democratic countries participatory journalism is not capable of influencing policy-making processes. This study allows me to offer a tentative suggestion that when the government-proposed solutions fail, the public recommendations for coordinated action or policy proposals acquire weight in the eyes of the country’s leadership as those are starting to fear the loss of public confidence and the subsequent rebellion.

Some substantive reservations regarding the findings of my study need to be taken into account. First of all, my findings are not supported by clear empirical evidence. As pointed out in the introduction and elsewhere in this thesis, this research is based on the letters to the editor published in two news outlets: the Azerbaijani Bakinskiy rabochiy and the Armenian Kommunist/Golos Armenii. I have been unable to interview the Azerbaijani and Armenian governmental representatives for whom the letters were intended. The lack of empirical evidence forced me to draw my conclusions regarding the rationale for the choices of the authorities based on historical records and relevant writings about
mainstream newspapers. Another limitation is given by the fact that the letters were analyzed without considerable alignment with other newspapers’ articles. The study of written submissions from newspaper readers conceived in isolation from a study of other news stories does not allow to capture the potentially crucial role of the effects the latter have for the former. Both kinds of media content may be closely interwoven. A parallel study of readers’ input and newsroom-generated material might be rewarding, as it could provide an opportunity to identify similarities in the discourses on the conflict and its solution. A third limitation has to do with the research method used to study the letter writers’ framing of the Karabakh conflict. The analysis of frames was guided by the principles of a qualitative method, which was not followed by a quantitative method. The chosen method entailed a certain degree of subjectivity in the way the letters’ content was interpreted. The use of a quantitative method could remove some of this subjectivity. There is also a limitation in data collection. As mentioned in section on Data gathering, the National Library of Russia in Saint-Petersburg, where the sample was collected, did not have full coverage for the concerned period. For this reason, only four out of nineteen sampled years, identified as the most decisive years for the Karabakh conflict development, have been covered in this study. A small sample of letters to the editor probably left out some interpretative patterns for the representation of the Karabakh conflict. However, I believe that my sample is unique in its own way and adequate for a historical and comparative study.

For all its flaws, this study can claim some notable achievements. First, it is a step forward toward improving further scholarship on participatory journalism within mainstream media and its role in influencing political choices in conflict-prone settings. While previous studies contributed to our knowledge of public participation in the creation of media content and its role for policymaking in times of war, the role of participatory journalism within mainstream media until now was a blind spot for the researchers concerned with media-conflict interactions. Moreover, most research in this area examined the use of participatory communication in Western democracies and tended to ignore its use in a different context. This study extended the geographical boundaries of participatory journalism research beyond established Western democracies and examined the role of traditional media in supporting public engagement in dialog with powerholders in a non-western context. Further research could examine the role of participatory journalism within mainstream media for the political decision-making in other geographical and political settings. Along with this study, this will pave the way for a more comprehensive understanding of the potential participatory journalism has for changing the dynamics of conflict. Further research could also extend this study by addressing in-depth framing effects of participatory journalism for policy-making processes in war-torn settings. Finally, future

48 Gorbachev’s “Appeal to the workers of Armenia and Azerbaijan” published in Bakinskiy rabotschiy and Kommunist on 26 February, 1988, constitutes an exception.
studies on framing implications of participatory journalism for political agendas are invited to apply combinations of research methods, instead of one single method as in the case of this study, to assure that the results are more reliable.
7. Bibliography


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8. Appendices

Appendix I

Professional status of letter writers in 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1990</th>
<th>LETTER WRITERS AZERBAIJAN</th>
<th>LETTER WRITERS ARMENIA</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Russian woman, resident of Azerbaijan</td>
<td>Armenian refugee from Azerbaijan, fruit sorter (female)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher (male)</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Professional status of letter writers in 1991

<table>
<thead>
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<th>LETTER WRITERS ARMENIA</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Azerbaijani man</td>
<td>Anonymous author (female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bus depot labour collective</td>
<td>Doctor-1 (female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Doctor of Engineering Science, professor (male)</td>
<td>Male, occupation is unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Resident of Azerbaijan (not Azerbaijani, male)</td>
<td>Russian retiree, resident of Armenia (female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Residents of Azerbaijan, the Russian couple</td>
<td>Grigory Dolukhanov, journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Retiree (female)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Retiree (male)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Doctors from Georgia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Lieutenant Colonel (male)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Resident of Minsk, Belarus (Azerbaijani, male)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Dilber Axundzade, journalist (two articles)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Izabella Orujova, journalist</td>
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Professional status of letter writers in 2016

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Resident of Antalya, Turkey (Turk, male)</td>
<td>Armenian woman, resident of France</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Resident of Baghdad, Iraq (Turkmen, male)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Resident of Baku (female)</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>Resident of Mersin, Turkey (Turk, male)</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Resident of Moscow (Azerbaijani, male)</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Resident of Nakhchivan (male)</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Resident of Nizhny Novgorod, Russia (Azerbaijani, male)</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Resident of Shabran (male)</td>
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<td>Resident of Trabzon, Turkey (Turk, male)</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Resident of Vilnius, Lithuania (Azerbaijani, male)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Resident of Zhlobin, Belarus (Azerbaijani, male)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix II

Key events constituting the sampling period of the study

1988
25 JANUARY Azerbaijanis flee Kafan.
27–29 FEBRUARY Anti-Armenian pogroms in Sumgait.
18–20 SEPTEMBER Armenians driven out of Shusha, Azerbaijanis out of Stepanakert.
NOVEMBER Mass expulsions of Azerbaijanis from Armenia.

1990
13–15 JANUARY Anti-Armenian pogroms in Baku.
19–20 JANUARY Soviet troops enter Baku, killing protestors.

1991
30 APRIL Troops and Azerbaijani OMON attack Armenian village of Getashen (Chaikend), begin to deport villagers. Beginning of Operation Ring.
4 JULY Operation begins against Armenian villages in Shaumian region.
SEPTEMBER Armenians recapture Shaumian region.
23 SEPTEMBER Russian-Kazakhstani peace plan signed in Zheleznovodsk.
20 NOVEMBER Helicopter crash over Karabakh kills twenty-two, wrecks peace plan.

1992
26 JANUARY Dozens of Azerbaijani soldiers killed in attack on village of Karintak.
30 JANUARY CSCE admits Armenia and Azerbaijan, takes up mediating role for Nagorno-Karabakh.
25–26 FEBRUARY Hundreds of Azerbaijanis killed after Armenians storm Khojali.
24 MARCH CSCE Minsk Conference for Nagorno-Karabakh proposed, Minsk Group formed.
10 APRIL Dozens of Armenians killed as Azerbaijani storm village of Maragha.
8–9 MAY Armenians capture Shusha.
18 MAY Armenians capture Lachin.
1 JUNE–5 AUGUST Minsk Group negotiations in Rome.
12 JUNE Azerbaijani offensive begins, capturing Shaumian region.
4 JULY Azerbaijanis take Martakert (and rename it Agdere).
1 SEPTEMBER Azerbaijanis take village of Srkhavend, control almost half of Nagorno-Karabakh.
14–15 DECEMBER CSCE meeting in Stockholm.

1993
27 MARCH–5 APRIL Armenians capture Kelbajar Region.
30 APRIL UN Resolution 822 calls on Armenians to withdraw from Kelbajar.
14 JUNE Ter-Petrosian travels to Stepanakert to promote CSCE peace agreement.
27 JUNE Armenians recapture Martakert.
23 JULY Armenians capture Aghdam.
23 AUGUST Armenians capture Fizuli.
25 AUGUST Armenians capture Jebrail.
31 AUGUST Armenians capture Kubatly.
25 SEPTEMBER Aliev and Kocharian meet in secret in Moscow.
24 OCTOBER Armenians capture Horadiz, cutting off Zengelan region.
29 OCTOBER Armenians capture Zengelan.
22 DECEMBER New Azerbaijani offensive.

1994
20–24 JANUARY Azerbaijanis push into Kelbajar Region, Armenians retreat with heavy losses.
12–18 FEBRUARY Armenians counterattack, thousands of Azerbaijanis killed.
APRIL Armenians begin offensive against Terter.
4–5 MAY Talks in Bishkek lead to drawing up of Bishkek Protocol, calling for cease-fire.
12 MAY Cease-fire agreement comes into force.
5–6 DECEMBER OSCE peacekeeping mandate for Karabakh approved.

1996
2–3 DECEMBER Lisbon summit of OSCE.

1997
20–24 SEPTEMBER Minsk Group mediators present a new peace plan in the region.
26 SEPTEMBER Ter-Petrosian argues for compromise on Karabakh at press conference.

1999
25 APRIL Kocharian and Aliev hold first bilateral meeting in Washington.
11 OCTOBER Aliev and Kocharian meet on Nakhichevan-Armenia border.

2001
26 JANUARY Aliev and Kocharian meet in Paris.
4–5 MARCH Aliev and Kocharian again meet in Paris.
3–7 APRIL Peace talks in Key West, Florida.
19 MAY Minsk Group cochairs cross front line into Nagorno-Karabakh.

2004
16 APRIL Foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan begin “Prague process”.
15 SEPTEMBER Presidents Aliev, Kocharian, and Putin meet in Astana, Kazakhstan.

2006
10–11 FEBRUARY Presidents Aliev and Kocharian meet in Rambouillet.
4 JUNE Presidents Aliev and Kocharian meet in Bucharest.

2007
30 NOVEMBER “Madrid Principles” document for Nagorno-Karabakh resolution filed with OSCE.

2008
14 MARCH France, Russia and the USA vote against Azerbaijani-sponsored resolution on Karabakh conflict at United Nations.
2 NOVEMBER Presidents Aliev, Medvedev and Sarkisian sign the Meiendorf declaration, affirming peaceful resolution of the Karabakh conflict.
2009
9 JULY Presidents Medvedev, Obama and Sarkozy issue statement at G8 Summit in L’Aquila, disclosing details of Basic Principles Agreement.
1-2 DECEMBER Nagorno-Karabakh discussed at OSCE Ministerial Council in Athens.

2011
26 MAY Presidents of France, Russia, and U.S. issue joint statement at G8 Summit in Deauville.
24 JUNE Presidents Aliev and Sarkisian fail to agree on Basic Principles document in Kazan.

2016
1-5 APRIL renewed fighting, which claimed at least 200 lives.
16 MAY the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents meet in Vienna to advance a peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
20 JUNE 2016 Presidents Aliev and Sarkisian meet in St.Petersburg.

2017
16 OCTOBER Presidents Aliev and Sarkisian meet in Geneva to recommit both to CSBMs (confidence and security building measures) and substantive talks.

2018
18 JANUARY meeting of Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Krakow to continue the discussions on the ways of implementation of the agreements of the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan, reached at the summits in Vienna, St. Petersburg and Geneva.
Appendix III

Self- and other-presentations articulated in the letters to the editor of Bakinskiy rabochiy in 1988

Figure III-AZ-1A

Figure III-AZ-1B
Self- and other-presentations articulated in the letters to the editor of Bakinskiy rabochiy in 1990

Figure III-AZ-2A
Self- and other-presentations articulated in the letters to the editor of Bakinskiy rabochiy in 1991

Figure III-AZ-3A

Figure III-AZ-3B
Self- and other-presentations articulated in the letters to the editor of Bakinskiy rabochiy in 2016

Figure III-AZ-4A

Figure III-AZ-4B
Self- and other-presentations articulated in the letters to the editor of Kommunist in 1988

Figure III-AR-1A

Figure III-AR-1B
Self- and other-presentations articulated in the letters to the editor of Golos Armenii in 1990

Figure III-AR-2A

Figure III-AR-2B
Self- and other-presentations articulated in the letters to the editor of Golos Armenii in 1991

Figure III-AR-3B

Self- and other-presentations articulated in the letters to the editor of Golos Armenii in 2016

Figure III-AR-4A
9. Executive summary

We live in highly conflictual times. Since World War II more than 100 armed conflicts have broken out in different parts of the world. The humanitarian implications of these conflicts have prompted interest by scholars in different disciplines about the role that various actors play in these conflicts. Research shows that the mass media is one of the players who may be in a position to influence conflict dynamics and conflict responses. The mass media can do this in a variety of ways. One of them is concerned with public participation and engagement in conflict mediation. The media, providing citizens a forum for debates with those in power, expose decision-makers to the views of their audience and require them to respond to public demands.

A significant body of literature on public participation through the media focuses on the use of participatory communication in Western democracies and tends to ignore its use in a different context. It is against this background that this study came to address the role of public participation for conflict resolution through the media in undemocratic and transitional countries. By way of illustration, the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region is used. The study first investigates how the conflict was discussed in the letters submitted to two Russian-language newspapers, the Azerbaijani Bakinskiy rabochiy and the Armenian Kommunist/Golos Armenii, in the period from 1988 to 2016, and then confronts these depictions with the decisions taken by the authorities around the same periods. The aim is to identify whether or not the government decisions were in line with the readership opinions on a solution to the conflict as expressed in the letters. Therefor the research question is: How does the readership of the Azerbaijani Bakinskiy rabochiy and the Armenian Kommunist/Golos Armenii perceive the causes of conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and how does this impact conflict resolution efforts?

In this study a framing analysis is employed. The analysis takes place in two stages. The first stage employs an inductive approach so as to reveal the main themes in the data. During the second stage of the analysis a deductive strategy is used, in order to validate the reliability of the results of the first phase of the analysis. Furthermore, this study pays particular attention to identifying cross-country and intertemporal differences and similarities between the ideas propagated by the Azerbaijani and Armenian letter writers.

Based on the analysis of the material assembled, two dominant frames emerge: the diplomacy and the militarism frames. The overall message transmitted within a diplomacy framework was to resort to legal measures for settlement of the dispute in order to avert the escalation of tensions and a further
deterioration of the situation. Within a militarism framework both the *Golos Armenii* and *Bakinskiy rabochiy* letter writers were promoting military action as the only viable solution to the conflict. In the former case, the aspirations of letter writers did not receive governments’ responses. In the latter case, solutions to the conflict articulated by letters writers apparently fed the agendas of those in power. Therefore, it is difficult to exactly tell what the relationship is between letter writers’ accounts of the Karabakh conflict and the political agendas and policy-making in Azerbaijan and Armenia, respectively. Nevertheless, the study allows me to suggest tentatively that public participation through the media has the potential for shaping opinions of the governments on a solution to the conflict. Thus, in the last chapter, I explain the convenience of public perspectives on possible avenues toward the conflict resolution for policy-making in Azerbaijan and Armenia. I also suggest a number of externally and internally imposed conditions that affect the success of the letter writers’ framing in feeding the agendas of those in power.

These findings have important implications for the relationship between the media and conflict resolution. If the media in conflict-prone settings engage in disseminating both readerships’ messages (of reconciliation and of hostility), then this suggests that the media become accountable for their content in terms of their humanitarian implications. This underlines a need for media and conflict study scholars to readdress the relationship between governments, citizens and the media in war times in order to identify how responsibility for content is to be shared among them. Further, this study points to the need for teaching news literacy to the public. An understanding of news effects is clearly of importance for participatory journalism practitioners if they want to contribute to the resolution of conflict.