

The fate of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict since the large-scale war in 2020 has substantially changed yet not resolved. Despite introducing new peace talks and mediation formats, the conflict still largely remains active with time-to-time escalations, recent one in September 2022, openly being initiated by Azerbaijan^[1]. Before going into the details of the challenges of achieving peace in context of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and feminist envisioning of peace for future, it is important to picture the current geopolitical scene as a part of larger politics that is surrounding this conflict.

After more than 30 years of ongoing conflict being shifted in the favour of Azerbaijan as a result of winning the war in 2020, both domestic and regional scenes have evolved into a new stage of uncertainties followed up with emerging conflicting points around the expected peace agreement. While with this dramatic shift in the geopolitical status quo in the South Caucasus after the war, Armenia faces challenges in coping with the results of the war internally and keeping up with the interests of external players, Azerbaijan manages to sustain its authoritarian and hegemonic consent with the public through the victory narratives in addition to using coercive bargaining as a method to get more advancements in the negotiations. The rise of Turkey as a regional power in the South Caucasus and deployment of the Russian peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Lachin corridor have increased regional rivalry with the recent involvement of Iran in this strife. Moreover, increasing mediation initiatives by the United States and European Union parallel to the Russia's mediation creates juxtaposed ambience that make the conflict resolution process itself look like a new form of rivalry among emerging multipolar world.

However, these larger geopolitics also cannot be framed around avoiding the flatten local realities and understanding that the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict depend on only local agencies and agreements. After failing to achieve this agreement for nearly 30 years and ending up in a violent war in 2020, the new peace talks have emerged with 09 November 2020 trilateral ceasefire agreement. This ambiguous document signed with Russia's intervention has different interpretations by each side that are the source of disagreements during the current negotiations. For instance, disarmament of the Armenian troops in Nagorno-Karabakh, or building transportation roots have been the key confronting points, sustaining conflict and justifying coercive politics^[2]. Issues like not guaranteeing security and rights of Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh and impunity of war crimes also presents that any peace agreement refraining from addressing these essential issues

will result in fragile peace that will not be able to prevent the violent cycle of the conflict. Additionally, neither past grievances nor future reconciliation is on the agenda of the governments when militarism and nationalism seem like the only natural outcome of the post-war realities.

Although post-2020, the conflict scene has changed dramatically and the new formats of peace talks have emerged, one thing is still the same as it was during last 30 years of negotiations: androcentric and elitist negotiation processes that intentionally ignore the needs of women and the wider public. Absence of women's agency from the political discussion is only a part of the problem, when the format and intention of the negotiations are circling around economic and political interests of ruling elite and other superpowers. In other words, patriarchal and capitalist power structures that benefit from the conflict, also instrumentalize negotiations for their favour which establishes never-ending rivalries and confrontation, while public keeps being mere observers of this high political talks. Being heavily militarized states, both Azerbaijan and Armenia still use the power of militarized masculinity not only as a source for hostility and war but also as assertiveness in the negotiations processes. Similarly, such assertiveness is also the source of competition among the hegemonic powers involved in the mediation processes, which reapproved how masculinized hierarchies are source of power-games in international politics. These gendered relations manifest itself through gendered narratives, such as President Aliyev most recently referring to the friendly relations of Armenia and France as "sister countries" to humiliate them^[3].

Now when we look at the current source of challenges for signing the peace agreement and building sustainable peace, it becomes revealing why feminist intervention is essential to address and transform the ongoing conflict. Because feminism as a standpoint addresses the sources of inequalities, violence, and power, targeting gendered politics around the conflict would make war and militarism, and systems that produce them no longer viable. Here women's representation and participation in the peace process is more than being included to already existing patriarchal power-structures, which already proved itself not working, such as popular [UN Security Resolution 1325](#) on women, peace, and security not achieving much globally since its adaptation^[4]. Nevertheless, this is also the time to acknowledge the crisis of liberal peace globally which manifests itself in its inability to challenge the source of violence that keeps conflicts ongoing. Therefore, despite of years of peace-building projects

between Armenia and Azerbaijan being facilitated with participation of civil society, the voices for peace during 2020 war was nearly invisible. This obviously did not bypass the women's organizations and the liberal feminist peacebuilding efforts around Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that not only avoided calling for peace, but largely supported the war efforts in 2020 war^[5].

Considering these multi-layered obstacles to legitimate and lasting peace in context of Karabakh conflict, feminist peacebuilding within and across the conflicted societies has potential to keep the governments accountable and demand sustainable peace without compromising with any authoritarian, militarist, or nationalist politics. The strength of local and transnational feminist peace movements is characterized by their radical solidarity and intervention to existing macho-masculine political processes. Far from the liberal thesis of including women in some hierarchies, it depends on the unity of people, women and queers who are presenting a radical position. Transforming such individual or marginal power into collective power will both transform the peacebuilding process and undermine elitist and insular politics. This position was clearly stated after the September 2022 escalation by one of the feminist groups in Azerbaijan called [Feminist Peace Collective](#), when they called for the radical solidarity for peace^[6]. Of course, there is not much space for peace activism to be seen reasonable when the diplomatic goals are pursued coercively, and nationalist views are widespread among the vast majority. Nevertheless, such marginalized activism can connect to other struggles with addressing the needs of people, and consequently transform the nationalist and hegemonic values of any majority. Therefore, local and transnational peacebuilding must refrain from allying with the reformist efforts of the states that are the source of these violence and insecurities.

Finally, despite of new grievances, confrontations and emotions related to the conflict after two years of 2020 war, there are still possibilities for achieving legitimate peace if the feminist and other radical voices come together to address them and to reframe the political will of their societies. On 12 October 2022, Armenia's Security Council announced that there would be a peace deal including border demarcation between the two countries by the end of this year^[7]. If agreed, it will be an important stage in the process of conflict resolution. However, with historical irredentist, nationalist and militarist discourse getting widespread in the conflict societies, anticipated peace deal probably will not manage to address any major contradictions and disagreements. Therefore, it is now more than ever a chance for the local

feminist anti-war voices to joint their forces together as a part of transnational feminist power to shift these discourses and demand demilitarization, reconciliation and justice.

[1] Armenia claims Azerbaijan conducting false flag attacks [Armenia claims Azerbaijan conducting false flag attacks | Eurasianet](#)

[2] Will Armenia and Azerbaijan reach a peace deal? | [openDemocracy](#)

[3] Azerbaijani leader: 'France is protecting Armenia now, they call each other sisters' | [Report.az](#)

[4] Krause et al. (2018). Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace. *International Interactions*, 44:6, 985-1016. doi:10.1080/03050629.2018.1492386

[5] Women on the "Home fronts" facing war during 44 days Nagorno-Karabakh war ([feministpeacecollective.com](#))

[6] Call for radical solidarity for peace! ([feministpeacecollective.com](#))

[7] Armenian Security Chief Expects Peace Deal with Azerbaijan by Year's End ([hetq.am](#))