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## **A Warfare Metaphor and its Functional Aims in an Actual Armed Conflict – the Forty-Four Day War**

### **Abstract**

The present case study in general and the multimodal analysis of the warfare metaphor in particular tend to focus on the prevalence of metaphor framing related to news schemas documented over the period of the forty-four days of an actual war - the 2020 Nagorno-Karabagh war. Certain questions (Why was the warfare metaphor so widely used in this forty-four day war? How and in what ways did this type of metaphor realize its functional aims?) are addressed in the present case study by analyzing theoretical and empirical data on the subject and by advancing my own account of the functions of the warfare metaphor in war discourse presented in mass-mediated communication. Metaphor framing and its effects usually depend on words (the linguistic or verbal metaphor), however, such effects also depend on multimodal representations of the verbal metaphor, namely on the visual image. I therefore argue that metaphor framing and metaphor effects should be examined and explicitly described within the frames of multimodal analysis which can disclose how the convergence of verbal and the visual metaphor affects rhetorical war situations and increases the audience's reception of the message of the war. Hence, this case study will show that the wartime metaphor, with the application of multimodality, conveys information of the war and impacts public opinion, thus striving to achieve positive outcomes. The results show that metaphor framing and the given type of metaphor is encountered in actual war to draw and capture public attention through emotionally charged multimodal devices aimed at informing and impacting public opinion, thus persuading and motivating the world to take urgent steps to stop the further escalation of the conflict. The usage of such metaphor framing closely connected with the context of war might result in certain outcomes illuminating that the warfare metaphor contributes to the understanding of complexities and abstractions of war discourse at large.

**Keywords:** the forty-four day war, news media, multimodality, warfare metaphor, metaphor framing, recontextualization

## Introduction

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The forty-four day war (from September 27 to November 9, 2020) was an armed conflict in the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabagh and surrounding territories. The parties to the conflict or the combatants included Azerbaijan (supported by Turkey and foreign mercenaries), Armenia and Nagorno-Karabagh. The war was an escalation of an unresolved conflict over this region with Armenian ethnic majority, annexed to Azerbaijan during the Soviet period. According to the Minority Rights Group International (2018), the 1989 census recorded that before the collapse of the Soviet Union the region was populated by 76.9% Armenians, 21.5% Azerbaijanis, and 1.5% other groups, totally 188,685 people. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Armenia and Azerbaijan gained independence, Nagorno-Karabagh declared its secession from Azerbaijan and held a referendum on independence which was confirmed on January 6, 1992 by the newly-elected Nagorno-Karabagh legislature. Soon after, outbreaks of violence which had started long before, turned into the first Nagorno-Karabagh war. By 1994 not only the region but also the surrounding territories belonging to Azerbaijan were under the control of Karabagh Armenian forces. Mediation efforts and negotiations under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe have continued on a regular basis since the first war (1988–1994) and the 1994 ceasefire to the second war (2020), the November 9, 2020 ceasefire, and are still on to date.

After the above brief outline of the conflict, it is worth mentioning that when news media reports documenting thoroughly the horrors and humiliations of the war came to the attention of the shocked public, international voices were raised calling the world leaders to join effort to stop the further escalation of the conflict. The documentation of this twenty-first century dehumanization and ways to stop it found their place in public discourse repeatedly framed by the warfare metaphor. It is the metaphor framing and the warfare metaphor that are superior when the phenomenon of interest is difficult to control and the necessary assumptions are dubious, when help is needed to comprehend the complexities and abstractions of international relations and war (Beyerchen 1992/93), when the war discourse aims at affecting, informing and shaping public understanding of the terrors of war, and it is the examination of this metaphor that will contribute to the promotion of peace discourse and peace journalism (Galtung 2003), holding the world accountable for choice of war and enmity rather than peace. In this great is the role of mass media and its multimodal tools of presenting information. Today, multimodality in mass-mediated communication “involves conceptualising abstract frameworks for language, images, and other resources and their intersemiotic relations (e.g. text and image relations) and then demonstrating these frameworks with some examples” (O’Halloran, Gautam, Minhao 2021: 2). Today, when visibility needing speech for its completion, has become central, the text and image combinations not only make a formal arrangement that is just “well balanced or aesthetically attractive” – but also help to make “images and other visuals meaningful” because “images too can instruct, they can persuade, and more”, because in visual communication “images relate to people” and “do things in the world” (Kress, Van Leeuwen 2020: 19–43). Moreover, multimodal metaphor combinations (including both verbal and visual elements) represent conceptual structures that form “more or less stable and timeless essences” that “accurately map spatial structures and relations” and “set up attributive relations”, visually emphasizing not only symbolic but also conceptual attributes (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2020: 75–112). At this point it should be mentioned that certain conceptual metaphors can be derived from linguistic metaphors, i.e. conceptual mappings can be departed from metaphorical expressions. Considering that “particular metaphors in

language reflect particular metaphors in thought” (Steen 1999: 57) and that any particular concept can have a metaphorical linguistic expression based on the cognitive model A is B (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), we can demonstrate that the linguistic metaphors to be referred to in this paper (for example, *Your Silence is Killing Us* or *Your neutrality is killing us*) can also form respective conceptual models such as *Silence is a killer* or *Neutrality is a killer*.

Finally, as will be seen in this study, integration of the linguistic metaphor with the visual image assigns weight to the meaning and influence of the rendered information. The analyses of text and image in a news posting will show how modern media patterns work and how they can be studied as communication tools incorporating language and other semiotic resources to provide a more productive environment for news reporting.

### ***Wartime Metaphor Framing and its Effect on Receivers***

War discourse usually includes such key elements as call to arms rhetoric, construction of identities and legitimating linguistic devices that make the war-associated actions reasonable and justifiable, i.e. its language as a means of social interaction mediates in the conduct of war and political conflict (often an armed one) (Hodges 2015). In wartime this discourse becomes a regular feature in the world and local media, political debates, national and social interest groups. A set of particular vocabulary which evokes negative emotions and negative response from this or the other party is utilized to narrate war situations, to reflect identity, culture, power, politics and global intrigue. Obviously, the war discourse evokes negative associations, and “there is always a need to demonstrate (and teach) how damaging the war discourse can be and how necessary the permanent production of peaceful counter-voices is” (Carpentier & Kejanlıoğlu 2020: 136). Therefore, war discourse, if used appropriately, may provide a basis for the opposite discourse, i.e. for peace discourse.

Political discourse in general and war discourse in particular are often framed by metaphors. Metaphors fulfill their functions of impacting, persuading and rendering the desired information through framing, and metaphor frames are argued to affect public opinion and how people reason on issues of war and politics (Charteris-Black 2005; Bougher 2012; Boeynaems *et al* 2017). As a device of war discourse, the warfare metaphor is used to frame the most important issues connected with war and can often achieve potential benefits (sometimes not very tangible though). At war, metaphor framing contributes to defining, interpreting, evaluating, addressing the problem, and, what is more important, promoting a possible solution to the problem. Due to expressive style and language (and other multimodal tools), such framing affects people’s choice of the right opinion that may lead to the resolution of the conflict. Hence, through activating emotional connotations, the warfare metaphor informs, evaluates, persuades and finally, positively influencing beliefs and attitudes, affects public opinion in general and the decision-makers’ opinion in particular. This means that metaphorical language and other metaphorical representations in policy debates, including war debates, are used to steer the public toward a certain viewpoint (Ottati, Renstrom & Price 2014) and influence political persuasion to achieve certain outcomes (Boeynaems *et al* 2017; Brugman *et al* 2019).

Why was the warfare metaphor - a traditional literary and rhetorical trope - so widely used in the forty-four day war? How and in what ways did this type of metaphor realize its functional aims? These

questions are addressed in the present case study by analyzing theoretical and empirical data on the subject and by advancing my own account of the functions of the warfare metaphor in war discourse presented in mass-mediated communication.

While overviews of metaphor framing effects have usually focused on metaphor framing through words (the linguistic or verbal metaphor), such effects may immensely depend on multimodal representations of the verbal metaphor, namely on the visual image. We therefore argue that in our case study metaphor framing and metaphor effects should be examined and explicitly described within the frames of multimodal analysis which can disclose how the convergence of the verbal and the visual metaphor affects rhetorical war situations and increases the audience's reception of the message of the war. Hence, this case study will show that the wartime metaphor, with the application of multimodality, conveys information of the war and impacts public opinion, thus striving to achieve positive outcomes.

It is against this backdrop that I intend to analyze a most striking warfare metaphor used in time of the war.

### ***Multimodality and Recontextualization of the Warfare Metaphor "Your Silence is Killing Us"***

It is argued that the metaphoric representations referring to war should be reserved to be used in actual war situations where they fully realize their function of emotionally impacting and informing the public rather than in unreal war situations, political campaigns, emergencies and common public debates. What is considered most troubling in non-military situations is that the usage of the war discourse "to describe anything that isn't war" supports the belief that "creating common enemies is the only way to bring people together to make progress toward a common cause" (Veltcamp 2021: 2). Likewise, Jamie Fahey (2010: 1) states that the martial metaphor should be saved "for the real wars with real victims and real enemies" because in unreal war situations "bombarding readers with the language of the battleground" shows no concern for others' feelings and "can pummel even the most battle-hardened reader into surrendering, owing to acute war-weariness." In this respect, Trudie Richards and Brent King (2000: 481) have also critiqued the practice of metaphorically framing non-military news media communicative data as *battles* or *fight*s. The truth lies in the notion that in actual war situations the warfare metaphor becomes "the defining *schema* or *frame*" (Karlberg and Buell 2002: 25) through which the story is objectively presented, without aiming at still more positioning one side against another. In addition, it reliably expresses "an urgent, negatively valenced emotional tone that captures attention and motivates action" (Flusberg, Matlock & Thibodeau 2018:1) which may result in positive outcomes. In real-life situations other than war, these metaphorical framing becomes "inherently masculine, power-based, paternalistic and violent" (Reisfield and Wilson 2004: 4025), "adding further anxiety and stigmatization by blaming the victims when they are not able to win the battle" (Castro 2021: 1). Thus, however encouraged or criticized the role of the warfare metaphor in public discourse at large, it is uncritically more important and functional in actual war discourse because through impacting and informing the public it may promote a more critical approach to mass violence, specifically calling to action with the aim of interfering and hindering a war in progress, contributing to peace and conflict resolution in the world.

The prevalence of metaphor framing is obvious in news schemas documenting the analysis of the war over the period of forty-four days. The recurrent use and recontextualization of the warfare metaphor during the given period may be actually a proof of its effectiveness as a rhetorical tool deserving further scrutiny.

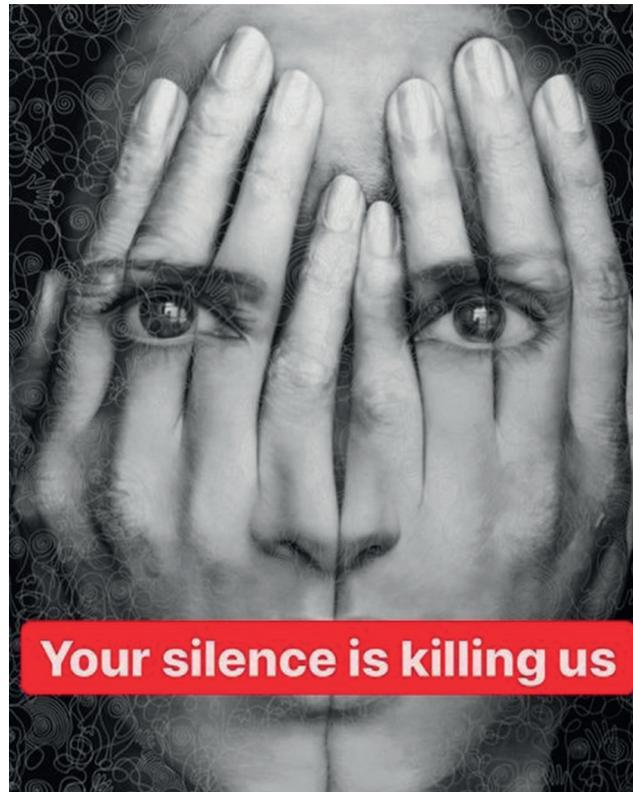


Fig. 1. *Your Silence is Killing Us*. Photo: courtesy of Tigran Tsitoghdzian [at:] <https://www.facebook.com/tigrantsitoghdzian?>

The painting, displayed in the Cube Art Fair in New York, belongs to the American-Armenian artist Tigran Tsitoghdzian. On October 26, 2020, when the war was in full swing, he publicized it on the Facebook. In it (Fig. 1) the artist has used multimodal communication tactics with the focus on the complex nature of verbal and visual modes to frame the message of the war. The verbal part is expressed via the metaphor *Your silence is killing us*, addressed to the world. The image visually symbolizes the world trying to close eyes not to see the horrors of the war, the open eyes, though, suggest that we are already witnessing a real war and should raise voices because our *silence* contributes to the killings. The masterful collection of the two modes (verbal and nonverbal), contributes to how multimodality affects the rhetorical situation and increases the audience's reception of the idea or the concept of stopping the violence (Muradian, 2019). This is the result of a shift from isolated discourse/text being relied on as the primary source of communication, to the image being utilized more frequently in the digital age

(Lutkewitte 2013). In other words, artistic expressions (audio, visual, digital) better convey the message and make a stronger emotional impact on the audience. In further verbal messages, outside the image, the author uses additional metaphor framing to address his call to the world enhancing both the informative and impact functions of the previous message via other, more direct metaphorical representations, particularly *human rights and freedom of speech are crushed to dust; Who cares about it except expressing being deeply concerned; Wake up world, stop aggressor!*

Immediately after the image was publicized, the traditional semiotic resources interacted and combined through information technologies, design and arts to result in new modes of expression. The artistic image went viral in the news media, taking new multimodal forms - it became a slogan which appeared on the social media as a hashtag and a meme; it was used as a profile picture; animated texts and 3D effects were added to it; the first official English language Armenian weekly published in the US since 1932, the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* (2020), *dominated Times Square by a thirty story tall billboard (Fig. 2) along with a live video material displaying the image located in the street.*



Fig. 2. *The Times Square Billboard*. Photo: courtesy of Tigran Tsitoghdzian [at:] <https://www.facebook.com/tigrantsitoghdzian/>

Moreover, the artist himself, in two other images following the first one (publicized on October 28 and October 30, 2020), used semantic shifts and extension of the capacity of the signal word *kill*, recontextualization or recomposition of the original discourse, metaphorical expansion of meaning to achieve a far stronger communicative aim. This is not surprising because “as evolving things, metaphors are open to novelty, surprise, inspiration” (Beyerchen 1992/93:88). This is observed in the two modified forms of the original metaphor *Your silence is killing us*, presented below [in:] Fig. 3 and Fig. 4.

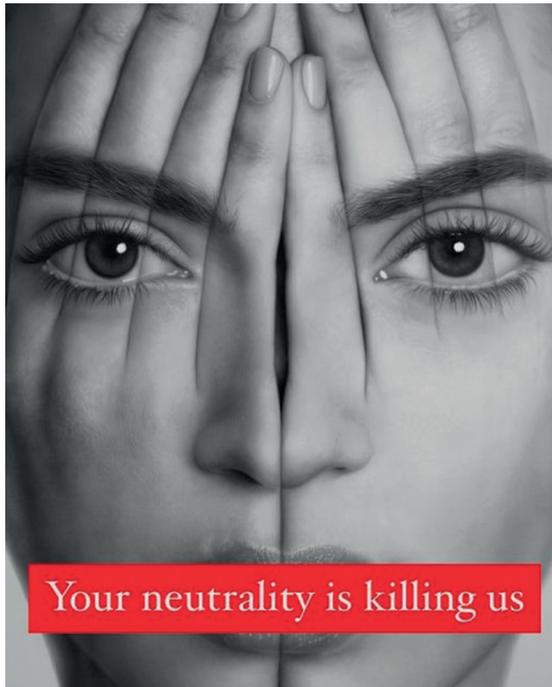


Fig. 3. *Your Neutrality is Killing Us*. Photo: courtesy of Tigran Tsitoghdzian. [at:] <https://www.facebook.com/TigranTsitoghdzian>.



Fig. 4. *Your Ignorance of History is Killing Us*. Photo: courtesy of Tigran Tsitoghdzian [at:] <https://www.facebook.com/TigranTsitoghdzian>.

Bezemer and Kress (2008: 166–195) argue that the receivers understand information differently when the text is delivered in conjunction with a secondary medium, such as image or sound, than when it is presented in alphanumeric format only. In this case the text draws attention due to both the originating site and the site of recontextualization. Recontextualizing an original discourse/text within other mediums creates a different sense of understanding for the audience, and this new type of comprehension can be controlled by the types of media used. In our case, the high frequency signal word *kill* – a semiotic sign typical of war discourse - has been preserved in the two recontextualized metaphor forms of Fig. 3 and Fig. 4. The visual image on the background in all the variants is nearly the same. The contrasting colors (black and red), the structure of the verbal message, the present continuous tense have also been preserved. The subject of the previous action - *silence*, has been modified into *neutrality* and *ignorance of history*. As a result, the emotional charge and the impact on the audience have grown immensely because the new

metaphors (*Your neutrality is killing us; Your ignorance of history is killing us*) are being perceived within the context of the original metaphor (*Your silence is killing us*), and seem to be logically recommencing it. The original metaphor has been recontextualized contributing to the perception of the two new forms as condemning the world and the world leaders for being *ignorant* of the roots of the conflict, for their passive stance in the conflict and a striving of *neutrality*. In other words, after the originating site (the original metaphor *Your silence is killing us*) is perceived and comprehended, the recontextualized site (the recomposed metaphors), can be perceived even when presented in a significantly modified version. Moreover, worked out carefully and used in transformed artistic modes, all the sites have become more expressive and make a stronger emotive impact, thus striving to affect the political context in order to change the conduct of war and contribute to a better comprehension of the message facilitating the public understanding that the situation is extremely grave and hence exceptional measures should be taken. Thus, multimodality and recontextualization via metaphor have evolved to become a sophisticated way to appeal to the discourse audience more effectively, to secure the reception of the war message and contribute to a final policy decision.

### Conclusion

The forty-four day war was marked by deployment of drones, sensors, long-range heavy artillery and missile strikes. State propaganda and official and non-official media accounts, in their turn, played an important part in the information warfare. Azerbaijan's wide use of drones was crucial in determining the outcome of the war. Many countries called on both sides to resume negotiations without delay but there seemed to be a lack of a timely response due to disagreement between the powers. After affliction of hundreds of thousands of human beings and three failed ceasefire attempts, a final ceasefire agreement was signed on November 10, 2020. Under the agreement, the warring sides kept control of the areas held at the time of the ceasefire. A final conflict resolution has not been achieved yet.

The impact, meaning and consequences of metaphor framing and the warfare metaphor are intimately tied to the context in which they are used, resulting in either positive or negative outcomes. In this case study challenging the criticism of warfare metaphor as inherently negative in non-war situations, I emphasize the positive aspect of metaphor framing in actual war. The findings show that such framing is used for purposes of influencing and informing the public, highlighting the impact of war, calling for exceptional measures to stop it. Furthermore, to realize the mentioned functions more effectively, multimodality (juxtaposition of various modes of communication to impact public opinion and convey information effectively) and recontextualization (metaphorical expansion of meaning to achieve a stronger communicative aim) are applied. The use of a warfare metaphor with recontextualized sets, forms the backbone of the argumentative and rhetorical strategies realized by the given metaphor in the course of war. Finally, the recurrent use and recontextualization of the warfare metaphor in actual war is a proof of its effectiveness as a multimodal stylistic device deserving further scrutiny.

At large, war discourse is used to present warfare as inevitable and justifies the one or the other party. In actuality it depends on political decisions, interests of powers and of course, on language of social interaction in the course of war. Therefore, the society will have to try to perceive in war discourse

the certain concealed truths about interested positions to be able to create a global peaceful sociopolitical reality.

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