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Rebuilding the Nation

A Discourse Analysis on the Growing Sentiment of Preferences for Sons in Armenia
post-Second Nagorno Karabakh War

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the language of son bias in Armenia post-Second Nagorno Karabakh War. In the pursuit of this, this study employs the use of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) and situates it in a theoretical framework comprised of Judith Butler's (2004) conception of gender as performance from their book *Undoing Gender*, Sandra Harding's (2004) Standpoint Theory, and Post-Conflict Demography. Following the end of the Second Nagorno Karabakh War, as well as continued skirmishes beyond 2020, previous scholarship has largely covered the legal, sociological, political, and historical perspectives of the conflict's gendered aftermath in Armenia. However, not much attention has been given to the discursive functions of language use across Armenian society that has normalized and disseminated son bias. This study therefore addresses this significant gap within the broader study of post-conflict son preferences in Armenia. Through analyzing the discourse produced by the vantage points of political, religious, media, professional, and ordinary citizens' discourse, this study examines the dominant Armenian narratives of motherhood, soldierhood, and post-conflict national recovery. Additionally, this study also places emphasis on how these dominant, repeated narratives are constructed and maintained in an interconnected nature across all societal levels. Thus, the research here rejects the idea of analyzing discourse from a singular, institutional site of power, and present power and knowledge as diffused across society.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction to the Study

Across generations of Armenian existence, the birth of sons and the greater societal value that they have been attributed to, as opposed to daughters, has long been socially viewed as purely an outcome of “Armenian mentality” (Guilmoto, 2013, p. 28). According to this same line of thought, the value of daughters in Armenian society has been associated with their proximity to motherhood and the role of the submissive wife to the husbands they would eventually be expected to fulfill (Zaslavskaya & Agadjanian, 2022). These two distinct categories of gendered identity and fulfillment have been carried throughout history, and now permeate the current conception of gender relations and attitudes in the modern day Republic of Armenia. In more recent times, these notions of traditional gender roles and the nationwide preferences for sons have been exacerbated by the extreme loss of life over the course of the 2020 Second Nagorno Karabakh War between the previously de-facto Republic of Nagorno Karabakh (otherwise known as Artsakh) and the Republic of Azerbaijan (Mavisakalyan & Minasyan, 2023).

Throughout the course of previous scholarship, son preference and the gendered effects of the Second Nagorno Karabakh War have been extensively examined. However, less attention has been given to the language and discursive practices through which these biases have been produced, maintained, and continuously justified throughout Armenian society. As such, this study has sought to address this gap that appears in the scholarship of son bias in post-war Armenia. The focus of this study is thus less concerned with legal, political, and demographic analyses of the Second Nagorno Karabakh War, and is instead invested in the linguistic analysis of son preferences that have emerged in the post-conflict setting of Armenia.

1.2. Research Objective and Questions

Throughout the course of this study, my main research objective has been to investigate the language of son bias discourse in Armenia since the end of the Second Nagorno Karabakh War. Beyond grammatical and linguistic devices, this thesis explores the in-depth discursive constructs and densely layered context of preferences for sons in post-war Armenia. I have given particular attention to the interconnected processes of power and knowledge as diffused throughout Armenian society in the form of collective experiences, deep-seeded historical practices, and dominant understandings of

gender and demography, rather than placing focus on knowledge as a linear system that directly trickles down from state institutions to ordinary citizens.

For this purpose, I have employed the use of post-structuralist philosopher Michel Foucault's conception of discourse analysis, known as Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA), as based on his inaugural lecture known as *The Order of Discourse* (1970/1981), as well as further support by authors Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2017) and Willig (2008). In support of my analysis, which is based on themes of gender identity, the construction of gender roles, norm-setting, and demography in post-conflict settings, I have situated my methodology in a layered theoretical framework that consists of Judith Butler's (2004) conception of gender as a performance, Sandra Harding's (2004) Standpoint Theory, and the analytical framework of Post-Conflict Demography.

The primary research question I have set out to answer throughout my study is "*how has the Second Nagorno Karabakh War discursively constructed son bias discourse in Armenia?*" This focal question is further supported by my secondary research question of "*what are the discursive conventions that are being used in constructing preferences for sons, traditional gender roles, and solutions for demographic anxieties in post-war Armenia?*"

1.3. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis follows a thematic structure that has been shaped around my central inquiries on the discursive constructions of son bias discourse in post-war Armenian society. Following the Introduction chapter, I expand on the extensive literature I have utilized in the pursuit of understanding the basis of preferences for sons in Armenia, the historical and legal developments surrounding the physical actualizations of son bias, the construction of traditional gender roles, the social effects of the Second Nagorno Karabakh War, and the current state of gendered discourse in Armenia. In the third and fourth chapters, I explore FDA as a discourse-based methodology and the theoretical framework I have set my methodology in, respectively. The fifth chapter outlines my analysis and findings while conducting FDA on my concentrated, but highly varied, selected corpora. Finally, I tie my investigation of son bias language and thorough contextual basis of post-conflict Armenia in my concluding chapter, as well as my fulfillment of my research objective and supporting annexes.

1.4. Positionality

This study discusses the state of post-conflict son bias discourse in Armenia proper, which is often noted to be entirely within the historical geography of Eastern Armenia. As a Western Armenian researcher who has mostly lived within the Armenian community of Lebanon, I have found it essential

to distinguish my standpoint as being outside of the deeper collective knowledge of son bias in the modern day Republic of Armenia. This being said, as I am of Armenian descent and have been living in Armenia for the past few years, I also understand that my own position is influenced by a more widespread sense of collective memory that spans generations of Armenians across the wide network of the Armenian diaspora across the world. This collective memory lays on the foundations of the memory of the Armenian Genocide, as well as the more recent addition of the “frozen conflict” between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno Karabakh, or Artsakh. The vantage point from which I have used to go about my analysis of son bias discourse in this context has thus been influenced by both my “outsider” experiences of being a diasporan Armenian, as well as my direct experience with living in Armenia during both the onset and aftermath of the Second Nagorno Karabakh War, as well as the following blockade of the Lachin Corridor and the eventual exodus of ethnic Armenians from Nagorno Karabakh. Overall, I have found it necessary to declare my positionality as to reflect on my own biases when interpreting the data that is almost entirely rooted in the history and experiences of Eastern Armenians within the Republic of Armenia.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In analyzing son-biased discourse in post-conflict Armenia, laying out the scholarly foundation that has led up to the possibility of such research taking shape has been crucial, especially in the case of the interdisciplinary nature of this study. As discussed in the later chapters of this study, as my research method is based on Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA), which I have set in a layered theoretical framework, this research on son bias discourse is heavily dependent on the historical, social, and political contexts from which the discourse has emerged. Without context, it would be impossible to conduct context-driven FDA.

The following chapter establishes the extensive previous scholarship that has aided my research by providing the bases on the roots of son bias in Armenia, sex-selective abortions, the gendered social roles that exist in Armenian society, and the gendered outcomes of the Second Nagorno Karabakh War.

2.1. Defining the Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB)

Across various academic and scientific fields concerning the demographic makeup of female and male births globally, son bias has long been best understood through the quantitative data of Sex Ratios at Birth (SRB) (UNFPA, 2023). Grech and Mamo (2020) define the SRB as a measurement of every male birth for every 100 female births within a certain population, with the average SRB being 105 male births for every 100 female births. While the vast majority of countries fall within the bracket of the average SRB, a few “outlier” countries, especially within the Southern Caucasus region, have consistently been noted for their highly skewed SRBs that greatly go beyond the 105 average (Grech & Mamo, 2020). According to the UNFPA (2023), when the average sex ratio of 105 male births for 100 female births within a given population increasingly skews to higher male births, typically reaching above 107 male births, then there is a high indication of prevalent prenatal sex selection, where female fetus pregnancies are terminated, or “unnatural” methods of avoiding female births in the hopes of increasing male births. As Hohmann, et al. (2014) states, this demographic signature of analyzing son preference and daughter aversion is the simplest and most effective method of quantitative analysis in studies that lack the necessary statistics of son bias.

Beyond the scope of analyzing the SRB, one of the greatest challenges to collecting statistics, such as survey data, of direct son bias is, as Schief, et al. (2021) notes, a prevalent *social desirability bias* among participants when asked about their own preferences of the sex of their future or current children. In the context of Armenia, recent efforts have been made by various NGOs and the Armenian government to reduce son bias through campaigns and legislation (Schief et al., 2021). This point of the

difficulty in assessing exact statistical data of son bias is further explored by Jilozian and Agadjanian (2016), who state that the large data gap related to son preference and family planning in Armenia is due to underreporting as a result of increased stigma. Thus, research participants, such as those in Armenia, would tend to shy away from direct questions regarding son preference, as any admission of preference would be in opposition to the current social “trend” of son bias reduction. The SRB acts here as the most accurate marker of detecting son bias, though at the group level, within a demographic area.

2.2. A Brief History of Son Preference in Armenia

In his UNFPA report, Guilmoto (2013) traces back extensive present-day gender inequities in Armenia to a culture of patrilineal kinship practices and notes this agrarian system to be at the core of systemic male child preference. Symptoms of such a kinship system have resulted in the lack of women’s incorporation in their birth families, as they are absorbed into the native households of their husbands after marriage, women’s exclusion from family inheritance, and the perception that women are a financial burden on the part of the birth family while being raised (Guilmoto, 2013). Zaslavskaya and Agadjanian (2022) further investigate the structure of Armenian gender inequalities in the process of marriage and the absorption of daughters-in-law into the houses of their husbands, which has been actively facilitated and encouraged by the dominant religious institution of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The authors state that during traditional Armenian marital practices throughout history, the family of the bride was expected to not attend the wedding, as the symbolic representation of the daughter’s marriage into her husband’s home was socially deemed to be a day of sadness and mourning for the bride’s family. From the moment their marriage would be officiated, the new daughter-in-law of a traditional Armenian family was meant to be not only submissive to her husband, as the traditional church’s vows would suggest, but also to the wills of the groom’s parents, signifying a sense of shame within the bride’s biological family (Zaslavskaya & Agadjanian, 2022). These deep-seeded patriarchal practices described by Guilmoto (2013), as well as Zaslavskaya and Agadjanian (2022), place daughters at a clear disadvantage. As such, it would be preferable for the Armenian family to birth at least one son for the purposes of financial benefit and the preservation of continued lineage.

Aside from the data on the roots of traditional Armenian practices that favored male offspring, Guilmoto (2013) notes that son preference would historically manifest through the practice of “stopping rules”. As the author explains, prior to the development of technologies that would determine the sex of a fetus, Armenian families would engage in repeated pregnancies and childbearing in pursuit of a male child (Guilmoto, 2013). No matter how large the composition of the family’s children got, in

the case where only daughters or very few sons were born, Armenian families would continue reproducing until a son, or the desired number of sons, was born. These “stopping rules” are evidenced by historic data on family size composition and the sex of the last child born, as discussed by both Guilmoto, (2013) and Hohmann, et al. (2014), whereby 80% of families would produce more children if their previous child was not a son.

As Armenia transitioned into a period of sovietization, officially becoming a part of the USSR in 1920 as the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, traditional gender roles, “stopping rules”, and the patrilineal kinship system were consistently and systematically challenged, with the Soviet Union introducing several new developments, such as divorce and abortion services, to combat gender inequalities in the region (Guilmoto, 2013). However, as the Soviet Union began to crumble towards the late 1980s, and completely collapse by 1991, the former grip that the USSR once had on social and familial institutions, as well as its gender system, began to fade as well. Moghadam and Goolgasian (2024) highlight that attempts to revitalize or retain gender equality in the 1990s, as it had been set in Armenia under Soviet rule, proved to be incredibly challenging as the country slowly witnessed the rise in conservative discourse and antifeminist rhetoric. Additionally, UNFPA (2023) states that as the Soviet Union collapsed, the absence of social safety nets and unequal inheritance laws prompted Armenian families to revert back to heavily relying on patrilineal kinship practices and moral guidance by the church, whereby sons were once again expected by their society at large to provide financial and economic support for their families.

In their working paper on isolating a culture of son preference in the Caucasus region, Schief, et al. (2023) highlight the stark contrast between the SRB in Armenia and the Caucasus under Soviet rule and post-Soviet Armenia. The researchers conclude that along with the dissolution of the USSR, the collective SRB of the Caucasus rose from a fairly consistent statistic of 106-107 male births in the years between 1960 and 1990 to a sharp increase of 115-116 male births in the year 2000 (Schief, et al., 2023). Narrowing the focus on Armenia during this transitional period, Guilmoto (2013) shows that the SRB in Soviet Armenia remained at a steady range of 106 male births, with the SRB rising up to 113.9 between 1996 and 2000, and even rising to a peak of 119.1 by 2001-2005. The data here illustrates how the waning of Soviet influence on the Caucasus and Armenia led to a significant societal shift to pre-Soviet traditional attitudes on male child preference.

The following two decades after the year 2000 saw a fluctuation of the national SRB in Armenia. The Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia (Armstat) (2025) documents the demographic changes of the SRB per year in Armenia, indicating gradual increases and declines in the

statistic each year, from the SRB being 113 in 2014, then decreasing down to 108 in 2019, and then a noted rise in the SRB of 110 in 2024. The quantitative data here shows immense progress in the reduction of the national SRB in Armenia, with a decrease of about 7.6% from 2005 to 2024, however, the SRB still remains significantly skewed in favor of male children. While some might argue that the increase of the ratio of male births can be factored down to purely biological or migratory reasons, including low fertility rates, Armenia's fluctuating SRB throughout recent history, as well as the SRB of any other country with skewed sex ratios, reveals a reliance on man-made intervention to produce this “unnatural” outcome. As Mavisakalyan and Minasyan (2023) argue, while the “natural” SRB of 105 male children for 100 female children presents itself due to higher female fetus mortality rates compared to male mortality, SRBs above 107 strongly suggest the presence of sex-selective abortion practices, which are one of the greatest indicators of prevalent son preference.

2.3. Sex-Selective Abortions

As Hohmann, et al. (2014) state, sex-selective abortions (SSA) can be defined as the voluntary termination of pregnancy, where the decision to abort the fetus is based on the prenatal determination of the fetus's sex using sex screening technologies. While SSA can favor male or female fetuses by straightforward definition, the practice has mainly been used globally in the prenatal elimination of female fetuses. Since the 1990s, when sex screening and improved abortion methods became more widely available and accessible across the world, SSA has emerged as a significant demographic phenomenon, with countries such as India, the People's Republic of China, and the countries of the Southern Caucasus, including Armenia, showing high levels of SSA (Hohmann, et al., 2014). It is around this time period when the practice of SSA drew worldwide attention where Guilmoto (2013) states that the term *missing women*, or missing girls, was popularized by economist Amartya Sen in 1990 to refer to the extreme SRB favoring male children in several countries across the globe. Circling back to the UNFPA (2023) fact sheet, the aforementioned demographic marker of the SRB is most often used to measure the prominence of prenatal sex-selective practices, as any deviation beyond around 107 male births for 100 female births indicates a high probability of widespread SSA within a population.

Focusing on the current SRB of Armenia, the most recent demographic evidence published by the Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia (Armstat) indicates an estimate of 110 male births for 100 female births in 2024 (Armstat, 2025). Despite the highly skewed nature of this statistic as compared to the average SRB of 105 male births, as aforementioned, Jilozian and Agadjanian (2016) note that not only is son preference over daughters considered to be underreported, but also the

prevalence of SSA within Armenia. As also previously mentioned, Shief, et al. (2021) attribute this commonality of underreporting son bias and SSA in Armenia to *social desirability bias*, which has been seen to take stronger hold in the outcomes of data on sex-selection in recent years due to stronger societal and legal strides towards eradicating prenatal sex selection. This phenomenon of underreported SSA and prevalence of son bias is also evidenced by the data on *missing women*, as Guilmoto (2013) estimates that from 1996-2013, there have been around 39,000 “missing” female births due to SSA in Armenia alone, and that this number is projected to reach about 93,000 by 2060 if this trend is to continue. Jilozian and Agadjanian (2016) further state that due to extensive laws banning SSA in Armenia, the high prevalence of *missing women* and the skewed SRB suggest that sex-selective practices are often performed illegally, whether at home or even in health facilities.

Similar to several post-Soviet states, induced abortion techniques have been widely used in Armenia as prominent methods of family planning for decades. According to Jilozian and Agadjanian (2016), as Armenia was a republic under the Soviet Union, abortion methods had been widely legalized across Armenia and the union as whole in 1920, introducing innovative safe methods of family planning throughout the nation. However, this period was soon halted by a sweeping ban on abortions in 1936, but was then legalized again in 1955, leading to induced abortions remaining as a legal means of pregnancy termination to this day in post-Soviet Armenia (Jilozian & Agadjanian, 2016). Despite the initial goal of introducing induced abortions being the ability to access legal and safe methods of pregnancy prevention, which also aided in the Soviet Union’s overall aim of achieving gender equality, abortion methods and sex-screening technologies had begun to be used for a different purpose in Armenia after the collapse of the USSR. Namely, according to the central claim that Hohmann, et al. (2014) make, the practice of SSA anywhere, including Armenia, cannot be made possible without the accepted use of both induced abortion and sex-determination methods. In the case of Armenia, the demand for sons, as guided by traditional son bias, has been viewed to be met by the supply of abortion and sex-screening abilities, which had been left with little to no legal restrictions for several years following Armenia’s independence from the USSR (Hohmann, et al., 2014).

In response to the persistently skewed SRB and the issue of the widespread abuse of these technologies for the purposes of aborting female fetuses, Armenia has introduced a series of legal measures targeting son-biased sex selection and SSA in general. Most notably, in the 49th session of the United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) (2024) states that in 2016, the Armenian government amended the Law of the Republic of Armenia “On Human Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights”. The law declares that every woman has

the right to an abortion up to 12 weeks of pregnancy, unless in the case of medical issues whereby an abortion is necessary in the presence of a specialist, and includes restrictions on abortions solely performed on the basis of sex (ECLJ, 2024). These domestic laws emerged and were adopted in the broader context of Armenia's prior commitments to gender equality, as, according to Zaslavskaya and Agadjanian (2022), the country had ratified and adopted international treaties, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1993). Additionally, according to the UNFPA's 2022 report on Gender-Biased Sex Selection (GBSS) in Armenia, to prevent future cases of SSA, the Armenian government implemented the 2020-2023 Action plan on Prevention of Gender-biased Sex Selection (N42-A/1 and N962-A). This action plan addressed three main avenues of GBSS prevention in the country, which roughly consisted of evidence-based policy-making, capacity building, and public awareness (UNFPA, 2022).

However, despite the Armenian government's legislative interventions to reduce the prominence of SSA, demographic evidence, most notably through SRB data from the last ten years since the adoption of the 2016 law, suggests that son biased sex selection continues to persist, though with few improvements. According to the UNFPA (2023), while Armenia's SRB remained fairly stable from the years of 2017 to 2020, signaling "lows" of around 110 male births for 100 female births, the following years saw stark shifts once again, with a sharp increase from 108 in 2021 to 112 in 2022. This recent data suggests that although the Armenian government's legal reforms may have contributed to an overall decrease in the national SRB over time, sex-selective practices, often in violation of the law, remain a significant discriminatory issue. Furthermore, circling back to Jilozian and Agadjanian (2016), as sex detection is typically carried out after the 12th week of pregnancy, and legal and social shifts have seen to lean against sex-selective practices, many current cases of SSA are unlikely to be registered and thus absent from the official data on abortions in Armenia.

2.4. Woman-Mother and the Soldier

In the pursuit of engaging in nationwide gendered discourse, which seeks to disseminate the idea that women should birth more male children, a society constructs layered social roles for its accepted conceptions of gender. As with any society, Armenia is home to several social roles, albeit, in the form of specific standards and expectations entrenched in traditional ideas of Armenian womanhood and militarized masculinities. According to Stryker and Burke (2000) in their synthesis of Identity Theory, these social roles emerge, and are maintained, as a product of repeated social interactions, societally constructed expectations, and role performance. Identities, such as "mother", "soldier", or "protector", become socially salient through a series of continuous reinforcement within

institutions and nationwide discourse (Stryker & Burke, 2000). As Zaslavskaya and Agadjanian (2022) argue, in Armenia, the process of gender socialization, where gender attitudes and roles form, present a unique case of rapid ideological and social transformations which have greatly influenced the modern perception of Armenian women and men today. Contextualizing Stryker and Burke's Identity Theory (2000) within Armenia, at the most simplified level of the dominating gender roles in son bias discourse, we are presented with the social role of *woman-mother*, as described by Aslanyan (2007), as being the expected role for women, and the construction of the *soldier* as the ideal social and professional role for men. This dynamic of *woman-mother* and *soldier* has become particularly relevant in Armenia following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, as identity expectations and role performance may intensify in response to present conflict and post-conflict recovery.

2.4.1. *Woman-Mother*

As Armenia is a nation that has witnessed immense political and social transitions over the course of centuries, the social roles formed in the shifting construction of overall Armenian identity, in the context of gender and nationhood, have gone through their own unique transformations. As Aslanyan (2007) highlights, over the course of centuries in pre-Soviet Armenia, the socially constructed ideal role for women had been that of what she identifies to be the *woman-mother* social role. Under this role, Armenian women's role performance had long been limited to childbirth and childrearing, being involved in women's groups which supported the church through charity, and aiding orphans and the elderly within their communities (Aslanyan, 2007). However, the establishment of the Soviet Union and its incorporation of Armenia in 1920 resulted in a stark, gradual transition of Armenian women's social roles and role performance from that of the *woman-mother* to what Aslanyan (2007) describes as the *liberated woman-worker* within the USSR.

Ishkanian (2003) states that Communist Party leaders considered the restructuring of women's social roles within the sovietized states to be an integral area of interest in the pursuit of economic and political reconstitution within the larger context of the Soviet Union. Accordingly, this social role alteration made its significant mark on Armenian women's role performance, as Soviet ideology uprooted and nearly disrupted the reinforcement of traditional Armenian family values. The process of total societal restructuring became so monumental in Soviet Armenia that parties associated with the retainment of traditional familial relations and the idea that motherhood and womanhood were interchangeable concepts were deemed to be "backwards", as Armenian women's role performance now composed of engaging in the workforce and contributing to social and political life (Ishkanian, 2003). For the first time in decades in Armenia, the idea that the focal point of women's work was to

birth children and be homemakers was pushed to the sidelines, effectively losing its ideologically mainstream prominence within society. Although many Soviet Armenian women initially looked towards this new standard of equal rights with men as a road towards liberation from being expected to carry out the entirety of domestic labor, the following decades under Soviet rule proved otherwise. The transition of Armenian women's social roles and self-identification with the *woman-worker* eventually began to grow towards a path of discontent and apathy with the Soviet regime. Here, Aslanyan (2007) peels the layers of the Soviet Union's so-called strive for gender equality, she elaborates on how Soviet policy and gender quotas rarely ever crossed into the realm of private households. Despite the more widespread negative perception of gender inequality within the broader Soviet Union, many Armenian women still found themselves having to carry the weight of domestic labor duties in addition to the harsh working conditions that came as a byproduct of their supposed "emancipation" (Aslanyan, 2007). While on the surface it seemed as though the Soviet Union's *woman's question* was solved, Ishkanian (2003) concludes that the USSR's strive for gender equality only went so far as to empower women to take on the social roles of *women-workers*, so as to strengthen the union's ideological propaganda, while deep within the system, gender inequalities still prevailed.

As the USSR dissolved in 1991 after a significant period of decline, so did the rigid ideological framework of the *woman-worker* social role in the newly formed post-Soviet states, including Armenia. The outcomes of the Soviet Union's conception of gender equality under communism left Armenian women completely dissatisfied with the inevitable "double burden" placed on them as they were expected to be workers and homemakers simultaneously (Aslanyan, 2007). However, the stark contrast between the Soviet state's push towards gender equality and the economic turmoil and "social chaos" of the newly democratized Armenian state left many Armenian women without employment or even the experience of fighting for their rights. As such, Armenia entered yet another period of gendered transformation, where the collapse of the USSR-induced idea of gender equality coupled with Armenian women's exhaustion with the "double burden" of work and homemaking has resulted in the most recent socially accepted social role of the Armenian *contemporary woman* (Aslanyan, 2007). The basis of this modernized role for Armenian women, as well as the gender attitudes that have dictated them, lies at the confluence between the *woman-worker*, through the "double burden" that many Armenian women still carry, as well as the traditional role of the *woman-mother*, which seeped back into the forefront of Armenian women's identity as Soviet ideologies no longer inhibited the social spread of traditional values (Ishkanian, 2003).

As Zaslavskaya and Agadjanian (2022) claim, modern Armenians' conception of gender relations and the perception of engendered identity mainly formally correspond with the global understanding of gender equality. As far as compliance with international standards of women's equality goes, as previously mentioned, Armenia has ratified numerous international women's rights treaties, including CEDAW (1993) and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) (Zaslavskaya & Agadjanian, 2022). However, the social day-to-day circumstances of Armenian women has painted a separate picture, where traditional values and the social role of the *woman-mother* has been reinstated as the norm. As post-Soviet Armenian women have been mainly occupying low-level and low-wage jobs, which comes as the result of the normalization of the Soviet-era "double burden", as well as the traditional pre-Soviet idea that women cannot be the primary breadwinners within their family, many Armenian citizens during the transition period have expressed a desire to return to traditional gender roles (Aslanyan, 2007). The contradictory nature of the current conception of Armenian women's identity has thus exacerbated the prominence of son preference in Armenia, as the accepted post-Soviet Armenian gender roles have once again placed birthing male children as a more desirable decision over female births.

2.4.2. The *Soldier*

While Armenian women's social roles and identities greatly fluctuated through the decades from the pre-Soviet traditional woman, to the working woman of the Soviet Union, and the post-Soviet contemporary woman, Armenian men's socially accepted identity has remained fairly rigid in light of what Armenian masculinities have encompassed. As previously mentioned, as opposed to Armenian women's identity being centered around submission and undertaking domestic duties, Armenian men's identity and role performance has long been rooted in their ability to be "protectors" of the family and the nation, as both sole breadwinners and soldiers. Moghadam and Goolgasian (2024) elaborate on what the socially accepted ideal of Armenian men's masculinity has entailed throughout history, stating that characteristics such as strength, protection, aggression, domination, and leadership are just some of the many venerated traits that have been associated with Armenian manhood. Circling back to how Zaslavskaya and Agadjanian (2022) expand upon traditional Armenian marital practices, which are considered to be a key anchor in the current conception of patrilineal kinship, these preferred masculine traits have especially been brought to the forefront in the celebrations of Armenian husbands' marriages. However, Moghadam and Goolgasian (2024) also emphasize that one of the most significant characteristics of Armenian men's identity, which heavily contributes to the occurrence of

son bias in Armenia until today, is the decades-long construction of Armenian men's *militarized masculinity*, through the patriarchal image of the *soldier*, and the creation of a so-called "manly state".

Following the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of the First Nagorno-Karabakh war, as well as the Second Nagorno-Karabakh war later on, *militarized masculinity* increasingly became embedded within social life, national identity, and state-building processes while navigating Armenia's transition into democratization. As Dilanyan, et al. (2017) argue, within post-Soviet Armenia, the Armenian nation-state and nationalistic discourse have heavily become reliant on pre-Soviet conceptions of gender identity, where the construction of a rigid framework for manhood and womanhood has been used as a way to retain national Armenian identity through tradition. In particular, Armenian masculinity has become almost synonymous with militarized patriotism and national defence as progressively imagined through the symbol of the *soldier* (Dilanyan, et al., 2017). This specific conception of the *soldier* as the image of Armenian manliness, however, has not been the product of mere coincidence, but rather, as Ziemer (2023) claims, one of the many consequences of prolonged military threat and the militarization of society.

In a raw reflection of the history of Armenian persecution and military threat, Hofmann (2025) states that "nothing in modern history has had a more lasting impact on the plight of Armenians than the threat and experience of annihilation" (p. 182). Focusing the scope of Armenia's history of threats to its military and sovereignty in its post-Soviet context, the emerging secessionist aspirations of the then-de facto state of Nagorno Karabakh, or Artsakh, as well as the smoldering decades-long tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan, have accelerated the need for mass militarization of Armenian society (Hofmann, 2025). When centering on this context of Armenia's and Azerbaijan's historic skirmishes, especially in the events that led up to and during the Second Nagorno Karabakh war, military tensions continuously reached threatening peaks for Armenia and Artsakh, with Azerbaijan committing countless ceasefire violations and military offensives (Ziemer, 2023). However, according to Ziemer (2023), the deeply entrenched militarization of society cannot be reduced to only being a product of continuously impending war and violence, militarization is a step-by-step process which can take decades to achieve total prominence through both times of war and peace. It is also imperative to highlight, just as Moghadam and Goolgasian (2024) do, that in Armenia, military conscription is widespread, with men aged 18-27 being obliged to carry out a two-year mandatory conscription, while women of the same age range can choose to serve a compulsory military service of six months. As such, consistent threats to Armenia's security, as well as its highly militarized society and masculinity, have left a distinct impact on Armenian men's social roles, whether in peacetime or in

war, as that of the strong, nationalistic, protective, and even sacrificial image of the *soldier*. Where a deeply gendered political system meets the threat of war, Moghadam and Goolgasian (2024) state that men are inevitably assigned the social role of the “protector”. Dilanyan, et al. (2017) and Ziemer (2023) both claim that it is under this framework of the threatened militarized nation-state where a closed cycle forms, where men’s state-building is actualized through military service while women are viewed to fulfill state-building and national service through giving birth to men who would later become soldiers. Revisiting Stryker and Burke’s (2000) Identity Theory in this context, this closed cycle, as described by Dilanyan, et al. (2024), can be best understood as the repetition and maintenance of the social roles of *woman-mother* and *soldier*, where social militarization can be linked to being one of the defining roots of modern-day son preference in Armenia.

2.5. The Shock of War and the *Rebirth* of Son Bias

According to several studies that bridge the link between conflict and post-conflict societies with demographic changes, high mortality in conflict situations, especially among soldiers, prompts societal motivations to increase birth rates (Brezis, 2025). As previously discussed, in societies such as Armenia, where son bias is already prevalent on a nationwide scale, this motivation to reproduce is often heightened by the idea that Armenian families must recover from the loss of soldiers by exclusively giving birth to male offspring as a form of demographic compensation.

Although the national SRB of Armenia had seen some improvements, as the extreme gap between male and female births had declined by 2020, the years following the Second Nagorno Karabakh War witnessed yet another increase in Armenia’s SRB. Most notably, as officially stated by Armstat (2025), the national SRB rose from a fairly consistent 110 in 2020 to a noticeable 112 by the year 2022. As previously discussed by Jilozian and Agadjanian (2016), the decline in Armenia’s SRB during the 2010s could be attributed to the increase in public backlash against practices such as SSA, as stricter laws against sex-biased abortions had been implemented and widespread stigma against son bias slowly became the norm. Despite these improvements, however, the shock of the Second Nagorno Karabakh War, as well as an intensified collective fears surrounding the possibilities of future conflicts in Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh, refueled nationwide preferences for sons, as they have long been viewed to be the future defenders of the homeland if tragedy were to strike again.

2.5.1. The Second Nagorno Karabakh War

In the autumn of 2020, tensions of the decades-long conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the de facto state of Nagorno Karabakh reached a significant boiling point, culminating in the Second Nagorno Karabakh War. According to Mavisakalyan and Minasyan (2023), despite disputes

over the region spanning back centuries, the Nagorno Karabakh conflict can be traced back to 1988, in the form of the First Nagorno Karabakh War and the events leading up to it. At the heart of this war, as Moghadam and Goolgasian (2024) discuss, lies the early 1920s Soviet Union's designation of territories between Armenia and Azerbaijan, whereby the region of Nagorno Karabakh, though predominantly ethnically Armenian, was allocated to Soviet Azerbaijan. As previously mentioned, the Armenian majority of Nagorno Karabakh eventually campaigned to gain independence from Azerbaijan and unify with Armenia proper in 1988, a reformist movement which took form in the larger context of the USSR's glasnost and perestroika movements (Mavisakalyan & Minasyan, 2023). As the Soviet Union fell, the interethnic violence between the newly independent states of Armenia and Azerbaijan escalated into full-on war, which, as Hofmann (2025) explains, led to Armenia's victory and control over the historic boundaries of Nagorno Karabakh by 1994.

Although the 1994 ceasefire agreement put an end to the conflict, clashes between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces along the front lines heightened the possibilities of future conflicts to come, labeling the post-First Nagorno Karabakh War period as a "frozen conflict" (Mavisakalyan & Minasyan, 2023). The following decades witnessed the failure of several peace negotiations between the two parties as well. According to official data by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, Mavisakalyan and Minasyan (2023) note that while battle-related casualties from 1992 to 1994 culminated in a death toll of above 9,000 deaths, periodic ceasefire breaches, until 2011, reached up to hundreds of deaths. Eventually, in April 2016, Azerbaijan committed one of the deadliest ceasefire violations before 2020, which took shape in the form of a four-day period of intense conflict along the Nagorno Karabakh border (Moghadam & Goolgasian, 2024). While not the only contributor, numerous instances of Azerbaijan's use of force during peacetime settings increased the fear of impending war among Armenians in Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh.

On September 27, 2020, Azerbaijan once again attacked Nagorno Karabakh, which led to the 44-day bloody conflict known as the Second Nagorno Karabakh War. As with previous wars in the region, this conflict was not just fought between Armenian soldiers from Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijani soldiers, as nationwide conscription in Armenia proper has been a common practice during peacetime, and is even more heavily enforced in times of war (Mavisakalyan & Minasyan, 2023). According to Hofmann (2025), the Azerbaijani victory in the war on November 10, 2020, led to its control of over a third of the region, with the exception of the then-de facto capital Stepanakert, and left Nagorno Karabakh with almost no direct connection to the outside world besides the land route known as the Lachin Corridor. By December 2022, Azerbaijan took advantage of this limited access point by

imposing a blockade, preventing electricity, gas, and food supply that was headed to Nagorno Karabakh, an atrocity crime that led to the mass starvation and near-genocide risk of Nagorno Karabakh's Armenians (Hofmann, 2025). After the country launched another major offensive into Nagorno Karabakh in 2023, Azerbaijan seized total control over the territory of Nagorno Karabakh, expelling the hundreds of thousands of Armenians from the region, and merging the deserted land with Azerbaijan proper by 2024.

According to Ziemer (2023), approximately 4,000 Armenian soldiers, who were predominantly male, were killed in battle during the Second Nagorno Karabakh War. This death toll alone was enough to spread shock and a more intensified fear of future conflict throughout the country, which ultimately gave rise to the conditions that fueled Armenian society's intentions with recovering from the Second Nagorno Karabakh War. Most notably, public discussion surrounding the disproportionate loss of young male soldiers during the war occurred within a society that already associated sons and masculinity with military defense and demographic continuity, allowing for son preference to seep back into the mainstream (Guilmoto, 2013; Mavisakalyan & Minasyan, 2023).

2.5.2 *Soldier*: Revisited

According to Mavisakalyan and Minasyan (2023), the imminent risk of war often leads to the revival of group survival instincts, and in countries such as Armenia, where traditional gender roles play a major part in identity formation and survival, this has namely been translated into the heightened preference for birthing sons as future defenders of the nation. In reference to the previous open conflict over Nagorno Karabakh, Guilmoto (2013) states that regular expressions around the need for soldiers in the military, which would predominantly be men, combined with discussions about the number of male deaths along the border and increased fears of future conflicts had given way to nationwide justifications for son preference, and ultimately SSA, in Armenia. The study conducted by Mavisakalyan and Minasyan (2023) further reflects this link through their findings, as a fear of war at the individual level is seen to be associated with a 10% higher likelihood of harboring son preference than among those that do not express a fear of future conflict. These recent findings have even challenged the popular notion regarding post-conflict demographic changes, as incorrect assumptions have previously been made stating that conflict periods only "naturally" cause an increase in the spontaneous biological conception of male children (Guilmoto, 2013).

Circling back to Armenia's extensive history of self-identifying as a nation under threat, owing to both its geographical position and "frozen conflict" status with Azerbaijan, militarization and long held perceptions of men as the defenders of the homeland have increasingly become normalized in

everyday life in Armenia. As Moghadam and Goolgasian (2024) argue, to this day, the concept of the *soldier* occupies one of the most central identity markers within the Armenian construction of masculinity. In its pursuit, successful role performance in achieving such masculinity is accompanied by ideals such as strength, sacrifice, protection, and national service (Moghadam & Goolgasian, 2024). Mass militarization in Armenia reinforces these expectations even further, as military service is not only positioned as a civic duty among Armenian citizens, but almost as a rite of passage among young men, whereby their aforementioned two-year mandatory conscription is viewed as the point from where they transition from boys into socially recognized men.

Regarding the Second Nagorno Karabakh War, the recurrence of armed conflict in the region and the predominantly young male casualties have significantly contributed to the persistence of these militarized masculinities. Revisiting the death toll of soldiers during the war, as Ziemer (2023) states, the excessive loss of 4,000 male soldiers shocked the Armenian public and pushed the country into a state of widespread grief and intensified collective national security and demographic anxieties. As previously mentioned, according to Brezis (2025), societies that undergo extreme wartime losses often rely on heightened reproduction to deter population decline and fears of future losses, especially when the mass majority of casualties constitute military-age men. In a society such as Armenia, where militarization and rigid gender roles are already deeply entrenched in everyday life, the reproduction of sons and the socialization of sons into soldiers, or simply men, indirectly become ways in which to serve the nation, where this fulfillment is realized through soldiering for men and motherhood for women (Ziemer, 2023).

Mavisakalyan and Minasyan's (2023) findings further support this relationship between conflict and son bias, as their study demonstrates how conflict exposure and anxieties of future violence increase the likelihood of individual and nationwide son preference. While deeply rooted gender norms and traditional values play a strong role in the construction of son bias, both Mavisakalyan and Minasyan (2023) and Hohmann, et al. (2014) suggest that cultural traditions and long-held patrilineal kinship systems do not solely constitute the logic behind son preference in Armenia today. However, since Armenian society has persistently fallen into a closed cycle of praising and associating masculinity with military service and national defense, son bias in Armenia has emerged from conditions where male offspring are uniquely expected to ensure familial and national continuity. Here, this idea of the *soldier* in the Armenian context has gone beyond wartime defense and has become embedded into broader, nationwide grounds on discourse surrounding population recovery post-Second Nagorno Karabakh War.

2.6 The Gendered Discourse of Son Bias in Armenia

By combining the argument surrounding the need for men in the military with references to the death toll of male soldiers in the pre-2020 conflicts over Nagorno Karabakh, Guilimoto (2013) claims that it is highly common to justify son presence in Armenia. Previous scholarship has identified several themes and notions with high implications of son bias in Armenia, among which include familial and national continuity, militarized masculinity, national defense, and gendered reproductive expectations. On a more general note, nationalistic rhetoric has long used allegories or direct references to the binary gender system to construct the idea of the nation-state, as well as the duties of the citizens under that same binary lens to the nation (Dilanyan, et al., 2017). In the scope of Armenia's transition periods over the past decades, a shared border with Azerbaijan, and widespread militarization, Dilanyan, et al. (2017) claims that the "nation" and "state" have also diverged into these separate gender dichotomies. Here, the "nation" is imagined in the image of a woman, where the qualities associated with it are its caring and nurturing spirit in which the "state", imagined in the image of a man, must provide and protect the nation (Dilanyan, et al., 2017).

The threat of war and national security in Armenia over the past decade has only further prompted nationwide urges for men and women to comply with traditional gender roles. Dilanyan, et al. (2017) states that along with the establishment of rigid gender roles in Armenia, discourse surrounding how identities or noncompliances with these roles are often shamed, discouraged from existing within the Armenian social space, and even deemed as the "enemy" that would lead to societal downfall. In the case of men that do not meet the standards of traditional masculinity, which has been established to be synonymous with soldierhood, this claim is further underscored by the fact that the image of the male Armenian soldier is often contrasted with the "emasculated" "Others" (Dilanyan, et al., 2017). Such rhetoric and references to the undesirable "Others", which may include daughters, "effeminate" men, non-heterosexual individuals, and so on, in the discourses of son preference in Armenia has been seen to also inform the decisions of families in the children they wish to conceive or their general preferences regarding family composition and size since late 2020. With the aforementioned research limitation of social desirability bias in mind, the results of the UNFPA (2022) GBSS survey based on familial preferences for sons or daughters in Armenia revealed that 18% of families in Armenia openly prefer sons over daughters, 11% prefer daughters, and 70% state that they have equal preference. In light of the current conception of the historic "stopping rules", 73% of son-preferring families with multiple children stated that their last child was a boy (UNFPA, 2022).

Additionally, the aforementioned significant influence of the Armenian Apostolic Church and its discursive expressions of gender roles, son bias, and demographic loss has cemented itself as a marker of key cultural and national authority within Armenia since the waning of Soviet rule. Zaslavskaya and Agadjanian (2022) note how the influence of the church in everyday social functioning in Armenia can be further reflected in the code of marital vows, which is solely exclusive to the marital unions between a man and woman. One such example of these vows includes the priest within an Armenian marriage ceremony to ask the future husband the question of “Are you a Master?”, and to the future wife the follow-up question of “Are you obedient?” (Zaslavskaya & Agadjanian, 2022). As the researchers state that while these questions are not meant to be taken at face-value and not literally meant to say that the husband is a master that is to be in control of the wife, the wording used plays a socializing nature (Zaslavskaya & Agadjanian, 2022). As previously noted, it is gendered wording such as this, where the position of women is expressed as evidently lesser than men, and thus frames the notion of birthing daughters as undesirable as opposed to birthing sons within Armenian society.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

The aim of this chapter is to explore the layered theoretical framework that has informed and guided my primary research method, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA), within this study. The theoretical framework here has been constructed by three distinct, yet interconnected, theories and frameworks, constituting Judith Butler's reflections on gender as a performance in *Undoing Gender* (2004), Sandra Harding's conception of Standpoint Theory within *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader* (2004), and the analytical framework of Post-Conflict Demography. As FDA is concerned with understanding discourse in context, this theoretical and analytical structure has been used as a supportive contextual basis from which analyzing the selected discourse is made possible.

3.1. Gender as Performance

Judith Butler, in their reflections on the social functioning of gender and sexuality in *Undoing Gender* (2004), makes the recurring central claim that gender, rather than being bound by biological sex, is produced and maintained through active performance. This performance, or a practice of "doing" gender, as Butler (2004) calls it, is never done in isolation, but rather it is done for an audience in the pursuit of recognition as a "socially viable being" as assessed by certain social norms (Butler, 2004, p. 2). Butler thoroughly examines these notions of that which is socially viable and the social norms from which viability stems from, asserting that social norms place a binary classification between those who can be socially recognized for their "humanness", or in other words, their success in their performance of gender. They state that social norms themselves are the products of repetition, in which certain discourses and speech practices are produced, disseminated, reproduced, and regurgitated back. In the context of producing gender, a closed cycle is formed, as the concept of gender, most often articulated in the dichotomies of male and female on the basis of sex, is maintained through the repetitions of social norms and expectations of role performances (Butler, 2004). In the case of the male, successfully "doing" gender is denoted by the performance of rituals and behaviors associated with masculinity, and for the female, it is denoted by the performance of rituals and behaviors associated with femininity. These successful acts of "doing" gender thus render them as being socially accepted under the gendered societal functions they allow, such as roles in childrearing, breadwinning, and statebuilding. Additionally, any deviation from these ascribed roles, as they are based on the biological sex of the individual, is either unrecognized or viewed to be that which goes against "humanness". However, Butler does not make the claim that performance is necessarily a conscious act, but rather a process of repetition that sets the stage of normalization in which performance appears

to be natural and guided by an unconscious truth of what it means to be a man or woman (Butler, 2004).

Applying Butler's (2004) understanding of gender as performance to the case of Armenian society's conception of gender roles, the performance of gender follows a quite structured, almost rigid categorization of men and women. As assessed earlier on, the binary classification of social viability in terms of Armenia's recognition of the desired gender roles manifests in the form of mothers and soldiers for women and men respectively, or future mothers and future soldiers in the case of children. Successful performance in the pursuit of these roles, which leads to social recognition within Armenian society, is categorized under the aforementioned conceptions of Armenian femininity, which necessitates the performance of nurturing and submission, and Armenian masculinity, which necessitates the performance of protection and domination. As a society that has long held a history of traditional gender roles and has been bound by an even longer history of constant persecution and threats, the constant push towards gendered performance for the sake of national continuity, retention of identity, and population growth has shaped and structured the social norms that had already informed these motivations from the start. As such, any compliance with these gender norms propels "performers" into a state of socially viable humans, and those that fall outside of the confines of these norms, for example, unmarried or childless women, into a state of being an unrecognized body or societal shame (Butler, 2004; Dilanyan, et al., 2017).

In the wider scope of this study, I have integrated Butler's (2004) claim of the social functioning of gender and its construction within my theoretical framework. With Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) as my primary research method, Butler's perspective plays an essential role in examining son bias discourse in Armenia, as repeated nationwide sentiments of son preference contribute to the aforementioned closed cycle of shaping, producing, and reproducing gendered expectations of motherhood, masculinity, and national belonging. Within this discourse, the often-repeated references to the need for sons as future soldiers reinforces the socially accepted ideals of masculinity, while simultaneously placing women's motherhood as a responsibility aimed at producing male offspring. While analyzing these discourses under a Foucauldian lens, I have applied Butler's perspective of gender norms for the purposes of identifying the constructed objects produced within these discourses, such as mothers and soldiers, the subjects positions or roles these objects are expected to perform, and the discursive effects that these discourses have on Armenian society.

3.2. Standpoint Theory

Sandra Harding's (2004) conception of Standpoint Theory is a feminist framework which highlights the connection between the production of knowledge and practices of power within a given society. Standpoint Theory illuminates the pivotal role that certain politics and social structures play in stimulating knowledge which is concerned to be the norm, as well as guiding it to further maintain certain normative conventions and dogmas. This ties into Harding's central claim regarding Standpoint Theory, which is that all knowledge is socially and politically situated, further informed by the epistemic vantage points these knowledge forms stem from (Harding, 2004). As applied to a patriarchal society, Standpoint Theory seeks to establish modes of knowledge construction and transmission which is for women, rather than knowledge which places women as "objects" of research, and challenges the natural and social order (Harding, 2004). Standpoint Theory here is thus used to not only identify where the power of knowledge formation of son bias occurs, but to decode the social locations of those within son bias discourse.

As Armenian society, which is marked by widespread militarization, is informed by a masculinist social structure of placing men at the heart of social functioning and national continuity, women are typically relegated to the sidelines and are expected to merely produce the men that would be placed at the center of statebuilding. While the overall national knowledge concerning gender roles is that of women as mothers and men as soldiers, the recognized binary genders of Armenian society function under their own presupposed situated knowledge. According to Harding (2004), women and men, under this binary classification, occupy varying social locations within a given society, which often translates into the formation of different situated experiences and knowledge. In the case of Armenian women, the general collective knowledge is rooted in needing to fulfill the purposes of motherhood, aiming at birthing male children specifically, and supporting soldiers during their mandatory conscription or in times of war. In the case of Armenian men, the general collective knowledge surrounds their need to lead the nation and act as the guarantors of national continuity and survival through soldiering. Within this structure, one of the most marginalized, and often undesired, groups is that of daughters, especially in the case where Armenian mothers continuously "fail" to birth male children.

Applying Harding's (2004) Standpoint Theory within this study's theoretical framework, I have woven Harding's conception of situated knowledge within the structure of my FDA design. Within the wider scope of my study, Harding's perspective has proven invaluable as the basis of Standpoint Theory seeks to establish an understanding of societal power and knowledge. Within the Foucauldian

tradition, power and knowledge are bound by a relationship where knowledge establishes power and power reinforces dominant knowledge or truth claims, thus configuring a system of accepted truths that cannot be challenged, as well as rejected falsities (Willig, 2008; Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017). Weaving Standpoint Theory within my theoretical framework here has thus been central in identifying the truth claims that are reinforced or are shaped by discourse. This has aided me in answering the questions of who holds the power of constructing what is considered to be the norm within Armenian society, where militarization and traditional gender roles effectively influence discourse surrounding son bias. Standpoint Theory has therefore helped place a greater emphasis on whose social positions allow certain truth claims to be viewed as legitimate and worthy of widespread acceptance, rather than simply drawing the attention towards what is said within the discourse.

3.3. Post-Conflict Demography

As the name suggests, Post-Conflict Demography is an area of demographic-based studies that shift conflict-based research from the initiation and duration of conflict to the aftermath of conflict, specifically in the analysis of how populations recover after suffering the extent of their losses (Brezis, 2025). Instead of acting as a standalone social theory, such as Standpoint Theory as discussed earlier on, I have applied Post-Conflict Demography as a broad analytical framework, consisting of scholarship across studies of demography in post-conflict settings, through which post-war demographic changes and societal responses to population losses can be understood. While early scholarship has suggested that demographic shifts post-conflict overwhelmingly point to “baby booms” and heightened population growths, when applying Post-Conflict Demography in the context of a recent post-conflict society, the data suggests that societies instead enter a phase of demographic compensation as a way to make up for the loss of life (Brezis, 2025, p. 16).

According to Brezis (2025), the phenomenon of the heightened societal push towards a phase of demographic compensation post-conflict is usually associated with the loss of young, military-age men within a given society. This often leads to widespread concerns and increased anxieties surrounding demographic recovery and national survival once the dust of war has settled. As a result, the dominant narrative that a society’s women must engage in higher levels of reproduction, in order to meet the demands of a male population replacement, becomes deeply entrenched in societal post-war reconstruction ideals (Brezis, 2025; Mavisakalyan & Minasyan, 2023). Applying these concepts to societies where traditional, masculinist, and patriarchal social structures already play a dominant role in statehood and national identity, Mavisakalyan and Minasyan (2023) state that these societal pushes towards predominantly male demographic compensations reflect deeper group-conforming choices.

Specifically, where societal preferences for sons already acts as a broader social norm, exposure to violent conflict and loss of life heightens both the group survival instinct of birthing more offspring and favoring male births (Mavisakalyan & Minasyan, 2023).

Bringing these concepts of Post-Conflict Demography into the Armenian context, as highlighted by varying previous scholarship, this analytical framework has provided a useful perspective in understanding the fears surrounding population loss following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. In addition to the revived conflict in the Nagorno Karabakh region, having had been considered a “frozen conflict” prior to the war, the deaths of thousands of predominantly male, military-age soldiers intensified nationwide anxieties concerning both national security and demographic stability. As previously discussed, in Armenia, where sons within a household have historically been associated with soldiering and the continuation of family lineage, these population fears may be assessed through the broader scope of Armenian society’s increased mass preference for male offspring (Mavisakalyan & Minasyan, 2023). In turn, while these preferences are already guided by traditional ideas of gender in Armenia, the societal pushes towards male demographic compensation, as discussed in studies on Post-Conflict Demography, further reinforce traditional gender expectations (Brezis, 2025; Mavisakalyan & Minasyan, 2023). Thus, this framework has aided in the understanding of the closed cycle of traditional gender roles, post-war demographic anxieties, and the strive towards birthing more male children within the context of post-conflict Armenia.

Within the wider scope of this study, Post-Conflict Demography has served as a contextual analytical framework through which the phenomena of the revival and mass pushes towards producing sons could be understood. For the purposes of this study, these strides for generating nationwide efforts in birthing sons have been set out to be examined through the persistence of son bias discourse within broader Armenian society. Rather than relying on the assumption that war acts as a direct trigger for nationwide son preference, this analytical framework has been used to highlight the contextual bases under which these discourses have emerged in recent prevalence in Armenia. Weaving Post-Conflict Demography into the fabric of this study’s theoretical framework, as used to guide the direction of my FDA design, this perspective has assisted me in identifying how fears surrounding population losses have been articulated through discourse, namely in the analysis of the discursive effects that have been the outcome of discourse. Additionally, this framework, coupled with FDA, has guided my analysis in how the social roles of sons and mothers have been constructed as both symbols of national continuity and post-war recovery, as analyzed through my FDA-expressed constructed objects and subject positions.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Through the course of investigating the language of son bias in Armenia post-Second Nagorno Karabakh War, my primary research method of choice has been Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). As the core of my study is engaged in the analysis of language as a vessel through which meaning and norm-setting is constructed, employing discourse analysis, as redefined by author Michel Foucault, has proved to be essential in the pursuit of discerning how discourse reflects, produces, and reproduces systems of power and knowledge. The core of this research is thus an examination of son bias language beyond linguistic and grammatical systems. Under this lens of discourse analysis, discourse is understood as a powerful tool that shapes or is shaped within or by the broader contexts from which they have emerged, in what Foucault (1970/1981, p. 55) describes as the *will to truth*.

The following chapter outlines the foundations of FDA, as well as my own step-by-step FDA research design, which I have constructed based on the theoretical lens I had set out in my previous theoretical framework chapter. Additionally, the goal of this chapter is to also set the data sample I have worked with, as well as my rationale on why I have chosen this sample and its limitations in the broader scope of this study.

4.1. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA)

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) highlights the crucial meaning-based link between language or any mode of communication, knowledge, and power. As based on Michel Foucault's own post-structuralist conception of discourse analysis over the corpus of his work, most notably in his inaugural lecture known as *The Order of Discourse* (1970/1981), Foucault heavily focuses on this interplay between knowledge and power, wherein knowledge creates power and power creates knowledge. As discourses provide "ways of seeing and being" within the world, those whose discourses align with the dominant language use within society are privileged within the narrative, whereas those who deviate from the norm are considered wrong or bearers of false knowledge (Willig, 2008). Thus, knowledge is inseparable from power and social institutions within any given society, as truths that are socially deemed acceptable and falsities that are outright mocked or rejected are the products of a form of socially recognized authority (Foucault, 1970/1981). When applied to understanding what and why a certain norm within society maintains or develops its prominence, or even asserts itself as a norm to begin with, FDA as a research method seeks to analyze how knowledge is produced and maintained, how power operates through maintained discourses, and how this power

transforms and creates societies in which certain standards are set in determining what is “right” and what is “wrong” (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017). At its most rudimentary form however, FDA is an analysis of language, but where language is socially and contextually situated rather than unrelated to the world in which it is produced.

As applied to the analysis of son-biased sentiments in Armenia post-Second Nagorno Karabakh War, FDA highlights the importance of examining the power that lies behind the accepted truth claims made by varying sites of power that spread across the nation at different levels. The wide scope of son bias discourse in Armenia post-conflict, as further evidenced by the high national SRB and continued prominence of SSA, has extended from the influence of national state actors all the way to the discursive power of ordinary citizens, including women. In analyzing the dynamics between power and knowledge within this broad discursive context, FDA seeks to not identify a single speaker, or who is the exact person or group that holds power, but rather how knowledge formed by maintained discourse shapes societies and claims who has or does not have the ability to be an authoritative speaker (Willig, 2008). As opposed to other forms of discourse analysis, the Foucauldian perspective of analyzing discourse is less concerned with power that is concentrated within a single speaker, and is instead invested in the power that is more widespread across society that continually reproduces and legitimizes these discourses.

Ultimately, FDA here has provided the most useful method of data analysis for examining how son bias in Armenia post-Second Nagorno Karabakh War has been constructed, disseminated, and normalized within Armenian society. Foucault’s distinct approach to discourse analysis has enabled me in identifying the various discursive mechanisms through which the Armenian ideals of motherhood, soldiers, reproduction, and national survival have become recognized as dominant truths. Additionally, as Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2017) state, FDA as a research method is distinct in its approach of asking questions that pull away from seeking to solve an established problem. Instead, FDA engages in asking why and how certain aspects of human thoughts, actions, and behaviors are made possible.

4.2. FDA Design

Informed by the Foucauldian understanding of discourse analysis and my previously established theoretical framework, I have constructed a six-step framework for analyzing my chosen textual discourses that reflect son bias in Armenia after the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh. The six steps of my FDA research design can be best broken down into four interconnected processes that influence one another and shape the state of overall discourse and societal functioning in Armenia.

First, I have identified the particular language used in the discourse and denoted how this language constructs certain objects, or entities that are given meaning within the discourse. A few examples of objects, in the context of this study's analyzed discourse, include the concepts of "sons", "daughters", "family", and "nation". Next, I analyzed the discursive use of these objects in context, where I have identified the subject positions, otherwise known as their social roles, that these discourses assigned to the identified objects. Applied to the examples of objects I had laid out, such subject positions included roles such as "future defenders", "good mothers", "trusted community", and the "home in need of protection". Through analyzing the recurrence and frequency of these notions, I have then examined how these constructed objects and subject positions embedded power relations. As previously mentioned, the Foucauldian tradition of discourse analysis does not concern itself with specific individuals and their relations to power alone, but rather how broader networks of knowledge and power influence one another and shape the overall state of social reality through legitimization (Willig, 2008). As such, instead of identifying single speakers that keep such discourses in circulation, I have identified how speakers as a collective created certain regimes of truth and what knowledge regarding these objects and subject positions was deemed to be "normal" and what was considered to be "abnormal". This final process of normalization of the discourse, as well as the actions these discourses inform, are known as the discursive effects that come about as a product of these regimes of truth.

The following subchapters detail the conditions of each step within my constructed six-step FDA research design for the purposes of this study. These steps include the identification of repeated narratives, constructed objects, subject positions, discursive practices, the interconnected nature of power and knowledge, and the discursive effects of the discourse within society. While Willig (2008) provides a six-step framework for FDA, I have decided to create my own step-by-step FDA design that is both unique for focus of this study and theoretical framework, while still having taken inspiration on how to conduct FDA as illustrated by both Willig (2008) and Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2017).

4.2.1. Repeated Narratives

The first step of the FDA design I have created is the identification of repeated narratives within the discourse. As established throughout the trajectory of this study, the discourse I have focused on is the nationwide discourse of son bias in Armenia since the end of the Second Nagorno Karabakh War. As the first step of my research design, this step has not been established as a form of deep analysis, but rather as the initial identification of specifically repeated sentiments within the discourse of son bias in Armenia post-conflict. As the Foucauldian tradition of discourse analysis is meant to identify why

certain narratives retain or grow in popularity through societal power and knowledge formation, I first had to pinpoint the select narratives within this discourse that shared similar or identical patterns of expressed sentiments, as well as those that strayed from the dominant discursive order.

4.2.2. Constructed Objects

After identifying the most dominant narratives within the overall discourse on son bias in Armenia, the next step of my FDA design was to identify the constructed objects within those repeated narratives. As previously stated, these objects are the focal points of the discourse. While the repeated narratives within the discourse can often be viewed as remaining consistent, as they all discuss the same subject matter through a similar lens of truth, the constructed objects within each case of discourse may differ (Willig, 2008, p. 115). For example, while both the sentiments “we need more boys” and “women need to birth more children” may repeat the same narrative on necessitating higher levels of reproduction, they construct two different objects within the discourse, which are “boys” and “women”. Similar to the first step within my FDA design, the identification of constructed objects does not demand the in-depth analysis of discourse. However, this step has been crucial in pinpointing who, or what objects, are being constructed and discussed for the purpose of creating this discourse.

4.2.3. Subject Positions

The third step within my FDA design was to focus on the subject positions that these objects were being assigned to and occupying through the process of the discourse. In other words, this is the point where I have identified the roles that constructed objects were meant to play out. Through highlighting subject positions within the text, this third step has served as the start of the more “in-depth” process of my FDA design’s discourse analysis, as under this methodology, language is never viewed to be neutral and is instead heavily invested in the contexts from which certain language has emerged (Willig, 2008). Given the social historical, political, and cultural background I had laid out earlier in this study, the subject positions of the constructed objects within Armenia’s case of son bias discourse is contingent upon several contextual bases, from traditional gender roles to the constant threat of war. Without this context, it is impossible to locate the subject positions that are created through the discourse that is focused on objects, as the construction and performance of certain vantage points is the site of meaning-making in discourse (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017). In the context of my study, the key recurring subject positions that had been ascribed to the constructed objects included the positioning of sons as soldiers or future defenders, women as mothers, and the nation itself as the homeland that must be protected.

4.2.4. Discursive Practices

After investigating the subject positions within the discourse, I had then reached one of the most important steps within my FDA design, which was pinpointing the discursive practices that are formed through the discourse. It is at this point within FDA research processes where certain truths are formed and maintained, and conversely, the knowledge or narratives that do not align with these truths are indirectly, or sometimes even directly, deemed as false (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017). According to Foucault (1970/1981, p. 52), the narratives that are relegated to the sidelines in the formation of truths through discursive practices go through *procedures of exclusion*, where “false” claims are most often prohibited from entering the order of a society’s discursive practices. While conducting FDA using my FDA research design, I have identified the discursive practices through analyzing the discourses’ overall repetition of sentiments, similar to the first step within my research design, as well as the moral language and emotional framing employed in the formation of these sentiments.

4.2.5. Power and Knowledge

True to the Foucauldian tradition of discourse analysis, the fifth step within my research design was focused on investigating the crucial link between power and knowledge that are translated through the production and dissemination of discourse. At this step of FDA, I have set out to identify the several sites of power through which certain discursive practices were being “normalized”, thus constructing rigid *regimes of truth*. As previously mentioned, Foucault explicitly rejects the idea of highlighting specific speakers in the analysis of power and knowledge and instead focuses on broader, interconnected networks of knowledge construction and formation (Willig, 2008). Applied to this study, I have identified a wide spectrum of vantage points that worked together as a network in the construction of knowledge, thus holding the privileged position, which assigns power, within the order of Armenian society’s discourse regarding son preference. Some of the many actors within this broader system of knowledge formation and transmission include state actors, mass media, and even ordinary citizens.

4.2.6. Discursive Effects

The final step within my research design was identifying what are the effects of the discourse within Armenian society. It is at this level of analysis where I have been posed with the question of what this dominant discourse does and how such widely accepted knowledge informs certain behaviors that align with the complete message of the discourse. As applied to the aim of my study, I have

identified the discursive effects of this discourse in light of the Foucauldian perspective of the normalization of such sentiments within society. Additionally, I have analyzed how this discourse has created, and still creates, the dichotomy of pressure set on Armenian men and women to comply with and perform the accepted gendered social roles within Armenian society. Lastly, I have also analyzed how son bias discourse in this specific post-conflict context has set certain views on demographic imbalances and compensation in Armenia.

4.3. Subject to Analysis

4.3.1. Rationale and Data Sample

While originally creating my FDA research design, I had decided to focus on a mixed corpus of online forums, news articles, and even public statements made by officials and prominent figures for my data sample. As the focus of my study is on son bias discourse in post-Second Nagorno Karabakh War Armenia, this study's data sample only includes online statements and communications that were posted online anytime from November 10th, 2020 up until the time of writing. My data sample for this study comprises of official statements made by former and current Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan, Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II, local news articles by the Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), and online discussions that have taken place under the “r/armenia” community forum, or “subreddit”, within the online platform known as Reddit. My rationale behind this selection of corpora has been based on one of the main principles of conducting FDA, which is to view discourse from varying sites of power and knowledge, and wherever there is meaning (Willig, 2008, p. 114).

While still rejecting the notion of “single speakers” and institutions, I have structured my data corpus so as to present voices across the discursive sites of political, religious, media, professional, and ordinary citizens' discourse. Since FDA as a research method places a greater focus on the quality of the content and the depth of the analysis conducted, rather than the quantity of the data sample, my analyzed corpus comprises seven selected texts in total. As these discourses are publicly available and widely circulated across Armenia and can be accessed by the broader global public, I have chosen these categories for how these distinct sites represent the dominant discursive narratives surrounding the conceptions of motherhood, soldiers, masculinity, reproduction, and national survival in Armenia post-conflict.

Although the data sample is quite limited, my corpus selection has been influenced by both the works of Willig (2008) and Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2017). Applying Arribas-Ayllon and

Walkerdine's (2017, p. 115) logic of selecting texts for analysis, I had made my selection based on the fact that they simultaneously constitute and problematize the constructed objects of interest for this study. Furthermore, the variety of my texts reflect the spectrum of power/knowledge relations within Armenian society within the same time period, but from the sites of different disciplinary regimes (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine's (2017, p. 115).

As previously mentioned, I have chosen to analyze this data sample by applying my constructed FDA research design that is embedded in a layered theoretical framework consisting of Butler (2004), Harding (2004), and Post-Conflict Demography, which I laid out in the previous chapter. In reaching my research objective, I have focused my attention on analyzing the gendered discursive constructions of the most prominent constructed objects within this discourse, such as sons, women, and the nation as a whole. As per my FDA design, I have also focused on the subject positions and the expected role performances for the social roles that were prompted through the constructed objects within the context of Armenia, such as mothers and soldiers. Applying Butler's (2004) conception of gender as performance, I have examined how gendered social roles and their expected performances are reproduced and normalized over consistent repetition, which creates a closed cycle of produced and internalized societal truths. Butler's (2004) reflections can be visible throughout the entirety of my FDA design through their valuable input on gendered role performance in ascribing meaning. Similarly, I have equipped Harding's (2004) Standpoint Theory for the purpose of my analysis to highlight the social locations from which the dominant regimes of truth form, especially within the fifth step of my FDA design. I have also used Harding (2004) in identifying which perspectives within the discourse on son bias become legitimized and normalized, while others suffer the fate of marginalization, which is most present within the fourth and fifth steps of my research design. Finally, I have relied on Post-Conflict Demography as an analytical framework to present how repeated sentiments that refer to fertility, national demographic recovery, and fears of further population loss are embedded in the greater context of post-war Armenia.

4.3.2. Limitations of FDA

While FDA is unique in its approach to analyzing discourse and highlighting how power is diffused throughout society, this research method, as with all other qualitative methods, poses various limitations. According to Willig (2008), FDA seeks to identify how certain truth claims are formed through the process of discourse. However, the focus of FDA almost entirely shifts away from establishing any *objective* truths and does not present itself to be a method used to identify causal relationships that are full-proof in stating that "y is the direct result of x". In this spirit, it should be

noted that the results of this study, including the background I had laid out in previous chapters, should not be interpreted as a representation of all Armenians and individual attitudes on gender identity and post-conflict society in Armenia. For the purpose of this study, my selection of a relatively small data sample also greatly limits the extent to which the findings here could be viewed as representative of the case of son bias discourse in Armenia. On another note, Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2017) also state that FDA, as with other forms of discourse analysis, is inherently interpretive and that different researchers or analysts would interpret the data through different discursive conventions, effects, and even power-knowledge dynamics. This is to say that the findings of each FDA-based study surrounding the same research objective and with the same corpus could generate vastly different research outcomes. Thus, the aim of this study is focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of the broader processes of construction, reproduction, and dissemination of son bias discourse within the specific context of post-conflict Armenian society.

Chapter 5: Analysis and Findings

Drawing upon my FDA design from the previous Methodology chapter, I have focused this chapter on my examination of son bias discourse and how it is constructed, reproduced, circulated across varying sites of power within Armenian society. These sites of power include political, religious, media, professional, and ordinary citizens' discourse in post-Second Nagorno Karabakh War Armenia. While analyzing the varying texts through the lens of my FDA design as set in my theoretical framework, I first decided to label the relevant discourses under the most common narratives. Through my analysis, I noticed that the most repeated narratives fell under the labels of "Sons as National Pride and Necessity", "Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility", "Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility". While the vast majority of the discourse I had analyzed fell under these distinct categories, I had been able to pinpoint discourse that strayed away from the dominant narratives as well. These alternate discourses are inherent to almost every discourse that takes place within a society of discourse, as they offer "ways of seeing" and "ways of being" in which varying vantage points can produce *counter-discourses* (Willig, 2008, p. 113).

Instead of treating these texts as isolated statements that touch upon the repeated narratives I had identified, the goal of this chapter is to identify the varying discourses as interconnected sites of discourse. While the language used in each discourse may have varied, such as the difference in the language used by the Armenian Catholicos and everyday citizens on Reddit, I had examined how particular understandings of gendered dichotomies, motherhood, soldierhood, reproduction, and national continuity are produced and reinforced as a whole. My analysis here does not follow an examination of which statements are objectively true or representative of Armenian society. In line with one of the main purposes of FDA, the focus of this analysis has instead been on how certain truth claims are constructed, legitimized, normalized, and disseminated through discourse (Willig, 2008). In the scope of my analysis, the most dominant recurring narratives are those that grant insight on the broader processes through which knowledge and power have normalized the socially accepted understandings of gender, reproduction, and national continuity in post-conflict Armenia.

5.1. Sons as National Pride and Necessity

The first repeated narrative I had noticed consistently emerging throughout the texts was the construction of sons as a point of national pride and necessity within several functions of Armenian society. I had assessed that this discourse is repeatedly reflected across the various discursive sites of political, religious, media, professional, and ordinary citizens' discourse in Armenia. Despite the

varying contexts and standpoints from which these discourses are located within, such as within one of the official statements made by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and a religious statement by Catholicos Karekin II, the discourse of this repeated narrative consistently constructs sons as the current or future defenders of the homeland, Armenia. This discourse also highlights the constructions of Armenian sons as essential to the national continuity of Armenians following the Second Nagorno Karabakh War. However, this discourse rarely discloses direct son bias and instead implies preferences for sons indirectly. This indirect disclosure is often expressed through the explicit mentions of sons when discussing the topic of future children, rather than referring to them as “children” or “sons and daughters”, as well as paints the image of sons as saviors of Armenian identity and nationhood. Throughout the analyzed texts, this repeated narrative is evident through various statements that either express the speakers’ explicit or indirect son bias, or even through discourse that seeks to explain son bias in Armenia from the perspectives of different vantage points. One striking example of discourse that expresses sons as national pride and necessity is clear in the quote “I had double feelings: I wished it was a boy, it turned out to be a girl...” This statement was expressed from the vantage point of ordinary citizens’ discourse as documented within a news article by the IWPR titled “*Post-War Trauma Prompts Armenia’s Sex Imbalance*” (Avetisyan, 2023). Other examples of this discourse are evident through statements such as “The 41-year-old doesn’t yet know the baby’s sex, but says that if she has a boy she will name him Samvel, after her only son who died in last year’s Nagorny Karabakh war.” (Avetisyan, 2021) and “...Our martyrs fell so that the Republic of Armenia could rise.” (Pashinyan, 2026).

While not every discourse that falls under the repeated narrative of sons as national pride and necessity directly states the term “sons”, they still allude to this concept through the construction of objects such as “brothers” or “martyrs”. Across the data sample, the object of the “son” is repeatedly constructed beyond the definition of a male child, with a few exceptions of the construction of “boys”. While analyzing the constructed objects within this discourse, the most common objects included “martyrs”, “soldiers”, “brothers”, and “sons”. In the Foucauldian tradition, constructed objects legitimize the discourses that uphold and reinforce existing social structures (Willig, 2008, p. 113). As applied here, and under Butler’s (2004) conception of gender as a performance, the discourses’ construction of objects such as “martyrs” and “soldiers” in expressing sons or males emphasizes the legitimate categories that reinforce the socially accepted constructions of manliness. In this sense, the objects of sons become understood through the ideals of militarized masculinity, and less expressed as male members of the family. However, these constructed objects themselves are not always explicitly

mentioned either. Instead these objects that reinforce the socially accepted understandings of manliness and manhood are sometimes implicit, as, according to Willig (2008, p. 115), the constructions of discursive objects are usually guided by a shared meaning rather than similar, rigid uses of lexicon. In the case of my selected corpus, male children are constructed as defenders and martyrs, which are constructed within the context of the traditional gender roles of men as dominating leaders and martyrs for the nation, as well as mass militarization and perceived threat to the nation.

The analysis of subject positions offers a lens into the construction and performance of the object positions they are assigned to from the standpoints of their particular vantage points (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017). When analyzing the subject positions within the data sample, as they surround the implicit and explicit constructed objects of “sons” or male children, the most common identities formed are the *sacrificial* “martyrs” or “soldiers”, *patriotic* sons, and *defenders of the homeland*. Under the lens of FDA, as set in my theoretical framework, these subject positions highlight the location of the constructed objects (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017, p. 117). In the case of my selected texts within the repeated narrative of sons as national pride and necessity, the positions that the constructed objects of sons occupy befall those that allude to the performance of masculinity and soldierhood. In Butler’s (2004) terms, the process of these objects *doing* gender is dictated by the social roles and conceptions of gender that have been set as the norm in Armenian society. As previously mentioned, the model of *doing* gender for Armenian males is the national identity of *militarized masculinity*, which is characterized by strength, dominance, patriotism, and a willingness for self-sacrifice for the nation (Moghadam & Goolgasian, 2024).

With both the constructed objects and their subject positions identified within the repeated narratives of the discourse, they all together allow for the examination of the broader discursive practices within a society of discourse (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017). Some of the most common discursive practices under this repeated narrative include “glorifying sacrifice”, “moralizing collective responsibility” in reaction to the “sacrifices” of “martyrs”, and “linking male children with national defense”. These discursive practices I had identified provide the overall trajectory of how the discourses on sons as national pride and necessity are practiced through the moral and emotional language they use. In this sense, applying Harding’s (2004) Standpoint Theory to my process of FDA, the knowledge reproduced here is that male children’s eventual soldierhood and possible sacrifice is to be commonly met with glorification and veneration. Under FDA, these discursive practices are eventually maintained through their repetition, where the most dominant discursive practices begin to form the overall truth of the discourses (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017).

Across the data sample, discourse that repeats this narrative of sons as national pride and necessity is expressed through the various vantage points of political, religious, and ordinary citizens' discourse, which also includes the media and professionals' discursive contributions. Within these discourses that express male children as the sons that would be defenders of the homeland, certain *truths* are consistently constructed that both maintain and reestablish *why* these discursive practices take shape and are often considered to be "common knowledge" (Willig, 2008). These truths are presented as almost self-evident, with the most common knowledge that is constructed and maintained throughout the data sample being that statehood is actualized through the sacrifice of brave, male soldiers. As previously mentioned, the Foucauldian tradition states that knowledge that is deemed to be the truthful norm, such as the Armenian concept of how statehood is actualized, is entirely dependent on power, but where power is omnipresent throughout society (Willig, 2008; Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017). In the case of my selected corpus, the various standpoints that engage with the discourse of sons as national pride and necessity are dispersed across society, from the political vantage point of PM Nikol Pashinyan's official statements to ordinary citizens' discourse within the IWPR articles. According to Willig (2008), the maintenance and persistence of that which becomes "common knowledge" is further pushed by the relations of power and knowledge in how these discourses become bound by "organizing, regulating and administering social life" (Willig, 2008, p. 113). Thus, the power/knowledge relation of this discourse is both diffused throughout society and sets the standard *truth* throughout Armenian society that sons are necessary for the militaristic defense of a homeland under threat.

Across the varying sites of power and knowledge within the data sample, this discourse that sets sons as national pride and necessity collectively constructs the idea that male children are essential for Armenian national survival and continuity. Stemming from my analysis, some of the most common discursive effects that this discourse has within Armenian society are the normalization of collective responsibility, the reinforcement of the idea that Armenia's survival is due to soldiers' sacrifice, and the normalization of birthing sons as both demographic compensation and national continuity. The discursive effects here go beyond the linguistic mechanics of the texts themselves. As this sentiment of sons being positioned as future soldiers or martyrs is constantly repeated throughout the majority of the texts, as well as from beyond a singular vantage point or standpoint, the effects of the discourse shows that this conception of sons in Armenia is not just confined to the private preferences of families. This is especially relevant in the case of PM Nikol Pashinyan's speech on Armenia's Day of Remembrance

(Pashinyan, 2026), as the discourse consistently positions sons as a representation of sacrificial soldierhood and the continuation of Armenian statehood.

5.2. Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility

In a similar spirit to the repeated narratives surrounding the positioning of sons as national pride and necessity in Armenia, I had identified the consistent construction of motherhood as a point of gendered responsibility across the data sample. The construction of this discourse is consistently evident throughout the texts that reflect political, religious, media, professional, and ordinary citizens' discourse. However, I had noticed that some of the most striking examples of this discourse, in terms of the explicit positioning of women as mothers and motherhood as gendered responsibility, is reflected through the religious discourse of Catholicos Karekin II's statements. The dominance of this discourse in the sphere of religious discourse can be tied back to the key role that the Armenian Apostolic Church plays in the maintenance of traditional gender roles and broader societal functionings in post-Soviet Armenia (Zaslavskaya & Agadjanian, 2022; UNFPA, 2023). Beyond just religious discourse, however, this repeated narrative constructs women across each discursive site as mothers and the act of being a mother as being the most essential role for Armenian women to fulfill. This fulfillment is expressed not only in terms of the traditional gender roles set out for Armenian women, but also as a gendered responsibility for the *rebirth* and reconstruction of Armenia post-Second Nagorno Karabakh War.

Across the data sample, this repeated narrative is consistently expressed through the varied vantage points and language of each discursive site, which utilize the specialized social, political, and historical knowledge that is typically constructed at each standpoint (Harding, 2004). Some of the statements that this narrative is actualized through include "The role of a woman is irreplaceable in the strength of the family, in educating our children with Christian values and patriotic traditions." (Karekin II, 2021) and "...If we add to this the exceptional role of women in solving demographic problems, it will become clearer why I say that the role of women in overcoming our situation is crucial." (Pashinyan, 2022). Additionally, one particular statement that had stood out to me for its direct reference to the terms "mothers", along with "sisters", in reference to women is "May the Blessed Virgin continue to be an inspiration to our mothers and sisters—a beacon of hope in God and a source of all virtues," (Karekin II, 2025).

Similar to the previous repeated narrative on sons as national pride and necessity, this discourse surrounding motherhood as gendered responsibility does not always explicitly mention the term "mothers" or "motherhood" in the construction of the objects of "women". However, the object here is often constructed through references to other objects that allude to motherhood, such as the "Blessed

Virgin”. According to the literature I previously laid out on the traditional Armenian gender roles for women, the social role of the *woman-mother* acts as the significant basis of identity formation for post-Soviet Armenian women (Aslanyan, 2007). In this spirit, the object of the “woman” is most often constructed in light of the construction of the “mother”, whereby these terms are often used interchangeably throughout the texts. This construction also goes beyond the “present” setting of the discourses. Even if “women” are referred to by the term “women”, the construction of these objects within the discourse often makes references to *future* motherhood. An example of this is within the religious statement made by Catholicos Karekin II, in which he stated “...We bless the women who are expecting the joy of motherhood.” (Karekin II, 2025). In Butler’s (2004) terms, this repeated construction of women through the act of having or raising children thus grants the discursive objects of “women” social viability within the society of discourse, in which “humanness” for Armenian women is dictated by the role performance of motherhood.

Throughout the data sample, the subject positions or identities that are formed in relation to the objects of “women” or “mothers” are most often constructed either in their relation to men and families or in their relation to motherhood. Such examples of the most dominant identities assigned to “women” and “mothers” within the texts include the *expecting* “mothers”, the *pure, humble, obedient, and traditional* “women” or “mothers”, and even *grieving* “women”. In light of Harding’s (2004) Standpoint Theory, the social locations of women within this discourse, is rooted in the fulfillment of the role of being mothers, as well as the figurative role of motherhood through providing care and grieving for the sons/soldiers within the context of post-war Armenia. Ultimately, the subject positions assigned to these constructed objects are socially situated at the margins, where the objects of “sons” and “soldiers” occupy the center of “women’s” and “mothers’” identities in the form of responsibilities.

True to the constructed objects and subject positions of Armenian women as *caring* and *grieving* “mothers”, the discursive practices within the discourse of motherhood as gendered responsibility fall in line with Armenian women’s relations to motherhood, soldiers, and the family. Under this discourse, some of the most prominent discursive practices present throughout the data sample include “pronatalism”, “collectivizing grief”, “linking women’s identity with motherhood”, and “framing motherhood as a moral duty”. These discursive practices place the constructed objects of “women” and “mothers” in a position of responsibility or duty towards both the men and the idea of the nation in Armenian society. Circling back to Harding (2004), the knowledge produced and reinforced through these discursive practices claims that the social position of Armenian women and mothers is

dictated by their biological or parental abilities in birthing, providing, and caring for the soldiers and national continuity of Armenia.

Similar to the discourse on sons and soldiers, this discourse on women and mothers is repeatedly expressed throughout the entire spectrum of vantage points across the data sample. While this discourse is diffused and present throughout the entire society of discourse, it is much less evenly spread across each discursive site than with the discourse concerning sons and soldierhood. As previously mentioned, this discourse is most present from the site of religious discourse, but it is also less present, and only implicitly discussed, within the political discursive site of PM Nikol Pashinyan's speech. Just as with the discourse on sons, this discourse concerning motherhood as gendered responsibility creates a series of *truths* based on the material conditions from which this discourse emerged from (Willig, 2008, p. 113). Throughout my analysis, the most prominent constructed truths I had identified in this discourse communicate that Armenian women should be celebrated for their motherhood and for their "ability to solve" demographic issues. This truth is also supported by another recurring constructed truth, which states that Armenian women's identity and social role are dependent on the conditions of soldiers' sacrifices. In the pursuit of understanding the power/knowledge relation that concerns identity, the Foucauldian tradition of discourse analysis follows that knowledge construction within a society forms "very specific *truth games*", in which understanding oneself and others is based on the accepted *truths* within the society of discourse (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017, p. 116). This accepted understanding is evident in the sentiments expressed from many of the vantage points of ordinary citizens' discourse. One striking example of this can be seen in a statement made by an Armenian woman in an interview for one of the IWPR articles, in which she says that "I always dreamed of having a second child, but it didn't work out... I promised my son a sister or a brother." (Avetisyan, 2021). Here, the vantage point of the ordinary citizen falls in line with the dominant power/knowledge relation, whereby the individual's choice and desire for another child and engaging with motherhood is rooted in the material conditions and context that prop up the celebration and necessity of motherhood and childrearing.

Within this power/knowledge relation, this discourse on motherhood as gendered responsibility constructs the dominant truth that Armenian women's identities and duties to the nation are actualized through motherhood and supporting soldiers. Across the data sample, the most common discursive effects of this discourse positions women's identity and role within Armenian society through the lens of motherhood, and oftentimes Christian values, as well as reinforces Armenian women's role performance as consisting of being obedient and submissive caretakers of the soldiers and men within

society. While the effects of this discourse are circulated throughout the society of discourse, the Foucauldian understanding of discourse reveals that these power relations and effects make take varying forms and degrees of prominence depending on their institutional contexts (Willig, 2008; Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017). This is to say that the discursive effects of the texts, such as those of Catholicos Karekin II, differ considerably from the discursive effects of the sentiments expressed and the language used from other sites of power. However, all together they construct the dominant *truths* on Armenian women's identities and role performances as mothers across the dominant order of discourse.

5.3. Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility

Beyond the discourses that situate the dichotomies of traditional gender roles and identities in Armenian society, I had identified another major repeated narrative that consistently emerges within son-bias discourse in post-war Armenia is that of post-conflict reproduction as a point of national responsibility. Unlike the previous two repeated narratives, this discourse is the most persistent in the overarching historical, political, and social context of the post-Second Nagorno Karabakh War Armenia. This context is fueled by the extensions of the conflict, where the focus is placed on the demographic anxieties and strives for national reconstruction that emerge post-war (Brezis, 2025). Additionally, this context is also built on the historical background of patriarchal social structures and widespread militarization (Mavisakalyan & Minasyan, 2023). Across the data sample, this narrative is repeatedly formed all throughout every discursive site, with the most explicit discourse on the matter being presented through the site of ordinary citizens' discourse. More specifically, in the realm of ordinary citizens' discourse, this narrative is most heavily circulated and discussed within the comment section of the r/armenia subreddit post on Reddit, where the focus of the discussion is based on the fertility rate in Armenia. While this discourse is not strictly based on the knowledge construction of traditional gender roles and identities, the previous gendered sentiments and power/knowledge relations heavily inform this narrative and in turn further reinforce gender expectations.

Among the three repeated narratives, this discourse is perhaps the most explicitly present in its references to the need for higher rates of nationwide reproduction post-war throughout the analyzed texts. As mentioned, this discourse is most present in ordinary citizens' discourse, but is also widely constructed from the other available discursive sites. A major example of this repeated narrative is in the comment section of the r/armenia post on Reddit, where one user states that "...If you think that your culture is valuable, if you want revenge for your friends and compatriot who were killed raise more children." (U/amirjanyan, 2023). Other examples of this discourse are evident through statements

such as “...I have always hated the idea of having kids but if it is gonna help save Armenia, then it should be one of our priorities.” (U/PharaohxAzat, 2023) and ““They wanted babies,” he continued. “These people have incredible strength of purpose. We realised that we should help them...”” (Avetisyan, 2021).

Across the data sample, I had noticed that the discourse under this repeated narrative most often constructs a much broader spectrum of discursive objects than the previous two. The constructed objects here thus range from the gendered objects of “women”, “mothers”, “sons”, and “soldiers” to those such as “state”, “nation”, “citizens”, “challenges”, “children”, “population”, and “war”. However, these constructed objects do not appear in every text simultaneously, and they often differ in the exact terminology that can be used interchangeably to construct the same objects, such as with the terms “challenges” and “problems” that convey more or less the same objects. In light of the Foucauldian tradition, discourse is not necessarily an analysis of specific language use, but where meaning is made through a shared lens of truth across an analyzed sample (Willig, 2008). In the case of the narrative of post-conflict reproduction as national responsibility, I had identified that the constructed objects of this discourse apply the constructed objects of “mothers” and “soldiers” in order to further construct and present the objects of the “nation” and “war”. According to Willig (2008, p. 112-113), these previous constructions also contribute to what can be referred to as a *discursive economy*, whereby discursive resources are increasingly made more available and thus add to ongoing discourses. In the case of my data sample, individuals are constructed in light of their gendered dispositions, consisting of “women/mothers” and “sons/soldiers”, and contribute to the construction of the demography of the post-war nation.

Unlike with the broad range of objects that are constructed within this discourse, the subject positions they occupy fall under a more fixed category of similar references to the nation, demography, and post-war society. While taking into consideration the previous gendered constructed objects I had analyzed in the previous narratives, the most dominant subject positions here include the “*responsible*” citizens, “*demographic*” problems, the “*saved*” nation/motherland, including the “*nation that must be saved*”, “*future children*”, and the “*post-war resurrection*”. According to scholarship in the framework of Post-Conflict Demography, as applied to FDA, these subject positions are constructed in light of group-conforming ideals that are already inherent within a society of discourse, but are now further influenced by the threat of war (Mavisakalyan & Minasyan, 2023). This further influences the aforementioned *discursive economy*, as discussed by Willig (2008), where the discourses of post-

conflict national reconstruction are marked by both the previously constructed gendered dichotomy and the same society engaged in demographic recovery.

As the constructed objects and subject positions under this repeated narrative are most in line with constructing both the ideal gender identities and post-war societal conditions, the discursive practices here are mainly geared towards the relation between these identities and the context from which they emerged from. The most common discursive practices of this discourse include “pronatalism”, “framing women’s importance to society through a demographic lens”, and “linking childbirth with post-conflict recovery”. The overall scope of the practices of this discourse can also be understood through the collectivization of civilian responsibility, with the employment of moral language for a final goal being referred to as irrefutable “common sense” (Willig, 2008, p. 113). However, I had also noticed that the discourses sometimes produce alternate or even competing practices under this narrative, which Willig (2008, p. 113) describes as *counter-discourses*. Throughout the three repeated narratives I had identified, these *counter-discourses* were surprisingly most present within discussions of post-conflict reproduction, and they were mainly formed from the vantage points of professional and ordinary citizens’ discourse. An example of this is reflected in the comment section under the r/armenia subreddit post, where one user states that “...The notion of breeding people for war is also hugely flawed; we don't live in the stone ages anymore.” ([deleted], 2023). Though Willig (2008) and Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2017) both argue that discourses aligned with the dominant truth claims are those that are most often legitimized, such *counter-discourses* demonstrate how the prevailing order of discourse in Armenia is still at times challenged.

Across the texts, this discourse that repeats this narrative of post-conflict reproduction as national responsibility is expressed through all the analyzed vantage points, though they are unequally distributed. For example, this discourse is least evident from the vantage points of political and religious discourses produced by PM Nikol Pashinyan and Catholicos Karekin II. This is because discourses limit both what can be said and be legitimized within the order of a society’s discourse, as well as *who* can speak and contribute to the knowledge production under a certain discourse (Willig, 2008, p. 116). However, this is not to say that these discursive sites do not have any authority within this discourse whatsoever. Instead, these institutions express these discourses implicitly through wider socially-situated references, with statements such as “...the realization of our martyrs' unaccomplished goals should be a stimulus for living and creating for them and all of us.” (Pashinyan, 2022). In contrast to these institutional discursive sites, the diffused power/knowledge relations of this discourse are more

explicitly evident in media and ordinary citizens' discourse, with speakers openly constructing connections between pronatalism, preferences for sons, and replacing deceased soldiers post-war. The overall association between childbearing and national reconstruction under this discourse is most pronounced in its sense of urgency. Across the data sample, this discourse most commonly produces pressure of collective responsibility through national reconstruction post-conflict, as well as reinforces the veneration of parents willing to birth more children. As previously mentioned, while discourses both construct and disseminate meaning, these meanings can in turn reproduce and legitimize these discourses and maintain the relation between power and knowledge within a discursive society (Willig, 2008; Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017). Applying Post-Conflict Demography (Brezis, 2025; Mavisakalyan & Minasyan, 2023), as Armenian society is already engaged with the construction of discourses surrounding gender roles and militarization, the presence of discourse surrounding the grave loss of life, especially among soldiers, reinforces these pre-existing discursive realities. Thus, the cyclical nature of this discourse's effects further entrench post-war Armenian society's son bias discourse in the constructions of childbearing, motherhood, the resurrection and replacement of soldiers, national recovery, and a need for defense.

Chapter 6: Limitations and Avenues for Further Research

While I realized the overall aim and purpose of investigating the language of son bias in post-war Armenia through my FDA design and layered theoretical framework, this study follows a long list of limitations. As with many studies on densely packed issues such as this, my close analysis of son bias language in Armenia had been met with numerous time constraints. Due to the limited time on my hands while conducting my research, I had to omit several additional or key elements that could have strengthened the base of my study. For example, I had originally planned to conduct an open-ended survey via Google Forms as a supplementary feature of my research. The goal of these surveys was to gain additional insight on certain common phrases and sentiments throughout Armenia and its regions that would display clear signs of son bias, such as phrases that would associate wanting to birth more children with needing soldiers in the Armenian military. Additionally, in terms of the lack of time, I was unable to focus my FDA on a large corpus for analysis. As mentioned in previous chapters, while FDA does not require large corpora for meaningful analysis, having more material to work with would have generated more accurate depictions of son bias, social militarisation, the interchangeable use of the terms “woman” and “mother”, and widespread incentives for increasing the birth rate in Armenia.

On another note, while mapping out this study throughout the research process, I had also found that another great limitation was the lack of resources necessary to conduct a more thorough examination of son bias discourse. While some news articles and online discussions, such as those within the online community of Reddit, aided my work in researching discourse at the ordinary citizen level, I noticed a greater lack of discourse generated from women and girls that have been the victims of son bias in Armenia. While a greater scope of perspectives on the matter would have been incredibly useful for the purpose of this study, especially considering the bases of incorporating Sandra Harding’s (2004) Standpoint Theory within my research, gathering material on direct contact with son bias would have proved to be a time-consuming and nearly impossible task. This is mostly due to the phenomenon of *social desirability bias* within qualitative research, as highlighted by Schief, et al. (2021) within my Literature Review chapter. Finally, in this same spirit of lacking resources, I had realized that the lack of corpora written in the Armenian language could have generated biased or less accurate results. As I am not equipped with translating the official dialect of Eastern Armenian texts to English myself, I had to focus strictly on texts that had already been translated into English or texts that were originally written in English. In the case of the already-translated texts, such as the official statements made by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, I have conducted this language-based research with the limitation of the full meaning behind the texts being lost in translation. As such, while I analyzed the language that

was presented to me in the English texts, they may not reveal the full accuracy of meaning behind the language used when originally written or spoken in Eastern Armenian.

For further research that would utilize FDA to analyze post-war son bias in Armenia, I would firstly suggest to structure the focus on a more mixed corpus that would incorporate both primary and secondary sources. While FDA is not a research method intended to achieve an absolute truth and results are highly dependent on the researcher conducting the study, analyzing diverse corpora could yield more rounded results. For the sake of greater accuracy of the language used, I would additionally suggest that future research into this topic should be done with untranslated texts, whether they be in Eastern Armenian, English, or Russian. As this study follows a linguistic-based approach, analyzing the language used in its most raw form would help retain a lot of the meaning that would otherwise be lost in translation. For the purposes of studies utilizing sources in their original language, I would also suggest employing the help of a translator or professional translating tools that would be able to retain the accuracy of the language so that the annexes of the texts are accessible to a wider range of readers. Thus, I would most strongly suggest a more fleshed out corpus and attention to original linguistic details for any future work that would expand on this study.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In conclusion, this study set out to examine the Second Nagorno Karabakh War's role in stimulating son bias discourse across Armenia within the timeframe of late 2020 until the time of writing. This thesis has identified the discursive conventions and practices of preferences for sons, deep-seeded traditional gender roles, and demographic fears that are constructed through the discourses within post-conflict Armenian society. While previous scholarship has focused on the phenomenon of post-conflict son bias in Armenia through sociological, legal, and demographic lenses, this thesis has utilized FDA, as set in a layered theoretical framework, to approach it as an investigation of socially-situated language. By analyzing a shared, overarching narrative of post-conflict son bias in Armenia from vastly different sites of power, this study has demonstrated that discursive power relations can be constructed and influenced by all levels of society.

The findings of this thesis suggest that this post-war son bias discourse constitutes several interconnected narratives that are reproduced and repeated across Armenian society. Specifically, this thesis has placed significant focus on the main three dominant narratives that span from political to ordinary citizens' discourse, which are labeled as: "Sons as National Pride and Necessity", "Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility", and "Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility". Additionally, the findings illustrate that these repeated narratives are often constructed and expressed across the society of discourse in Armenia using varied linguistic expressions that either explicitly or implicitly express these narratives. All together these sites of power and their ways of constructing the aforementioned narratives collectively reinforce the dominant shared narratives of gender roles and identity, demographic compensation, and national recovery. True to the Foucauldian nature of this research, this study presents these varied discourses as greatly interconnected in nature, as they both produce and reinforce the already existing narratives in Armenia through. No discourse or standpoint has been analyzed in isolation or as independent from the overall discussion of post-conflict son bias in Armenia.

Breaking down the functions of this study's theoretical framework, Judith Butler's (2004) conception of gender as performance has provided the theoretical basis of how certain gender roles are assigned to biological predispositions of men and women. As applied to this study, this concept has shown how repeated narratives have constructed and reproduced socially viable definitions of "humanness" for Armenian femininity and masculinity. Across the data sample, sons are consistently constructed in light of the objects of "martyrs", "soldiers", and "defenders". On the other hand, women are repeatedly constructed through the objects of "mothers" for the most part. The traditional Armenian

gender roles only further highlight the subject positions these objects are assigned to, with “martyrs” and “soldiers” often being assigned the positions of “patriotic” and “sacrificial” and “mothers” mostly being expressed as “submissive”, “grieving”, and overall “mothers of future children”. While the findings of this study state that these gendered ideals have been long-established throughout Armenian history, the aftermath of the Second Nagorno Karabakh War has pushed these discourses further into the forefront.

Sandra Harding’s (2004) Standpoint Theory has also played a pivotal role throughout this study’s theoretical conception. Harding (2004) has been used here to illustrate how the discourses that express the three dominant narratives that are based on shared truths can be constructed from different vantage points. For example, while Armenian PM Nikol Pashinyan’s (2026) speech frames national recovery from the war through collective civilian responsibility, ordinary citizens across the data sample directly express demographic concerns through personal experiences and suggestions of greater nationwide reproduction. This has demonstrated the Foucauldian objective of analyzing power/knowledge relations by highlighting that knowledge is not reproduced by a single speaker or institution, and is instead diffused across multiple discursive sites and maintained through repetition. Additionally, the employment of Post-Conflict Demography as an analytical framework influenced by Brezis (2025) and Mavisakalyan and Minasyan (2023) has also influenced the theoretical foundations of this study. The studies under this framework have demonstrated that post-conflict population losses can intensify societal preferences for sons, especially where the loss of military-age men are of particular concern. As applied to this study’s FDA design, this framework has highlighted the repeated references that discuss post-conflict national recovery and the framing of reproduction as a viable solution in the spirit of demographic compensation.

Interestingly, the analysis has also highlighted several *counter-discourses* against the dominant repeated narratives. According to these findings, cases of professional and ordinary citizens’ discourse in Armenia are the discursive sites that stray the farthest from the dominant understandings laid out in this thesis. The political discourse of Pashinyan’s (2022) speech further highlights this departure from the discursive norms regarding women’s social identity and functioning in Armenian society through references to women’s participation in public life. Compared to the rest of the data sample, however, these alternate discourses are quite limited. Despite this, the presence of these counter-discourses across the texts has shown that son bias discourse in Armenia is not entirely uniform and is oftentimes challenged.

The findings within this study contribute to the previous scholarship on post-conflict son bias in Armenia by providing a discursive analysis of the language used, which has been quite absent from existing studies regarding similar accounts. While there have been several existing accounts on Armenia's skewed SRB, the sociological implications of militarized masculinity, and the demographic consequences of conflict, this thesis has emphasized that analyzing discourses provides the mechanism through which son bias is normalized and maintained. Ultimately, this thesis makes the claim that the relationship between nationwide son bias and the Second Nagorno Karabakh War is not only limited to the demographic consequences of the war. The aftermath of the conflict in Armenia has intensified the discursive economy, in which sons are closely associated with soldierhood and defense, women are associated with giving birth to sons and embracing motherhood, and reproduction is framed as a nationwide collective responsibility. The war may have ended, but the frozen conflict and its consequences echo across Armenian society today.

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Annex- Codebook

Text 1:

Quote	Narrative	Constructed Object	Subject Position	Discursive Practice	Power and Knowledge	Discursive Effect
“There is great love in this popular formulation, in our reality there is great love for the martyrs who gave their lives for the sake of the Fatherland, and great responsibility.”	Sons as National Pride and Necessity	Martys; Fatherland; responsibility	Responsible citizens, sacrificial martyrs	Framing sacrifice and national obligations through a moral lens	Vantage point: state actor Regime of truth: Sacrifice is ground for citizens’ moral obligations to the nation	Normalize collective responsibility
“Each fallen soldier becomes a member of the family of each of us, and this is due to the obvious awareness	Sons as National Pride and Necessity	Soldier; family; citizens	Fallen/sacrificial soldier; national family member; saved citizens	Collectivizing grief of the entire nation for all soldiers; glorifying sacrifice	Vantage point: state actor Regime of truth: Sacrifice is ground for citizens’ moral	Reinforces collective identity through familial lens

that he died for us, for the sake of each of us.”					obligations to the nation	
“Remembering those who died for the sake of the Fatherland and bowing before them is our duty, this is the reason why a state day of remembrance has been established.”	Sons as National Pride and Necessity	Fatherland; state; martyrs; remembrance	Fallen/sacrificial martyrs; dutiful citizens; saved nation	Collectivizing grief of the entire nation for all soldiers; glorifying sacrifice; institutionalizing and collectivizing memory	Vantage point: state actor Regime of truth: Remembrance is a national obligation	Reinforces remembrance as a marker of citizenship
“But from this day on, our responsibility does not decrease, but on the contrary, the responsibility	Sons as National Pride and Necessity; Post-Conflict Reproduction as National	Responsibility; martyrs; sacrifices	Responsible citizens, sacrificial martyrs	Moralizing collective responsibility	Vantage point: state actor Regime of truth: Sacrifice is ground for citizens’	Produces pressure of collective responsibility

y increases to ensure that the sacrifices of our martyrs are not in vain.”	Responsibility				moral obligations to the nation	
“A clear and unequivocal answer has been given to this question: our martyrs fell so that the Republic of Armenia could rise.”	Sons as National Pride and Necessity	Martyrs; Republic of Armenia	Sacrificial martyrs; saved nation	Glorifying sacrifice	Vantage point: state actor Regime of truth: Statehood is brought about through sacrifice	Reinforces that state’s survival is due to sacrifice
“And, consequently, the state - a developed, strong, secure, prosperous and happy Republic of Armenia - is the most significant	Sons as National Pride and Necessity/ Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility	State; Republic of Armenia; memory; martyrs; descendents	Saved nation; strong and secure nation; remembered martyrs; future generations	Linking sacrifice to national continuity	Vantage point: state actor Regime of truth: Statehood is brought about through sacrifice; Future	Reinforces that state’s survival is due to sacrifice, as well as demographic continuity

monument perpetuating the memory of our martyrs and giving life to their descendants. ”					descendent s should also sacrifice and honor sacrifice in return	
“My dear brothers and sisters, you have not fallen in vain, your sacrifice has created a new consciousne ss, your sacrifice has opened our eyes, clarified our minds, strengthened our will to strengthen our state, to build a state-	-	Brothers and sisters; martyrs; state; prosperity; security; happiness; peace; Republic of Armenia; citizens	Sacrificial martyrs; dutiful citizens; strengthening nation-state	Linking sacrifice to national continuity; glorifying sacrifice; moralizing collective responsibility	Vantage point: state actor Regime of truth: Statehood is brought about through sacrifice; sacrifice is ground for citizens’ moral obligations to the nation	Reinforces that state’s survival is due to sacrifice; normalizes collective responsibil ity

centered path, which is a path to prosperity, security, happiness, and peace for the Republic of Armenia and its citizens.”						
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Text 2: <https://www.primeminister.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2022/04/07/Nikol-Pashinyan-Congratulations/>

Quote	Narrative	Constructed Object	Subject Position	Discursive Practice	Power and Knowledge	Discursive Effect
“Armenia is, perhaps, an exceptional country in terms of the existence of a women's month. This has happened due to some	-	Armenia; state; women; population	Unique state; Armenian women	Framing the celebration of women through a logical, demographic lens	Vantage point: state actor Regime of truth: Celebrating women in Armenia is unique due to	Positions Armenian women as essential to the nation

circumstances, but there is a big agenda in this, because the majority of the population of our country are women.”					certain (conflict) situations	
“...Women need to be fully involved in all spheres of public life, from economy to public administration, in the law enforcement and security spheres...”	-	Women; state; public life	Active woman-citizen	Mobilizing women’s participation in public life	Vantage point: state actor Regime of truth: Armenian women are necessary for state-building	Reinforces and enlargens women’s public responsibilities
“...because if we do not involve the potential of women in	Post-Conflict Reproduction as National	Women; potential; opportunities; state	Potential/capable women; active women-citizen; limited opportunities	Linking women’s potential public participation	Vantage point: state actor	Reinforces women’s public responsibilities; frames

these spheres, it means that we are using half of the already limited opportunities for the development of the country.”	Responsibility			on with state development; necessitating Armenian women’s participation	Regime of truth: Armenian women are necessary for state-building	Armenian women as resources for state-building
“...If we add to this the exceptional role of women in solving demographic problems, it will become clearer why I say that the role of women in overcoming our situation is crucial.”	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility; Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility	Women; problems; nation	Mothers; problem-solving women, demographic problems	Framing women’s importance to society through a demographic lens; pronatalism	Vantage point: state actor Regime of truth: Armenian women are necessary for solving demographic problems	Reinforces women’s reproductive responsibility

“Taking today’s opportunity, I extend my warmest words to the mothers, wives, sisters and daughters of our brothers martyred for the defense of the Motherland ...”	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility; Sons as National Pride and Necessity	Mothers; wives; sisters; daughters; brothers; martyrs; Motherland	Grieving women; sacrificial martyrs; male soldiers; saved Motherland	Gendering sacrifice as men as sacrifice for women’s and motherland’s sake; collectivizing grief	Vantage point: state actor Regime of truth: Women’s identity and social role are dependent on soldiers’ sacrifice	Positions women’s identity and role within Armenian society in tandem with men’s identity and role
“...emphasizing that they (women) are the full addressees of what I said today and the realization of our martyrs' unaccomplished goals should be a stimulus for living and	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility; Sons as National Pride and Necessity; Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility	Women; martyrs; nation	Grieving/persevering women; living memory of martyrs; nation-builders	Gendering sacrifice of men as sacrifice for women’s and motherland’s sake; collectivizing grief; calling to rebuild the nation	Vantage point: state actor Regime of truth: Women’s identity and social role are dependent on soldiers’ sacrifice; all	Frames Armenian women as resources for state-building; positions women’s identity and role within Armenian society in tandem with men’s

creating for them and all of us.”					citizens should be state-builders in honor of soldiers’ sacrifice	identity and role
“Dear women, mothers, sisters, daughters, may this day of motherhood and beauty open a new page of optimism and spring for our country.”	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility	Women; mothers; sisters; daughters; motherhood; beauty; optimism; country	Beautiful mothers; national hope	Linking women’s identity with motherhood, beauty; and optimism for the nation	Vantage point: state actor Regime of truth: Armenian women should be celebrated for their roles as mothers	Positions women’s identity and role within Armenian society through the lens of motherhood and beauty

Text 3: <https://www.armenianchurch.org/en/news/the-message-of-his-holiness-karekin-ii-catholicos-of-all-armenians-on-international-women%E2%80%99s-day/10011>

Quote	Narrative	Constructed Object	Subject Position	Discursive Practice	Power and Knowledge	Discursive Effect
“The role of a woman is	Motherhood as Gendered	Woman; family;	Irreplaceable women;	Gendering women’s	Vantage point:	Positions women’s

irreplaceable in the strength of the family, in educating our children with Christian values and patriotic traditions.”	Responsibility	children; values; traditions	mothers to future children; Christian mothers; Christian children; traditional patriotic nation	role in society through motherhood and Christianity	religious actor Regime of truth:	identity and role within Armenian society through the lens of motherhood and childrearing
“Women are the embodiment of selfless devotion, love and tenderness in our lives.”	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility	Women; selflessness; love; citizens	Selfless caring women	Gendering women’s role in society as caring for others	Vantage point: religious actor Regime of truth: Women are selfless caretakers	Reinforces women’s social roles as caretakers of the citizens
“In these difficult post-war days, when our country continues to be stormed by internal and external	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility; Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility	Post-war days; country; challenges; citizens; cross; resurrection	Post-war nation; struggling nation; victorious resurrection	Moralizing collective responsibility	Vantage point: religious actor Regime of truth: National resurrection	Produces pressure of collective responsibility through national reconstruction post-conflict

challenges, we have confidence that our people will once again pass the path of their cross towards a victorious resurrection.”					n through collective participation can alleviate the challenges of post-war Armenia	
“Dear mothers and sisters, we wish that you meet this holiday of reverence with hope and comfort.”	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility	Mothers; sisters; holiday; hope; comfort	Mothers and sisters of the nation; celebrated women	Framing the holiday through a lens of perseverance for mothers and sisters	Vantage point: religious actor Regime of truth: Women’s Day is a day of hope and comfort for women who have some connection with men	Reinforces collective identity for women through a male-centered lens

“We pray that the Lord will grant the comfort of the Holy Spirit to our mothers and sisters who have passed through the hardships of war...”	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility; Sons as National Pride and Necessity	Lord; comfort; Holy Spirit; mothers; sisters; war	Powerful Lord; grieving women; wartime difficulties	Framing Women’s Day as a religious day of comfort for those affected by war	Vantage point: religious actor Regime of truth: Women’s Day is a day of hope and comfort for women who have some connection with men	Reinforces collective identity for women through a male-centered and religious lens
“...as well as strength and vigor to all our people to build the bright and prosperous life of the homeland with willing love.”	Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility	Strength; vigor; citizens; life; homeland; love	Weakened citizens; potential for the homeland; potential for the citizens	Framing Women’s Day as a religious day of comfort for those affected by war; moralizing collective responsibility	Vantage point: religious actor Regime of truth: This holiday is a day for all Armenians to rebuild the nation post-war	Normalizes collective responsibility for the sake of nationhood

Text 4: <https://alphanews.am/en/may-the-holy-mother-of-god-continue-to-inspire-our-mothers-and-sisters-catholics-of-all-armenians/>

Quote	Narrative	Constructed Object	Subject Position	Discursive Practice	Power and Knowledge	Discursive Effect
“The Gospel episode of the Annunciation brings us the joyous news of the Savior’s arrival into the world and portrays the humble, obedient and faithful image of the Blessed Virgin Mary...”	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility; Sons as National Pride and Necessity	Gospel; Annunciation; news; Savior; world; portrayal of perfection; Blessed Virgin Mary	Truthful Gospel; Joyous news; Savior as the messenger; humble, obedient, and faithful Virgin Mary	Framing the Annunciation through the dichotomy of the Savior and the Virgin Mary	Vantage point: religious actor Regime of truth: The arrival of the Savior in the Gospel is joyous and the Virgin Mary is to be revered for her obedient and faithful image	Reinforces the gendered dichotomy of the Savior’s joyous arrival and the obedient image of the Virgin Mary
“who became a blessed testament to devotion to	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility	Testament; God; Armenian women; generations	Revered Virgin Mary; Blessed Virgin	Linking Armenian women’s identity with	Vantage point: religious actor	Reinforces Armenian women’s social roles as obedient

God and has been a good example for Armenian women throughout the ages.”			Mary; dominant God; submissive Armenian women	the Virgin Mary	Regime of truth: Armenian women should look to the Virgin Mary as a role model of womanhood	and submissive caretakers of the citizens; reinforces collective identity for women through a male-centered and religious lens
“On this day of spiritual renewal in our churches, we bless the women who are expecting the joy of motherhood.”	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility	Renewal; churches; women; joy; motherhood	Spiritual renewal; mothers; joyous motherhood; expecting mothers	Linking Armenian women’s identity with motherhood	Vantage point: religious actor Regime of truth: Armenian women should be celebrated for their roles as mothers or expecting mothers	Positions women’s identity and role within Armenian society through the lens of motherhood and Christianity

“May the birth of new children strengthen our nation, and may our sons grow with God’s blessing, under the loving care of their parents, in the spirit of faith and devotion to the Motherland.”	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility; Sons as National Pride and Necessity; Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility	Children; nation; sons; God; care; parents; faith; Motherland	Nation-builders; God-honoring sons; patriotic sons	Moralizing collective responsibility of sons; Linking future children with national reconstruction; pronatalism	Vantage point: religious actor Regime of truth: Future Armenian children should rebuild the nation and be devoted to God and Armenia	Produces pressure of collective responsibility through patriotic national reconstruction
“May they also be nurtured in accordance with the values of national identity.”	Sons as National Pride and Necessity	Sons; values; identity	Patriotic sons; national identity	Gendering men’s role in society through a patriotic lens	Vantage point: religious actor Regime of truth: Armenian sons should be patriotic	Reinforces Armenian men’s social roles through patriotism

“May the Blessed Virgin continue to be an inspiration to our mothers and sisters—a beacon of hope in God and a source of all virtues,”	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility	Blessed Virgin Mary; inspiration; mothers; sisters; hope; God; virtues	Inspirational Virgin Mary; pure mothers and sisters; virtuous God	Linking Armenian women’s identity with purity and obedience	Vantage point: religious actor Regime of truth: Armenian women should look to the Virgin Mary as a role model of womanhood	Reinforces Armenian women’s social roles as Christian, obedient, and submissive caretakers of the citizens
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Text 5: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/armenia-mothers-bereaved-war-offered-ivf>

Quote	Narrative	Constructed Object	Subject Position	Discursive Practice	Power and Knowledge	Discursive Effect
“Hasmik Qaryan is nine weeks pregnant with her second child. The 41-year-old doesn’t yet know the	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility; Post-Conflict Reproduction as National	Woman; pregnant; child; baby; boy; son; war	Hasmik Qaryan; expecting mother; second child; 41-year-old woman; expected boy; Samvel; late soldier; Second Nagorno Karabakh War	Glorifying sacrifice; Framing reproduction as a response to wartime loss; Linking	Vantage point: media Regime of truth: Childbirth is perceived to be a	Normalize collective responsibility; positions women’s perceived identity

baby's sex, but says that if she has a boy she will name him Samvel, after her only son who died in last year's Nagorny Karabkah war."	Responsibility; Sons as National Pride and Necessity			childbirth with post-conflict recovery	necessary response to wartime losses	and role within Armenian society through the lens of motherhood
"“I always dreamed of having a second child, but it didn't work out,” she said. “I promised my son a sister or a brother.”"	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility	Child; son; sister; brother	Wanted second child; son	Linking Armenian women's identity with motherhood	Vantage point: ordinary citizen and media Regime of truth: A woman's joy is anchored in childbearing	Positions women's identity and role within society through the lens of motherhood
"Qaryan became pregnant after six months of	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility; Sons	Qaryan; treatment; initiative; procedure; parents;	Pregnant woman; novel fertility treatment; Armenian initiative; free	Framing reproduction as a response to wartime	Vantage point: media	Normalizes collective responsibility;

fertility treatment under a new Armenian initiative that provides free procedures for parents who lost children during the 2020 war.”	as National Pride and Necessity; Post-Conflict Reproducti on as National Responsibi lity	children; war	procedures; bereaved parents; dead children; 2020 war	loss; Linking childbirth with post-conflict recovery	Regime of truth: Childbirth is perceived to be a necessary response to wartime losses by both the citizens and the state	positions women’s perceived identity and role within Armenian society through the lens of motherhood
““My Samvel was in intelligence, he had been in the army for a year-and-a-half when the war broke out,” she said, adding that he had voluntarily returned from studying abroad so as to enlist for	Sons as National Pride and Necessity	Samvel; intelligence; army; war; service	Lost son; voluntarily conscripted soldier; national service	Glorifying sacrifice; Gendering men’s perceived role in society through a patriotic lens	Vantage point: ordinary citizen and media Regime of truth: A son’s voluntary sacrifice was for his national service	Reinforces Armenian men’s perceived social roles through patriotism and soldierhood

his national service.”						
““They wanted babies,” he continued. “These people have incredible strength of purpose. We realised that we should help them...””	Post-Conflict Reproducti on as National Responsibi lity	Babies; people; strength; purpose	Wanted future babies; strong and purposeful citizens	Moralizin g collective responsibi lity; pronatalis m	Vantage point: professiona l and media Regime of truth: The citizens’ desires for children is commenda ble and is worthy of aid in the process	Normalize s collective responsibi lity for the sake of nationhoo d; reinforces the veneration of parents willing to birth more children
“Prior to this, only women under the age of 42 were allowed access to fertility treatment in Armenia. However, as the age of women who lost sons	Motherhoo d as Gendered Responsibi lity; Sons as National Pride and Necessity; Post-Conflict Reproducti on as National	Women; treatment; Armenia; sons; war; ministry; limit	Young women; fertility treatment; Armenia; older women; lost sons; war; ministry of health; increased age limit	Framing reproducti on as a response to wartime loss; linking childbirth with post-conflict recovery; linking Armenian	Vantage point: media Regime of truth: The Armenian government decided to raise the age limit of those that can receive	Positions Armenian women’s perceived identity and role within society through the lens of motherhoo d

during the war generally exceeded this, the ministry of health has changed the age limit.”	Responsibility			women’s perceived identity with motherhood	fertility treatment due to the age of women that lost sons during the war	
““We take into account the woman’s health condition and contraindications, and then take the necessary steps. You know, most of the women who come to us dream of having a son, they say, ‘Doctor, please give us our son back.’””	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility; Sons as National Pride and Necessity; Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility	Women; health; steps; son; doctor	Grieving women; women’s health; necessary steps; wanted sons; doctor	Linking future children with national reconstruction and the resurrection of lost sons; linking Armenian women’s identity with motherhood; Framing grief as a need for sons	Vantage point: professional Regime of truth: Armenian mothers dream of having male children to replace their lost sons	Positions women’s identity and role within Armenian society in tandem with men’s identity and role

“Family psychologist Naira Kharatyan acknowledged that a woman who becomes pregnant again after losing a child may face psychological challenges.”	-	Psychologist; Naira Kharatyan; woman; child; challenges	Family psychologist/professional; pregnant woman; bereaved woman; lost child; psychological challenges	Framing childbearing after losing children as damaging through a professional lens	Vantage point: media Regime of truth: Professional consensus on women who become pregnant after losing children states that it is psychologically damaging	Produces a counter-understanding of women’s post-loss pregnancies through scientific fact; challenges the dominant veneration of mothers wishing to replace lost sons
““The victim cannot be identified as a newborn child; these are different people,” she continued, adding, “In this case, we do work so that the	-	Victim; child; people; mothers	Lost victim; future newborn child; bereaved expecting mothers	Framing reproduction as not being a viable response to wartime loss	Vantage point: professional and media Regime of truth: Expecting mothers should understand that the	Challenges the dominant veneration of mothers wishing to replace lost sons

mother understands that a new person was born, and not the dead person.””					child that they will birth is not a continuation of the life of their deceased son	
““We are not talking about one or two victims,” Kharatyan continued. “Thousands were killed, it was a national disaster. In this case, there was no alternative. A whole generation rose to defend their homeland. An entire generation	Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility	Victims; Kharatya n; thousands ; disaster; generations; homeland	Thousand of victims; lost generation; defended homeland	Framing reproduction as not being a viable response to wartime loss; framing the loss of life during the war as a nationwide tragedy	Vantage point: professional and media Regime of truth: The extensive loss of life during the war cannot be easily replaced	Challenges the dominant understanding that childbearing post-conflict can replace those that lost their lives

needs to be rebuilt”.”						
““Armenia has a demographic problem. We are considered an aging nation,” Kharatyan concluded.”	Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility	Armenia; problem; nation; Kharatyan	Demographic problem; aging Armenia	Linking Armenia’s demographic issue with the greater prominence of older generations over those that are younger	Vantage point: professional and media Regime of truth: The prominence of Armenia’s older generations as opposed to the younger ones pose a demographic problem	Positions Armenia’s demographic imbalance from the perspective of unequal age distribution
“Gayane, not her real name, has been trying to get pregnant under the state-sponsored scheme for	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility; Sons as National Pride and Necessity; Post-Conflict	Gayane; pregnant; scheme; months; son; Karabakh ; War	Pregnant woman; bereaved woman; state-sponsored scheme; deceased son; Nagorno Karabakh War	Moralizing reproduction as a form of demographic compensation	Vantage point: media Regime of truth: The Armenian government’s IVF treatment	Reinforces women’s perceived reproductive responsibility

the last eight months but with no success. Her son was also killed during the last Karabakh war.”	Reproduction as National Responsibility				has been aiding mothers like Gayane who lost their sons during the war	
““Our son must be reborn. It doesn't matter if we have a girl or a boy, I feel that with the birth of a new baby I will alleviate the longing for my fallen hero.””	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility; Sons as National Pride and Necessity; Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility	Son; girl; boy; baby; hero	Resurrected son; future child; new baby; fallen hero	Glorifying sacrifice; framing reproduction as a response to wartime loss	Vantage point: ordinary citizen Regime of truth: Birthing a new child will recover the loss of a son	Reinforces women's perceived reproductive responsibility; positions childbearing as a relief for grief

Text 6: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/post-war-trauma-prompts-armenias-sex-imbalance>

Quote	Narrative	Constructed Object	Subject Position	Discursive Practice	Power and Knowledge	Discursive Effect

“Ani hopes that the child she is expecting means a new start.”	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility	Ani; child; start	Expecting woman; new child; fresh start	Framing reproduction as a form of demographic compensation	Vantage point: media Regime of truth: Birthing a new child may bring a new start to an Armenian woman	Positions childbearing as a fresh start
“The 48-year-old’s world was shattered on the autumn day in 2020 when her 19-year-old son was killed fighting in the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorny	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility; Sons as National Pride and Necessity	Woman; world; day; 2020; son; war; Armenia; Azerbaijan; Nagorno Karabakh region	Bereaved mother; shattered world; deceased soldier; Armenia-Azerbaijan war; Nagorno Karabakh region	Framing the loss of life during the war as a personal tragedy	Vantage point: media Regime of truth: The loss of her son during the war shattered an Armenian woman’s world	Reinforces the grief following the war

Karabakh region.”						
“Desperate to fill the void he left she sought to replace him with another child - and she wanted it to be a boy.”	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility; Sons as National Pride and Necessity	Void; woman; son; child; boy	Emotional void; deceased son; replacement child; future boy	Framing reproduction as a response to wartime loss; framing hope as a male child	Vantage point: media Regime of truth: A mother believes she will recover her loss through the birth of a new boy	Reinforces the Armenian conception of motherhood through the birth of male children
“She cannot say whether she would have carried on with the pregnancy if she had known the baby was a girl.”	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility; Sons as National Pride and Necessity	Woman; pregnancy; baby; girl	Pregnant woman; baby girl	Framing the possible birth of a female child as a taboo	Vantage point: media Regime of truth: The woman does not wish to comment on whether or not she would have carried on	Produces perceived pressure for birthing male children

					with the pregnancy if the fetus was female	
““I had double feelings: I wished it was a boy, it turned out to be a girl...””	Sons as National Pride and Necessity	Feelings; boy; girl	Double feelings; hopeful boy as an outcome; unfortunate female child	Linking female children with disappointment	Vantage point: ordinary citizen Regime of truth: The birth of a girl is unfortunate news	Reinforces perceived pressure for birthing male children
“Ani fell into depression but was determined to have another child.”	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility	Ani; depression; child	Depressed mother; wishful second child	Framing grief as a need for sons	Vantage point: media Regime of truth: The birth of a female child is not enough to satisfy the longing for a deceased son	Reinforces perceived pressure for birthing children

“Ani’s desire for a boy is not isolated. Nearly 4,000 Armenian servicemen died in the 44 day-war and many grieving parents have sought to have boys to replace their dead children.”	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility; Sons as National Pride and Necessity; Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility	Ani; boy; servicemen; war; parents; boys; children	Hopeful woman; Armenian servicemen; 44 day-war; grieving parents; boys as replacement ; dead children	Framing grief as a need for sons; collectivizing grief	Vantage point: media Regime of truth: Families of deceased soldiers are trying to reproduce sons as replacements	Reinforces perceived pressure for birthing children; normalizes collective responsibility
“Experts maintain that the post-war trauma may have played a role in the rise of Armenia’s sex imbalance at birth after	Sons as National Pride and Necessity; Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility	Experts; trauma; Armenia; imbalance; birth; years	Experts; post-war trauma; Armenia’s imbalanced sex ratio; years of stability	Linking post-war trauma with rise of Armenia’s high SRB	Vantage point: media Regime of truth: Professional opinion states that post-war trauma could be a cause for	Positions the national SRB as a consequence of post-war trauma

years of stability.”					Armenia’s reemerging sex imbalance	
“The conservative, patriarchal society values boys over girls and with technology allowing the sex of the baby to be known at an early stage, some families opt for an abortion in the case of a female fetus.”	Sons as National Pride and Necessity	Society; boys; girls; technology; sex; baby; stage; families; abortion; female; fetus	Conservative, patriarchal society; high valued boys; low valued girls; sex-screening technologies; SSA; female fetus	Linking SSA with conservative and patriarchal societal values	Vantage point: media Regime of truth: SSA occurs due to patriarchal values and the availability of sex-screening technologies	Reinforces perceived pressure for birthing male children; positions female fetuses as undesirable in Armenian society
““It is a problem of national mentality; the society,	-	Problem; mentality; society; region; sons;	National mentality problem; biased society;	Framing son preference as a matter of national mentality	Vantage point: professional and media	Challenges the preferences for sons by linking it to

both here and in the wider region, favours sons over daughters as the continuation of the family,””		daughters; family	valued sons; low valued daughters; family continuation		Regime of truth: Sons are valued over daughters due to societal norms	nationwide societal bias
“Awareness campaigns and measures like announcing the sex of the baby at a later stage managed to slowly contain the imbalance, which dropped in the late 2010s. Then, in 2020, the war broke	-	Campaigns; sex; baby; stage; imbalance; 2010s; 2020; war; country	Awareness campaigns; sex of the baby; reduced imbalance; 2020 war; traumatized country	Linking the reduction of the SRB to nationwide awareness; framing the 2020 war as an issue for this controlled imbalance	Vantage point: media Regime of truth: While the SRB and rates of SSA were decreasing, the 2020 war served as a traumatic disruption	Positions the high national SRB as a consequence of post-war trauma

out, leaving a country traumatised.”						
“According to psychologist Hovakimyan, mothers who have lost a son may seek to have a male child to fill the gap left by their dead child.”	Sons as National Pride and Necessity	Psychologist ; Hovakimyan; mothers; son; child; gap	Psychological specialist; grieving mothers; deceased sons; future male child; male child as replacement	Framing grief as a need for sons among mothers	Vantage point: media Regime of truth: Mothers are trying to have male children to replace their deceased sons	Reinforces perceived desire for birthing male children as a method of coping
“The defeat in the 2020 war and the increasingly volatile security situation along the border with Azerbaijan are thought	Sons as National Pride and Necessity	Defeat; war; security; border; Azerbaijan; increase; respondents; sons; defenders; motherland	Defeated 2020 war; volatile security situation; Azerbaijani border; increased son-biased respondents ; “defenders	Framing nationwide grief as a perceived need for sons	Vantage point: media Regime of truth: The loss in the 2020 war led to an increase in son bias	Positions heightened son bias as a consequence of losing the war

to be behind the sharp increase of respondents who see sons as “defenders of the motherland” .”			of the motherland ”			
““My firstborn, my daughter, is five years old. My husband adores her, he says he wouldn't exchange her for 1,000 boys. But his family dreamed of a grandson and he kept saying that our second child had to	Sons as National Pride and Necessity	Firstborn; daughter; husband; boys; family; grandson; child; boy; Alla	Firstborn daughter; loving father; valued daughter; hypothetical boys; son-biased family; hypothetical second child as son	Framing birthing sons as a duty	Vantage point: ordinary citizen and media Regime of truth: A mother's in-laws place pressure to produce sons	Produces perceived pressure for birthing sons

be a boy,” Alla (not her real name), told IWPR.”						
“Alla’s in- laws repeatedly told her that a woman’s duty was to give birth to a boy child to continue the family name.”	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibilit y; Sons as National Pride and Necessity	Alla; in- laws; woman; boy; child; family; name	Son-biased in-laws; dutiful motherhood ; hopeful male child; family lineage	Linking sons to familial continuity: gendering women’s role in society through motherhood	Vantage point: media Regime of truth: Women are being expected to birth sons to continue to the family name	Produces perceived pressure for birthing sons
““The topic was discussed so much that I was inclined to think that our second child ought to be a boy. When I got pregnant	Sons as National Pride and Necessity	Topic; child; boy; pregnant; girl	Second child; hopeful male child; unexpected female child	Framing having daughters as a perceived disappointme nt	Vantage point: ordinary citizen Regime of truth: The birth of a girl is unexpected after	Reinforces the perceived value of male children over female children

two years ago, I found out it was a girl... We were not expecting a girl.””					hoping for a boy	
““A boy was needed,” she recalled, adding, “I don’t want to talk too much about it. I had an abortion. I had to...””	Sons as National Pride and Necessity	Boy; abortion	Boy as a necessity; abortion as a necessary remedy	Framing having daughters as a perceived disappointment; moralizing SSA	Vantage point: ordinary citizen and media Regime of truth: An abortion was needed because she was not pregnant with the necessary boy	Produces perceived pressure for birthing sons; reinforces the perceived value of male children over female children
““...I committed a sin, I did it without realising it. I've gone to 1,000	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility	Sin; doctors; pregnant; God; punishment	Abortion as a sin; infertility as divine punishment	Linking women’s perceived identity with motherhood; framing infertility as a	Vantage point: ordinary citizen Regime of truth: The	Reinforces a woman’s identity through motherland and a

doctors, but I can't get pregnant. God punished me,””				punishment from God	abortion was a sin and infertility is the divine punishment	religious lens
“She said that her day starts and ends with a prayer, in the hope “to be forgiven and have another child”.”	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility	Woman; prayer; hope; forgiveness; child	Devout mother; forgiveness as hope; hopeful second child	Linking women’s perceived identity with motherhood; moralizing religious responsibility	Vantage point: media Regime of truth: Divine forgiveness is perceived as a possible way to become pregnant again	Reinforces women’s perceived identity through motherland and a religious lens
““We should learn to value girls, women should be valued in	-	Girls; women; society; conversations; selection	Socially valued girls/women; open conversations for prevention;	Mobilizing collective efforts for societal change against	Vantage point: professional and media Regime of truth: If	Challenges the dominant perception of women’s lesser value within

society. We need to have conversations about it, so that we can prevent the issue of gender-based selection,””			gender-based selective abortion	selective abortions	people learn to value women, then SSA can be prevented	society: frames gender equality as a means to reduce SSA
““The new child is the beginning of a new life and will not be a replacement for my lost boy...””	-	Child; life; replacement ; boy	New child as a new life; lost boy	Framing childbirth as a new start instead of replacement	Vantage point: professional Regime of truth: The birth of a new child cannot replace the deceased	Challenges the dominant perception of birthing new children to replace lost sons
““There is a need to change the mentality, to value the role of women.	-	Mentality; role; women; equality; issue	Patriarchal mentality; valued women; gender equality; sex	Mobilizing collective efforts for societal change against	Vantage point: professional and media Regime of truth: If	Challenges the dominant perception of women’s lesser value within

Gender equality will make the issue [sex selection at birth] disappear,” he told IWPR.”			selection at birth as an issue	selective abortions	people learn to value women, then SSA can be prevented	society: frames gender equality as a means to reduce SSA
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Text 7: https://www.reddit.com/r/armenia/comments/17kuzqg/fertility_rate_in_armenia/

Quote	Narrative	Constructed Object	Subject Position	Discursive Practice	Power and Knowledge	Discursive Effect
“Maybe there isn’t enough pronatalist policies? Or most of the younger generation especially females are focusing on their careers and thus having less time to build larger	Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility; Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility	Pronatalism; policies; generations; females; careers; time; families; the economy; people; years; children; border	Pronatalist policies; younger generations; career-focused females; ideal larger families; economic factors; 18-year old children	Pronatalism; framing women’s importance to society through a demographic lens	Vantage point: ordinary citizen Regime of truth: Armenia needs to have more pronatalist policies, women need to focus more on having	Normalizes collective responsibility; positions women’s identity and role within Armenian society through the lens of motherhood and family planning

families, economic factors might also factor into it, and most definitely people don't want to spend 18 years investing in their children to see them go die on the border."					larger families instead of careers, and the economy should be more favorable for the birth rate to go up.	
"...My advice to people who are concerned about this demographic issue is to do their own part instead of complaining about the current	Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility	People; demography; issues; situation; Armenia; family	Concerned people; demographic issues; current situation; Armenia; future family	Framing reproduction as a response to wartime loss; linking childbirth with post-conflict recovery; framing collective responsibility through immigration	Vantage point: ordinary citizen Regime of truth: Armenians who are concerned about the birth rate should move to	Normalizes collective responsibility

situation... If you have the means you should move to Armenia and try to build a family there.”					Armenia and create families	
“... Do people not realise how disastrous it is for a nation's security and economy when it depopulates like Armenia? Armenia needs a growing and young population to keep its economy growing,	Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility; Sons as National Pride and Necessity	People; nation; security; economy; Armenia; population; tax; army; country	Depopulation as a national disaster; young population; aided military; country as needing of defense	Framing reproduction as a response to wartime loss; linking childbirth with economic and security recovery; moralizing collective responsibility	Vantage point: ordinary citizen Regime of truth: Armenia needs a youth population for national defense	Reinforces collective responsibility; produces pressure for youth to defend Armenia

for continued tax revenues to fund the army and for people to staff the army and defend the country.”						
“Encouraging people to have more children is one of the most common sense ways to help the country in the long-run...”	Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility	People; children; country	Future children as means for aiding the country	Pronatalism; moralizing collective responsibility	Vantage point: ordinary citizen Regime of truth: People should have more children to save the country	Reinforces collective responsibility; produces pressure for youth to defend Armenia
“Low fertility rates are quite common in any modern	-	Fertility; society; people; war	Common low fertility; modern society; breeding people as	Framing low fertility as a common trait of modern societies; linking	Vantage point: ordinary citizen	Challenges the dominant notion of needing to reproduce

society though. The notion of breeding people for war is also hugely flawed; we don't live in the stone ages anymore.”			flawed and barbaric	pronatalism with barbarism	Regime of truth: Low fertility rates are normal and encouraging people to breed for wartime defense is barbaric	for national defense
“Maybe the recent situation will wake people up to have more kids, especially since people from artsakh have more kids.”	Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility	Situation; people; kids; Artsakh	Dire situation; large Artsakh families	Pronatalism; moralizing collective responsibility	Vantage point: ordinary citizen Regime of truth: The current situation of the state might prompt individuals to reproduce more	Reinforces collective responsibility; produces pressure to reproduce
“...If you think you,	Post-Conflict	Culture; language;	Few children as unpatriotic;	Pronatalism; moralizing	Vantage point:	Reinforces collective

your culture, your language, are not particularly valuable, and should stay as is, raise 3 children.... If you think that your culture is valuable, if you want revenge for your friends and compatriot who were killed raise more children.”	Reproduction as National Responsibility	children; revenge; friends; compatriots	valued culture/language; pronatalism as revenge; martyrs	collective responsibility ; Linking childbirth with post-conflict recovery	ordinary citizen Regime of truth: People who do not birth more children are unpatriotic	responsibility; produces pressure to reproduce
“...In a few years there must be more and more people with large	Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility	People; families; war; children; deserters; grandchildren	Large families as national survival and wartime defense; children-less	Pronatalism; moralizing collective responsibility ; linking childbirth with post-	Vantage point: ordinary citizen Regime of truth:	Reinforces collective responsibility; produces pressure to reproduce

families, who are vocal that what they are doing is the most important part of the war, that people who refuse to raise more children are in fact deserters, that if we want our grandchildren to be safe we must make sure that there are 100 million of them.”			traitors; safe grandchildren	conflict recovery; framing childless individuals as deserters of the nation	Having large families will ensure national continuity	for national continuity
“...I have always hated the idea of having kids but if it is	Post-Conflict Reproduction as National	Kids; Armenia; priorities	Reproduction as national continuity; national continuity as a priority	Pronatalism; moralizing collective responsibility	Vantage point: ordinary citizen	Reinforces collective responsibility; produces pressure to

gonna help save Armenia, then it should be one of our priorities...”	Responsibility				Regime of truth: Having children should be a priority to maintain Armenia’s survival	reproduce for national continuity
“Selective abortion. That stupid notion the first kid must be a boy and favoring a boy over a girl is still there and shaming those parents who have girls.”	-	Abortion; notion; kid; boy; girl; parents	Selective abortion; son bias as an outdated notion; female children as perceived shame	Framing son preference as a an outdated notion; linking SSA with son preference	Vantage point: ordinary citizen Regime of truth: Son bias and SSA are absurd and unfortunately still present	Challenges the dominant notion of favoring male children over female children
“Unless there is a rampant nationalistic fervor or	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility; Post-Conflict	Nationalism; fervor; change; women; kids	Hopeful nationalistic fervor; cultural change;	Pronatalism; moralizing collective responsibility ; linking	Vantage point: ordinary citizen	Reinforces collective responsibility; produces

cultural change I doubt anything will happen. God willing I'm wrong. I'm sure there are some Armenian women here, how many kids would/plan on having?"	Reproduction as National Responsibility		Armenian women; future mothers	childbirth with national recovery; linking women with the role of motherhood	Regime of truth: Without a sense of nationalistic change, Armenia's birth rate will decrease	pressure to reproduce for national continuity; reinforces women's reproductive responsibility
"The crux of the issue is that as Armenians or any nation that develops and becomes relatively more educated it decreases	Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility	Issue; Armenians; nation; responsibility; religion; Christianity; people; luxury; changes; sacrifice; kids	Developing nation; decreased responsibility as an issue; religious decline; Christianity as an encouragement for reproduction; social change	Moralizing collective responsibility; Linking social progress with low collective responsibility; linking religion with pronatalism	Vantage point: ordinary citizen Regime of truth: Developed nations produce less children due to a	Reinforces collective responsibility

the desire for added responsibility. Couple it with a decline of religion (Christianity in Armenias case) which expressly instructs people to multiple and an increase in people chasing luxury (social changes)/not seeking additional sacrifice and well people stop having kids.”			as luxury; low birth rate as low responsibility		lack of collective responsibility	
“Armenia needs a	Post-Conflict	Armenia; culture:	“Westernized” Armenia;	Pronatalism; moralizing	Vantage point:	Reinforces collective

culture of child rearing as weird as it sounds. To replace the decline in religious and general societal sentiment for it which would require women rejecting working full time and seeking familial life which you and I both know is grossly frowned upon as Armenia “westernizes” gradually”	Reproduction as National Responsibility; Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility	child; religion; sentiment; women; family	child rearing culture; religious decline; working women; future mothers	collective responsibility ; linking social progress with low collective responsibility ; linking religion with pronatalism; linking women’s public participation with “westernization”	ordinary citizen Regime of truth: The birth rate in Armenia will only increase if the country has a culture of child rearing, greater religious influence, and less rights for women to work	responsibility; produces pressure to reproduce for national continuity; reinforces women’s reproductive responsibility
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“I think this is the ultimate solution. Armenia needs to set up massive incentives for couples to have multiple children. It’s a long term investment for the country in its people which we will see the fruits of in years to come but it’s necessary. Like OP said, our chances of winning war would be way	Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility	Solution; Armenia; incentives; couples; children; investment; country; people; war	Pronatalist incentives; large families as national defense; large families as an investment; future threat of war	Pronatalism; moralizing collective responsibility ; linking childbearing with national defense	Vantage point: ordinary citizen Regime of truth: The birth rate in Armenia and chances of winning future wars will only increase if the country works towards having a culture of child rearing	Reinforces collective responsibility; produces pressure to reproduce for national continuity and wartime success
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higher if we have more people”						
“We need to introduce financial incentives for women to have more kids. That’s how Turkey had an insane population boom over the past 100 years...”	Motherhood as Gendered Responsibility; Post-Conflict Reproduction as National Responsibility	Incentives; women; kids; Turkey; population	Financial incentives as pronatalist policy; mothers; Turkey as a model of increased population	Pronatalism; moralizing collective responsibility ; linking women with the role of motherhood	Vantage point: ordinary citizen Regime of truth: Financial incentives could aid women in increasing the population	Reinforces women’s reproductive responsibility