

HOW MILITARIZATION COMMUNICATED THROUGH  
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SHAPED  
ARMENIAN IDENTITY

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# ABSTRACT

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Education is a basis for many civil society functions but sometimes it gets mixed with factors that do not belong in the sphere. This research explores how militarization is conveyed in Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions in Armenia and how it impacts the shaping of local Armenian identity. In-depth interviews, experience observation and secondary research analysis allowed to understand the medium and the most powerful influencers of militarization. The research and the interview analysis shows that because of normalized and institutionalized militarization, generations in Armenia end up adopting a culture of violence, which in turn, is often directed internally, towards Armenian society itself. As a result, this encouragement and further reinforcement of violence increases the role of militarization in Armenian identity.



# INTRODUCTION

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- Children in Armenia are exposed to war, arms racing and the concept of army from very young ages.
- Governments and societies reinforce militarization: society's organization for violence, war and armed conflict, the glorification of the army and normalization of weaponry, making it reach even education institutions.
- The consequences of militarization on early childhood education curricula and culture affect the Armenian identity of the 21st century, which is shaped by historic, religious and traumatic events, such as the Karabakh wars and the Armenian Genocide.



# Key Terms and Definitions

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## Militarization

Militarization is the process of transforming a particular entity to act similarly to the armed forces. Militarization can be done by society or a specific state by preparing the people for a military conflict, war, or violence.

## Early Childhood Education



Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a branch in pedagogy focusing on children's learning processes from birth till eight years old. ECE as a stage is crucial for child development as it prepares the child for continuous learning and exploring of the world



# Key Terms and Definitions

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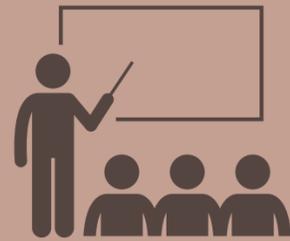
## National Identity or National Consciousness

National identity is a person's sense of belonging to a state or a nation. It includes understanding a nation as one despite the person's legal citizenship, place of birth, and residence. National identity can be expressed in two ways: patriotism and chauvinism. Patriotism is the positive expression of national identity, which shows one's love towards one's country and the national pride the person carries. Meanwhile, chauvinism, the negative expression of it, is the belief that one's country is superior compared to others and shows extreme loyalty to it.



# Key Terms and Definitions

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## Hidden Curriculum

The "hidden curriculum" is a set of "unstated norms, values, and beliefs transmitted to students through the underlying structure of schooling" that is an entirely different dimension of the accepted practice of schooling



# Literature Review

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It is not fraternity that pushes a person to die for a country but the ties that a person has towards the imagined community and the fact that such act is considered pure. The two significant factors contributing to identity building is common language and the means to share an idea among the imagined community (Anderson, 1983).

Nationalism comes and “invents nations where they do not exist” and that is exactly how a person's national consciousness is awakened (Gellner, 1964).

Education in the world and Armenia, specifically where the Ministry of Education is the only one overlooking the textbooks, the educational reforms and the content of the books are “predominantly shaped by local politics.” There are certain themes that can be identified in elementary school books (Aybenarans) in Armenia, such as local and global community gap, awareness of surroundings and associations created based on that, and church relations (Palandjian, 2014).

Armenian identity is complex in all dimensions. The revival of memory and dispersion are a few of the factors constituting Armenian identity. The Armenian Genocide, the NK wars and other historical events have shaped the language, the mentality and the identity of Armenians. There are also cases when cultures of violence are created based on certain political/historical events (Abrahamyan, 2006).



# Research Questions

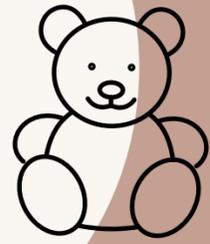
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1

How does militarization in kindergartens affect Armenian identity?

2

How is militarization communicated in early childhood education institutions: kindergartens, preschools, and nurseries?



## phenomenological research analysis

- INTERVIEWS
  - Virtual, in-depth interviews
  - 60-90 minutes long
  - Participants: 9 teachers (all female), 10 parents (one male)
  - Age group: teachers; 27-60, parents; 25-38
  - All from various regions and Yerevan
- Experiences of the author and participants
  - Narrative vignettes used for parallel analysis



# Methodology

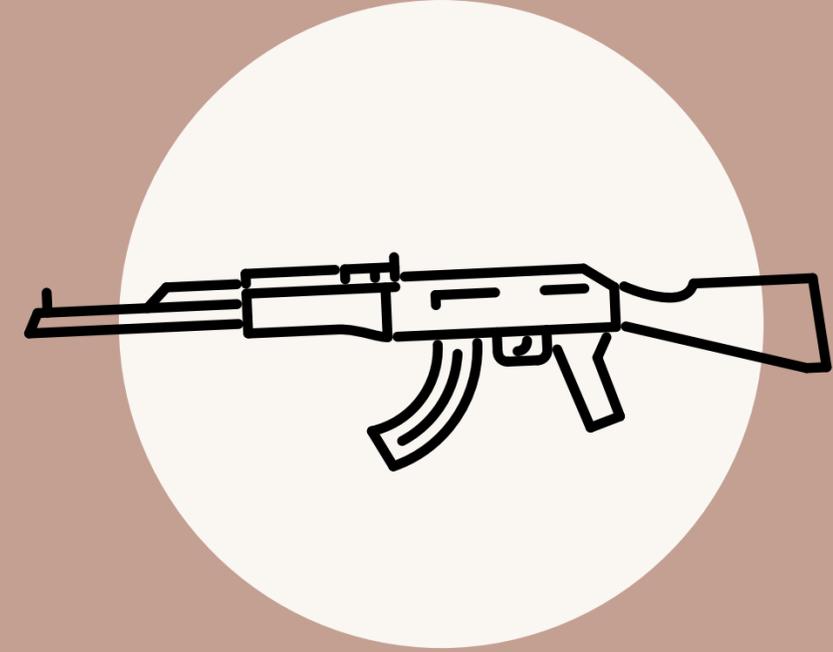
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## process

- Identifying interviewees
- Conducting the interviews (in Armenian)
- Transcribing the interviews (in Armenian)
- Analyzing the interviews
- Mapping common themes
- Finding connections and explanations for the mapped themes

# Research Findings and Analysis

## The Subtle Art of Militarizing

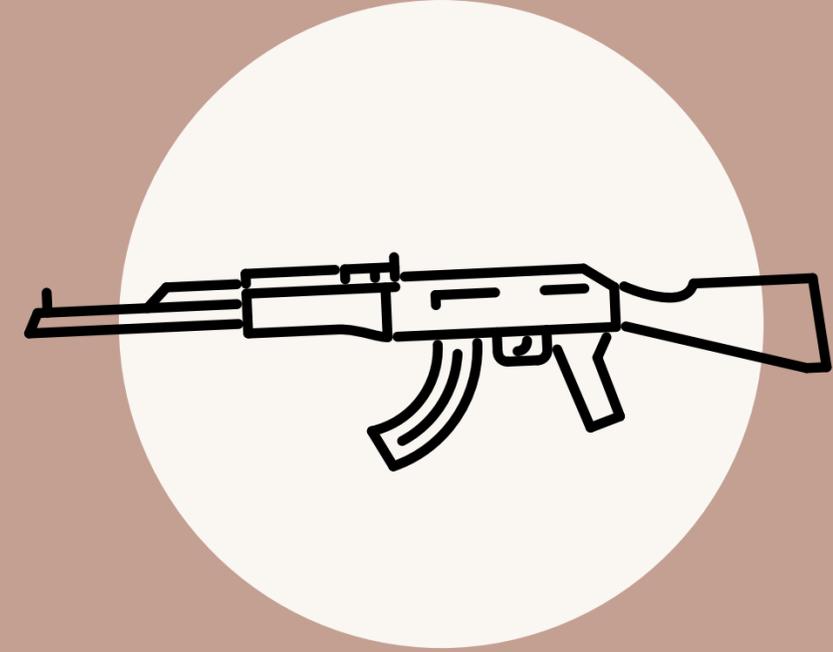


- Childhood stories and tales that teachers read for the kids in the kindergarten are not used as a means for militarization, because there are certain state requirements that children have to read only specific works of Toumanian, Aghayan et al.
- Many ECE institutions still have a few toys that are perceived aggressive and promote violence, such as guns, tanks, etc. Although, the MoESCS has made it mandatory to have no military toys, some teachers continue keeping them and they even encourage "war games" among children.

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# Research Findings and Analysis

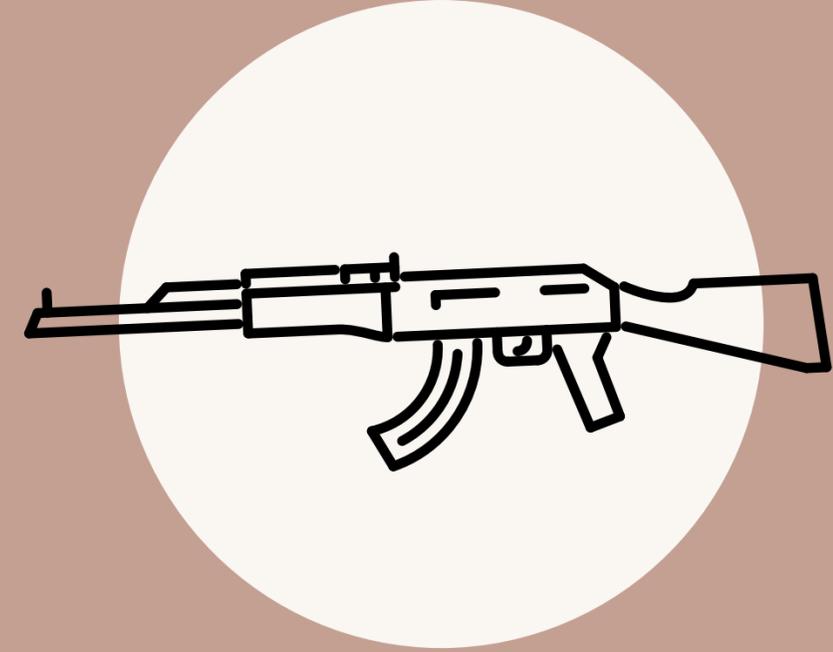
## The Subtle Art of Militarizing



- Perhaps the biggest medium for militarization is the cultural and emotional baggage that teachers burden children with, especially boys because they are the future soldiers. This is one of the reasons for gender-based abortion statistics in Armenia. Patriotism is associated with militarization.
- School events (*handes*) are next in line to militarize children. Staged military operations, camouflage clothing, and nationalist songs in kindergartens also normalizes militarization. Many teachers organize such events because they know that is what parents expect them to do.

# Research Findings and Analysis

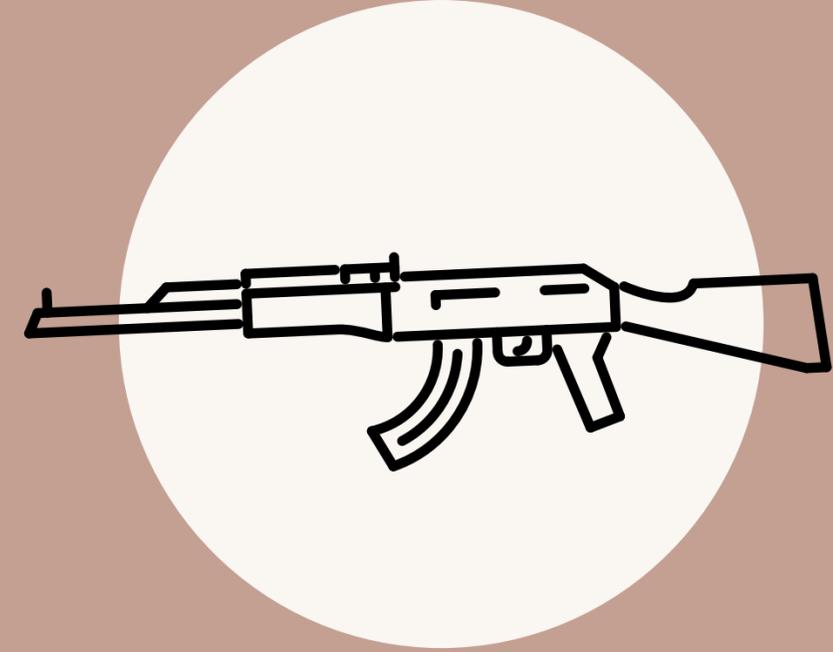
Parenthood, Teacherhood and Statehood



- Three of the most powerful weapons to enroot militarization are the parents (family), the teachers (surrounding world), and the state (education policies).
  - Parents and the family a child is born into is of great significance as it shapes the environment a child grows up in. They set standards for the child and expect her/him to follow them.
  - While families give the basics of militarization, the teachers make sense of and encourage militarization among the children. The teachers behave like second mothers and together with their own perspective teach boys to be soldiers and girls to be mothers of soldiers.
  - While parents and teachers are an important factor in militarization reinforcement, the state still stays the greatest militarizing agent as it can influence education policies and school curriculum.

# Research Findings and Analysis

## The Labyrinth of Identity-Making

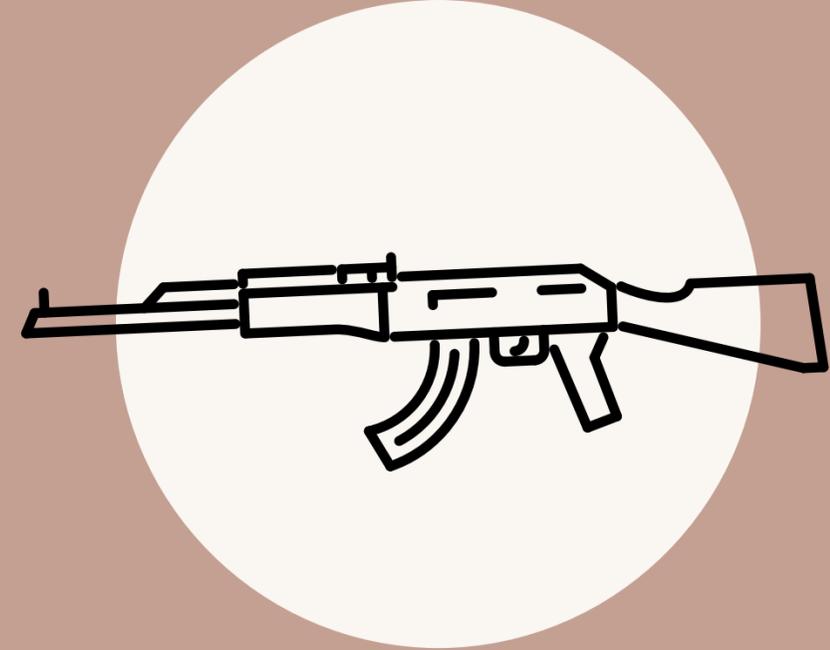


- Militarization is a means to protect Armenia from the "Armenians' fate." If Armenians lose a war, then Armenia was not militarized enough (prepared enough). Unfortunately, the victimization continues and so does militarization with it (perhaps on a bigger scale).
- Many Armenians want army reform but do not understand that militarization is not reformation of the army.
- Most teachers and parents don't reflect deeper into the concept of identity. They see identity as a combination of religion, history and war. Therefore, do not question it further. Same with militarization; they have heard of it but do not know what constitutes militarization and what consequences it might have.

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# Research Findings and Analysis

## The Labyrinth of Identity-Making



- Militarization encourages culture of violence. As a result, violence is normalized, boys are born to fight, girls are born to bear sons for the homeland.
- People always live with the fear that they are going to be hurt again and the state uses it so justify militarization even in ECE institutions. That is why participants believed there is no alternative to militarization, especially in the South Caucasus.
- Armenians always have to fight for their land and freedom. Militarization is in Armenians' blood according to many interviewees.

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# Recommendations:

Future in the Making



ECE teachers must be trained on trauma stewardship. Teachers have also been through challenges themselves lately and to help children, they need to be helped as well. This is necessary to make sure the the traumatic experiences of the teachers don't lead to the activation of the 'hidden curricula' and we don't end up having a generation that has been raised to take revenge from the other side.

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# Recommendations:

Future in the Making

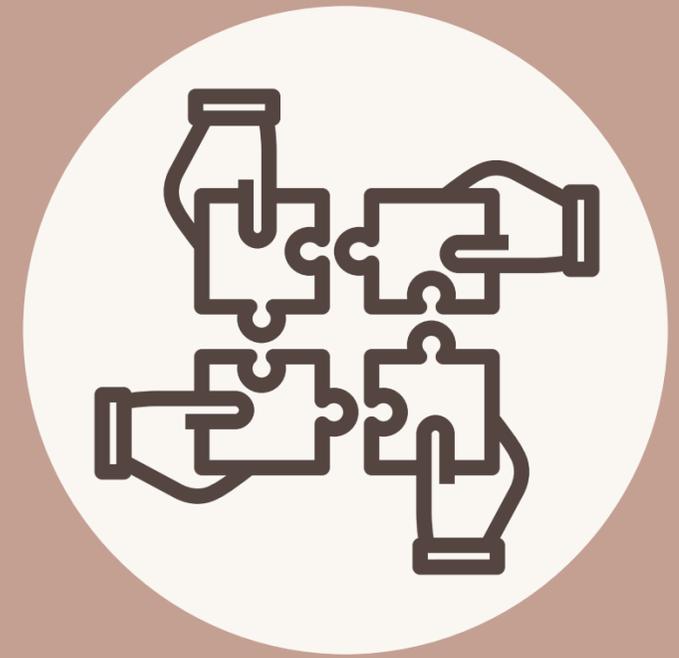


The education guidelines should be clear of any terminology that is difficult to understand and implement. These terminologies give teachers permission to act based on the 'hidden curricula' and teach children about issues that they are yet too young to understand. Patriotism should be about more than taking up a gun.

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# Recommendations:

## Future in the Making



The supervision of the ECE institutions and their operations should not be considered a threat but a professional opportunity to grow. The MoESCS should develop a strategy that will ensure close cooperation between kindergartens and MoESCS specialists to guarantee exchange of ideas and experiences.



# Conclusion

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Education is one of the most important spheres of a person's life. If not organized properly, education can cause major disturbance in a person's and society's life. Meanwhile, some countries expose education to militarization, which sometimes is perceived as the only alternative for countries in conflict. As a result, the culture of violence becomes so strong that all aggression is directed inward within a society, causing domestic violence, gender inequality and leading generations to think that they are nothing but 'just soldiers' and 'just mothers.'



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THANK YOU

