

**The Impact of the 2020 Artsakh War on Armenian Women's Mental and Psychological  
Health**

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## Table of Content

Acknowledgments-----	3
Abstract-----	5
Introduction -----	6
Literature Review -----	7
Statement of Central Research Question(s) -----	16
Methodology -----	17
Prologue -----	26
Epilogue -----	27
References -----	28
Appendices -----	31
Research Creation Piece -----	54

### Acknowledgements

It all started with a powerful book that I have read, *All She Lost*, written by Dalal Mawad, an award-winning Lebanese journalist. Impactful and important, Mawad skillfully narrated the stories of Lebanese women who suffered from the explosion of the Port of Beirut on August 4, 2020. An admirer of her work for extensive years, I did not waste time in ordering the book from Lebanon and finishing reading it in a couple of days, shedding tears as I flipped through the pages. This book made me realize how overlooked women's voices are in Lebanese society, and it pushed me to think about women's narratives in Armenia in a recent context—the 2020 Artsakh War—which I also witnessed on the ground. To my surprise, there was ridiculously limited research on women's narratives during the war—a key moment that marked the start of my research, driven by the need to expand on this project. As a young feminist and journalist with a love and passion for storytelling lives, I naturally decided to produce a creative piece for my capstone in the form of a long journalistic essay.

As I conclude my life-changing years at the American University of Armenia with the completion of my capstone, I want to thank my capstone advisor, Dr. Hourig Attarian, who has been a remarkable mentor in my journey discovering the fascinating world of oral history. I couldn't have asked for a better way of ending this important chapter of my life without her impactful guidance and passion for oral history, serving as an example for me.

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made me reflect tremendously on myself and shaped my perspective on life. I truly thank you for that.

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Of course, my thoughts are always with the courageous Armenian women whose voices have been silenced for many years, notably in the context of war and conflict. I hope that my project encourages you to speak up about the numerous injustices. May your voices be the wind of change for the generations to come.

### **Abstract**

This capstone project examines the mental and psychological impact of the 2020 Artsakh War on Armenian women. It sheds light on women's narratives during this period with a special focus on their mental and psychological wellbeing during the war and its aftermath, a phenomenon that is neglected in the local society. The research is conducted through interviews with three female participants who have contributed to the war or experienced it in their unique way. Through the oral history method, the oral data collected is transcribed and later coded and mapped to establish key themes. Based on the findings of the research, a creative nonfiction essay is produced to tell the women's stories, presented through a set of themes that are apparent and common in all three stories.

## **The Impact Of The 2020 Artsakh War On Armenian Women’s Mental And Psychological Health**

The 2020 Artsakh War became yet another devastating chapter in Armenia’s extensive history of conflict and wars. Commonly known as the 44-day War or Second Karabakh War, it started on September 27, 2020, when the longstanding clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed territory of the de facto Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) resulted in a full-scale war. The war ended 44 days later, as the name suggests, through the Russian-brokered ceasefire deal. This event was the most violent between the Armenian and Azerbaijani forces since the First Karabakh War in the 1990s, with heavy military losses and high mortality rates (Karlinsky & Torrasi, 2023, p. 2). In addition, researchers concluded that “the war led to almost 6,500 excess deaths among people aged 15–49. Nearly 2,800 excess losses occurred in Armenia, 3,400 in Azerbaijan, and 310 in de facto Artsakh” (Karlinsky & Torrasi, 2023, p. 16). As the highest number of casualties were found among late adolescents and young men, the study suggests that they were directly exposed to combat during the war (Karlinsky & Torrasi, 2023, p. 1). A human tragedy, the 2020 Artsakh War made a void and broke the hearts of an entire Armenian nation from Armenia to Artsakh and its vast diaspora as it lost a complete generation of young men, in addition to indigenous Armenian lands. Moreover, the war has had a substantial effect on the Armenian people’s mental health, with significant levels of PTSD and anxiety among Armenians who have been exposed to the war or have their loved ones injured or participating in the war (Movsisyan et al., 2022, p. 6-7).

In this research, I explore how the 2020 Artsakh War impacted Armenian women’s mental health and well-being. I look into the situation of women of various kinships, such as mothers, sisters, grandmothers, cousins, aunts, wives, girlfriends, friends, and many other

women who were associated with our heroes who took part in the war with the purpose of sharing their stories during the war and its aftermath. The Republic of Armenia's militarist approach to war, which is driven by the "glorification of violent masculinity," leads to inequalities between men and women (Ditel, 2023, p. 165); in other words, men and women experience war differently due to the gender roles and duties that were deeply entrenched in the patriarchal Armenian society.

This project allows me to collect life stories and shed light on the missing narratives of this tragic war. As a young Armenian feminist, I provide a safe space for women to speak up about their situation during the war and its aftermath by conducting a series of interviews. More importantly, I raise awareness about women's situation in the post-war environment because they are somewhat overlooked in this male-centered society. This is proven by the lack of research about Armenian women in times of war in general, let alone the more limited research about their mental health in times of war. It's unfortunate that there is this gap in scholarly work about the discourse of war. While men, especially our soldiers, are depicted as heroes, our women are equally heroes for being strong bearers of loss, household managers, and active members in the workplace and society all at the same time.

### **Literature Review**

Four themes come across this topic: The role of women in war, trauma, loss, and health consequences, the social attitudes towards Armenian women and stereotypes, and life writing and trauma narratives. I focus on these themes as they are intertwined with storytelling and documenting Armenian women's stories in war. Moreover, they set the foundation for

understanding and analyzing women's role—notably Armenian women—in war and how the public perceived them.

### **Women's experiences in war**

The topic of women's roles and experiences in war and conflict is often recurring in various literature, with authors emphasizing that women from traditional societies can accomplish more than their traditional roles at home. Kaufman and Williams (2010), in their chapter, *Women, Political Activism, and Conflict*, discuss what roles women play during war or conflict zones and what they experience. The authors, without specifying cases or nations in conflict, suggest that there is a wide range of answers to the question of "What do women do during war?" from doing nothing to being actively involved in support of working for peace or resolving conflict. Part of this range of responses includes women maintaining their traditional roles as wives, mothers, and daughters or taking actions "that are overtly feminist, often in defiance of traditional norms" (Kaufman and Williams, 2010, p. 58). Moreover, according to Kaufman and Williams, women from patriarchal societies opt to move beyond their domestic tasks and into the public realm as they are actively politically engaged with political structures that are not necessarily part of the country's political system. For instance, these women might decide to form movements or initiatives that exist outside the state's political structure but are designed to put pressure on political authorities (Kaufman and Williams, 2010, p. 58). Continuing on this topic, Ditel argues that the 2020 Artsakh War allowed Armenian women to challenge the country's patriarchal norms. She emphasizes that the event proved the transformative potential of Armenian women during times of crisis and conflict. Ditel asserts that "Some women contest the militarist culture as this affects their lives via support for a patriarchal

society that forces them into restrictive gender roles. In Armenia and Azerbaijan, some groups of women have proven to be powerful agents of change of the conflict rhetoric and representatives of a culture of peace” (Ditel, 2023, p. 174). In the face of war, Armenian women took upon roles of leadership in activism and community support, challenging the strict confines of patriarchy. In addition, she concludes that Armenian women show solidarity as they “create confidence-building measures in a conflict-affected scenario, with great potential for the implementation of a multitrack perspective for the resolution of the conflict” (Ditel, 2023, p. 175).

Of course, in patriarchal societies, which still persist in many countries, women’s participation is strictly limited as their rights are overlooked, especially in times of war. In Lebanon, where I come from, “Women are still discriminated against in Lebanese law, and their political participation remains minimal” as Lina Khatib writes in her article *Gender, Citizenship and Political Agency in Lebanon* (Khatib, 2008, p. 438). The author mentions that during the Civil War Lebanese women initiated feminist movements to spread awareness about the violations of their rights by men, including women’s inability to transmit their Lebanese nationality to their children until this day, one of the many forms of discrimination that women face (Khatib, 2008, p. 445). Thus, “The Civil War was an economic, political and social disaster, during which the actions of women’s movements geared towards women’s rights were largely suspended” (Khatib, 2008, p. 446). Continuing on this subject, feminist authors Altınay and Petó (2016) introduce their book, *Gendered Wars, Gendered Memories*, by highlighting that women in the past century were exposed to “silent resistance” in patriarchal societies in times of war because their rights were violated. Unfortunately, women become subject to numerous violations of women’s rights such as being victims of sexual violence, domestic violence, and discrimination, which leads them to remain silent (Altınay and Petó, 1991, p. 3). There are many

layers to silencing; women are silent for various reasons, mainly when it comes to collective memory and the history of war. For example, Altınay and Pető write that “Silence for them was a form of resistance to the existing politics of memory” (Altınay and Pető, 1991, p. 4). In addition, the authors claim that silencing is not solely about not being willing to speak up but it also serves as a form of self-defense and resistance (Altınay and Pető, 1991, p. 12).

### **Trauma, loss, and health consequences**

The 2020 Artsakh War inflicted profound and lasting trauma and loss among the Armenian populace, with mental and physical health consequences permeating all levels of society. Shadunts (2024), in his chapter Trauma and Ontological Insecurity after the Second Karabagh War 2020, explains that the war was “yet another devastating event for Armenians in their long history of being victims of violence and subjugation” (Shadunts, 2024, p. 113). Countless lives were lost, several villages and towns were depopulated, and Armenians experienced continuous basic human rights violations and threats of ethnic cleansing in Artsakh. The author asserts that the war was a traumatic event for the Armenian nation that has affected their sense of collective identity. According to him, “The narratives of national revival and victory, which were key to the construction of Armenian collective agency after the first NK war, have been challenged” (Shadunts, 2024, p. 113-114). In addition, the narratives and self-identification practices have become disrupted because of the trauma of the 2020 Artsakh War, notably when the deeply entrenched political narrative of the Armenian nation was to be victorious against the defeated enemy. When these narratives and practices are not attained, the nation’s identity is disrupted, further creating “a moment of existential trauma” (Shadunts, 2024, p. 117-118). The author’s analysis showcases an important aspect of the traumatic experience of

the Armenian nation; he suggests that articulating trauma is “a political act and becomes a terrain of struggle between different actors and their narratives” (Shadunts, 2024, p. 118). Additionally, this narrative and discourse become dominant and dictate how it should be remembered and rewritten. In other words, this narrative serves as a representation of how the Armenian nation experienced trauma during the war.

Tadevosyan (2024) also delves into the long-term repercussions of loss and trauma among the Armenian populace. In his chapter, *Life after War: Loss and Trauma among Civilian Population after 2020*, the author explores how grief, caused by the death of loved ones and the destruction of ancestral lands, manifests in pervasive feelings of despair as he writes, “the feeling of loss in the Armenian reality has deep connections with displacement, migration, and genocide fears” (Tadevosyan, 2024, p. 152). In other words, Armenians from Artsakh felt deep trauma from the accumulated fear of being killed and losing their homes, so they immediately leaving the country. In addition, the author argues that the war has not only resulted in individual trauma but has also created collective psychological wounds that continue to affect the Armenians, especially considering that so many young men were killed, or as the author says “the loss of an entire generation” (Tadevosyan, 2024, p.152). Having said that, the war caused deep trauma among Armenian women considering that the most casualties were men fighting in the army. Tadevosyan writes “Among the displaced population, women who have lost their husbands, in particular, seem to have a feeling of uncertainty” (Tadevosyan, 2024, p. 152).

Apart from the trauma and identity dislocation, the war caused Armenians to experience health consequences affecting their mental health. Movsisyan et al. (2022) analyze the immediate mental health effects of the 2020 Artsakh War, highlighting the prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depression among Armenians. The study reveals that the participants were found to have higher

levels of depression as they had a loved one who got injured, experienced financial difficulties, lost a loved one, or had a loved one taking part in the 2020 Artsakh War (Movsisyan et al., 2022, p. 6). In addition, the study also shows that higher levels of anxiety were found among “groups who had a loved one get injured, lost a loved one, and had a loved one participate” (Movsisyan et al., 2022, p. 7). According to the researchers, the results suggest that factors including the participation of a loved one, sustaining an injury, and loss of home have direct effects on anxiety severity. Moreover, groups with clinically significant levels of PTSD included those who had a loved one injured and those who experienced physical injuries during the 2020 Artsakh War. Individuals who sustained physical injuries related to the conflict exhibited the highest average PTSD scores. This is particularly noteworthy given the war’s context, where unusually severe injuries were reported, including those caused by the unlawful use of white phosphorus (Movsisyan et al., 2022, p. 6). The findings clearly showcase the devastating impact on the Armenians’ mental health, which the authors describe as “immediate” rather than long-term effects. One other important factor that the researchers point out is the gruesome videos of Armenian soldiers being tortured by the enemy that circulated on social media platforms, which was another factor affecting the Armenian population’s mental health (Movsisyan et al., 2022, p. 7).

### **Gender stereotypes and social attitudes toward Armenian women**

The deeply entrenched patriarchal norms in Armenian society have long shaped the public’s perception of women, notably emphasizing their traditional roles as nurturers and caregivers, creating persistent gender stereotypes. Cavoukian and Shahnazaryan (2019) explore social attitudes toward Armenian women, highlighting that society views women as unequal to men as members of the clergy “described women’s equality as being antithetical to Armenian

values” (Cavoukian and Shahnazaryan, 2019, p. 730). The authors shed light on women’s limited participation in politics as their opportunities are challenged by patriarchal norms and societal resistance. They argue that, according to a UNDP report, few women can be found holding positions in Armenia’s local and regional government bodies. In addition, “There are no female city mayors or regional governors, only a handful of women serving as village leaders” (Cavoukian and Shahnazaryan, 2019, p. 731). The chapter explains that other women’s integration into politics was hindered by “familial or societal pressure since holding office is seen as incompatible with patriarchal notions of acceptable womanhood” (Cavoukian and Shahnazaryan, 2019, p. 732). Therefore, patriarchal society idealizes notions of femininity. Moreover, although women’s integration into the workplace was encouraged in Soviet Armenia to meet the growing demands of modernization and industrialization, the degree of women’s participation in the workplace and this so-called “women’s equality” should not be romanticized as it created a “double burden” as they were still expected to maintain their traditional domestic roles by society (Cavoukian and Shahnazaryan, 2019, p. 730). Ditel (2023) builds on Cavoukian and Shahnazaryan’s discussion by examining how the 2020 Artsakh War served as a double-edged sword for Armenian women. In her chapter, *Women’s Transformative Power in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, the author underscores Armenia’s male-centered politics and militarism that further create gender stereotypes. She defines militarism through the feminist theory as “a hegemonic process, influencing not only geopolitical dynamics but also the intimate sphere, exacerbating gender stereotypes in society through the promotion of a patriarchal culture” (Ditel, 2023, p. 165). Moreover, she argues that militarism diffuses military ideas into popular culture; these ideas consist of the “glorification of violent masculinities that encroach on

women's and men's everyday lives in the form of a patriarchal and restrictive reality that intensifies in times of conflict" (Ditel, 2023, p. 165).

Continuing on the nuances of patriarchy, Ditel adds that in societies centered on militarist ideas, gender and conflict converge leading to traditional stereotypes and gender expectations. According to the author, patriarchy assigns specific duties to men and women to abide by militarist ideas and structure. This includes men's assigned role to defend the homeland against the enemy, while women need protection to ensure the birth of the nation's future soldiers (Ditel, 2023, p. 166). Additionally, the Armenian people's collective memory romanticizes women's role through the imagery of a female figure embodying the nation as they are perceived as "passive *incubators* that must perpetuate and maintain the ethnic purity of the nation" (Ditel, 2023, p. 166). This perspective showcases the other expectation of women to give birth to boys due to the strong cultural preference for sons. It also suggests that the loss of sons in times of war is a sacrifice that women have to bear for the sake of the homeland, prioritizing their roles as "mothers of the nation" over simply being "mothers of a soldier" (Ditel, 2023, p. 166).

### **Life writing and trauma narratives**

Life writing is shown to be an essential umbrella in a plethora of methods and genres of life storytelling. Kylie Cardell and Kate Douglas (2013) recall the early uses of life writing in biography and autobiography, which have been around for more than hundreds of years, on a global scale. The scholars also argue that life writing can be traced even further in history from oral and visual traditions by creating a medium for epic tales and indigenous stories to pass down to generations before civilizations started writing. Hence, "life stories have long offered a backbone to history, particularly in linking communities and in forging and recording experiences and identities" (Cardell and Douglas, 2013, p. 1).

Other scholars like Anna Beer (2012) would argue that life writing “produced a ‘strangely simplified and summarized’ subject, constructed from certain ‘estimated and cherished things’” (Beer, 2012, p. 359). Apart from the simplification element, Beer asserts that recent biographies “appear either oblivious or resistant to post-modernism’s dismantling of narrative authority or its scepticism about the knowability of the human subject” (Beer, 2012, p. 360). She also makes a distinction between the genre of biography and history; biographies, unlike the latter, are “not academic and theorized” as the biographer allows himself or herself to impose their authority upon the subject (Beer, 2012, p. 360). More importantly, the author highlights biographies can be exploitative when it comes to publishing to provide the reader with pleasurable text, citing Joseph Addison, a scholar who condemned writers “who ‘watch for the death of a great man, like so many undertakers, on purpose to make a penny of him exposing the private concerns of families, and sacrificing the secrets of the dead to the curiosity of the living’” (Beer, 2012, p. 360-361). In other words, biographers would take advantage of the subjects’ personal experiences, whether traumatic or not, to satisfy the readers’ expectations (Beer, 2012, p. 362).

In the 21st century, life writing has been widely used as a primary method of storytelling trauma narratives, and it also applies to Armenians’ trauma narratives during the 2020 Artsakh War. Douglas et al. (2008), as well as Anush Petrosyan (2023), argue against Beer’s claims that biographies are not theorized, notably in terms of trauma narratives. The scholars write that “the experience of trauma is an overwhelming and self-shattering event that is frequently theorised as unspeakable, resistant to representation” (Douglas et al., 2008, p. 1). Similarly, they mention that trauma pushes autobiography to limits of representation; however, these limitations don’t prevent life writing from thriving, so autobiographies are suitable for the “age of trauma” which can

range from stories of pain and sufferings to violent events (Douglas et al., 2008, p. 2). In the Armenian context, trauma narratives often take the form of both individual and collective narratives. In her research study, Petrosyan analyzes “the individual and collective narratives exploring layers of grievances that require societal engagement for reconciliation and remembering forwards” (Petrosyan, 2023, p. 6). She explores the young veterans’ trauma narratives through various theories, including Halbwachs’ Collective Memory theory, which highlights the influence of broader social frameworks on individual recollections of memory. In addition, this approach suggests that while individuals shape their memories based on their personal experiences, these memories do not emerge in isolation. Rather, they are influenced by social environments they engage in, which provide a framework for how memories are remembered or forgotten (Petrosyan, 2023, p. 6).

The literature review highlights four interconnected themes that shape the experiences and representations of women in the war context: women’s roles in war, trauma and health consequences, gender stereotypes, and life writing. Scholars such as Kaufman, Ditel, and Williams reiterate that war allows women to boast roles that go beyond their traditional ones as forces of activism, resilience, and peacebuilding. However, the psychological and physical consequences of war, as Movsisyan et al., Shadunts, and Tadevosyan discuss, show the long-term trauma, loss, and health consequences endured by Armenian women as they deal with grief and loss. In addition, patriarchal norms in Armenia limit women’s roles in the public sector, as Cavoukian and Shahnazaryan argue, emphasizing gender stereotypes and systemic inequalities. Overall, these themes reveal the multifaceted impact of war on Armenian women and the urgent need to document their stories to challenge the dominant narratives.

### **Statement of Central Research Question(s)**

I explore the mental and psychological impact of the 2020 Artsakh War on Armenian women, as my primary research question. I also focus on two main sub-questions: What were the short-term and long-term effects on Armenian women's well-being, and how did these short-term and long-term effects impact women's daily lives and activities at home and outside their homes?

### **Methodology**

Rooted in feminist epistemology, feminist practices of oral history and creative nonfiction are the most fitting elements in the creation of my capstone project as they align my interests in feminist theories, oral history, and storytelling. Feminist theories and practices in oral history illustrate why I focus on Armenian women's experiences of the 2020 Artsakh war; knowledge about war and trauma is deeply political, social, and historical. The fact that there is almost no literature about Armenian women's experiences of war explains that knowledge remains in a positivist and male-centered stance, and there is an indispensable need for change by introducing and voicing Armenian women's experiences in the public discourse.

### **Feminist epistemology**

I chose feminist epistemology as the main theoretical framework for my capstone project as its principles align with the core themes of my research, described in detail in my literature review. Moreover, feminist epistemology challenges the dominant perspectives in the local discourse by providing principles, which also serve to amplify the voices of Armenian women, as they are unheard and underrepresented, and ensure that their experiences of the 2020 Artsakh War are recognized as legitimate and important to fill in the gaps in history.

Feminist scholars extensively write about knowledge through the reputable standpoint theory—a foundational principle of feminist theory—and describe how it is situated. Sandra Harding writes that standpoint theory “was presented as a way of empowering oppressed groups, of valuing their experiences, and of pointing toward a way to develop an ‘oppositional consciousness’” (Harding, 2004, p. 2). She adds that this phenomenon is often applied when oppressed groups gain a public voice, and these groups confirm that the way social order is perceived varies based on the standpoint—whether or not the individual is marginalized in society (Harding, 2004, p. 3). Building on this notion, Donna Haraway (1988) introduces the concept of situated knowledges, highlighting that knowledge is a product of a specific perspective shaped by social, historical, and political contexts. Defining situated knowledges, she argues for the “politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims” (Haraway, 1988, p. 92). In other words, the author emphasizes positionality rather than objectivity.

Another significant principle is subjectivity that shapes knowledge and the social nature of knowing. Lorraine Code (1991) sheds light on the importance of subjectivity in knowledge production. She argues that male-centered societies fail to consider the “constitutive role of ideologies, stereotypes, and structures of epistemic privilege” to establish exclusively “institutionally legitimate possibilities for the construction and growth of knowledge” (Code, 1991, p. 316-317). The author suggests thinking and asking questions through mitigated and critical relativism, such as “Whose knowledge is in question?” She adds that this “relativism would recognize the perspectival, locatedness of knowledge and its associations with subjective purposes” (Code, 1991, p. 320). Adding to Code’s arguments about subjectivity, bell hooks

(1989) asserts that knowledge is politically and socially constructed as the popular ways of knowing underline dominant perspectives while leaving the lived experiences of marginalized groups in the shadows. She talks about the context of domination in patriarchal societies, primarily in the U.S., and the experiences that black communities—whether black men, women, or children—endure, including oppression and exploitation practiced by white men and women (hooks, 1989, p. 20-21). hooks emphasizes the need for various perspectives, especially from those who suffer the most, to spread awareness about their lived experiences and make their voices heard to make efforts to end patriarchal domination and oppression. Adding to her argument, she stresses the importance of this issue should concern men and women worldwide because “it is that form of domination we are most likely to encounter in an ongoing way in everyday life” (hooks, 1989, p. 21). hooks also adds that working-class women and those of color bring essential insights about feminist epistemology that are often overlooked by the feminist discourse. She writes that elitism and racism among women resulted in the “suppression and distortion of this connection so that it is now necessary for feminist thinkers to critique and revise much feminist theory and the direction of feminist movement” (hooks, 1989, p. 22).

### **Feminist practices in oral history**

Feminist practices in oral history is another essential framework that I use in my research. These practices enable me to challenge the dominant narrative of the 2020 Artsakh War and provide nuances to the public discourse from the feminist perspective, especially in contexts where women’s voices have been marginalized in Armenian history.

Both *Women’s Words: The Feminist Practices of Oral History* (1991) and *Feminists Under Fire: Exchanges Across War Zones* (2003) provide foundational principles of feminist

oral history as a method for collecting, interpreting, and telling women's narratives in various contexts, particularly in the ones marked by trauma, violence, and marginalization. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai write that their interest in women's oral history emerged due to women's underrepresentation and invisibility in American history and emphasize the need to tell women's narratives as they are valuable stories (Gluck and Patai, 1991, p. 1). The phrase "research by, about, and for women" stemmed from their feminist research principle, allowing women to learn about their history through "the words of women who had previously been silenced" (Gluck and Patai, 1991, p. 2). Moreover, the feminist researchers were engaged in advocacy as they were documenting women's narratives of their distinctive reality. They add that through "framing, presenting, interpreting, analyzing, and making the work public, we have believed, simply and finally, that we were contributing to the larger collectivity of women—making a kind of return" (Gluck and Patai, 1991, p. 3). Thus, repeating the principles of feminist epistemology, subjectivity and memory are crucial elements that shape narratives as narrators become more reflexive and analytical of their experiences (Gluck and Patai, 1991, p. 3-4). Similarly, Wenona Giles (2003) continues on the importance of subjectivity and adds a crucial layer to feminist oral history, notably when documenting women's experiences in war and mass violence, by describing transnational feminist practices in comparative research framework. The researcher emphasizes the importance of understanding "relational positionality" as "nationality, gender, religion, class, caste, and cultural context situate people unevenly within a web of relationships that transcend political borders" (Giles, 2003, p. 6). In other words, she focuses on comparative research with a transnational feminist lens as women's experiences of war are shaped by local cultural, political systems, in addition to dominant discourses of colonialism and globalisation (Giles, 2003, p. 6). This framework enables researchers to analyze the differences

among gendered experiences of violence, displacement, and survival and also look into deep specificities of local settings and cases (Giles, 2003, p. 7). Moreover, comparative research deepens the researchers' understanding of subjectivity concerning women's narratives of trauma within and across various political realities; it offers a nuanced approach that focuses on the singularity and comparability of women's voices while looking into their local setting and power dynamics at multiple levels (Giles, 2003, p. 7-8).

### **Creative nonfiction**

Creative nonfiction serves as a methodological framework that merges the factual meticulousness of journalism with the literary techniques commonly used in fictional stories. Lee Gutkind (2007) explains that the primary objective of creative nonfiction is describing a certain subject or topic and attracting the most resistant reader to be curious to learn more about it. He highlights that the power of the genre is to reveal the truth in the form of storytelling (Gutkind, 2007, p. 1). The author adds that it involves immersion—an intimate process of gathering and communicating information from a personal point of view (Gutkind, 2007, p. 1). Thus, with these elements combined, “the writer establishes a certain humanistic expertise, becoming a reader's filter so that the reader will gain intellectual substance” about the subject while being attentive to the “drama and intensity of ordinary people living unusual, stressful, and compelling lives” (Gutkind, 2007, p. 2). Similarly, Philip Gerard (2017) builds on Gutkind's writings, emphasizing fact-based and authentic writing. According to him, “such writers capture the world as it is—not as they wish it were—and make sense of the critical choices we make, individually and collectively as citizens” (Gerard, 2017, p. 3). Gerard also describes the main characteristics of creative nonfiction writing. One of them is that “creative nonfiction is narrative, it always tells a good story” (Gerard, 2017, p. 8). He adds that fictional devices are essential to make the genre

tell a good story, including a plot, characters, and dialogue—together, adding dramatic sequences and making the narrative more attractive to the resistant reader (Gerard, 2017, p. 8). Another one is that the genre allows the author to reflect about the subject (Gerard, 2017, p. 9). Gerard writes that “the underlying subject has been percolating through the writer’s imagination for some time, waiting for the right outlet” (Gerard, 2017, p. 9). In other words, the writer produces a craft based on motivations to learn about a specific subject that will potentially attract an audience—notably the resistant one. Lastly, creative nonfiction goes far beyond traditional journalistic writing. Instead of the “inverted pyramid” structure, the genre entails figurative speech, lively and descriptive scenes, clichés and expected endings, in addition to “control over nuance, accurate use of words, and a governing aesthetic sensibility” (Gerard, 2017, p. 10).

An admirer of creative nonfiction works and in the creation of this project, I was inspired by a certain book, *All She Lost*, written by Dalal Mawad, an award-winning journalist. An admirer of Mawad’s work, I immediately ordered the book from Lebanese bookstores and finished reading it in only a couple of days. In her book, Mawad (2023) writes about women’s narratives in the aftermath of the 2020 Beirut Blast and dedicates a chapter for each woman she talked to, skillfully narrating their tragic stories in detail. It is one of the most powerful books I have read, and I was inspired to use the same framework and apply it in the Armenian context.

### **Research design**

I have chosen to talk to three women of different backgrounds who either had their loved ones serving in the army during the 2020 Artsakh War and/or have contributed to helping Armenian families during the war and its aftermath. I explore their stories and experiences during the war and tell their stories through a creative nonfiction story, combining my passion for storytelling and journalistic writing.

The first woman I have talked to is Marine Khachikyan. Marine is a middle-aged woman from the Noyemberyan village of the Tavush province who currently resides in Yerevan with her husband and son. She is the head lawyer at the municipality of Davtashen, a district in Yerevan. Her son, Ivane, served in the army during the 2020 Artsakh war. Although Marine was deeply worried about her son, she did not sit idly; she collaborated with NGOs to help out families, especially the families of our fallen soldiers. Initially, I had chosen to work with her for my oral history project in the fall semester of 2024. I decided to incorporate that project into my capstone. In it I'd explore the narrative of a mother whose son was serving in the army during this time. I believe that this bond between the mother and son is unique, distinctive, and special to explore. It's also important to mention that Marine is a close friend of my family and my family was by her side during the war to console her while her son was serving in the army.

Next, I asked Arevik Mkrtychyan if she would agree to participate in my research. Arevik is a young woman in her twenties from Hrazdan, a small town in the Kotayk province. She studies English and Communications at the American University of Armenia and lives in Yerevan to pursue her education. An ambitious woman, she dreams of becoming a university lecturer and giving back to her community. I met Arevik in my Gender and Social Change course in the Spring semester of 2025. She is very active during the class discussions as she often speaks up about women's issues in Armenia. When discussing the war in class, she once briefly mentioned that her brother served in the army, which caught my attention. I immediately talked to her after class, and she confirmed that her brother, Gegham, participated in the war voluntarily. She quickly accepted my request. I chose to work with her as she would provide the youth input in my research, which I believe is indispensable because the youth's opinion is largely disregarded in Armenian society, let alone young women's thoughts, based on my

observations and interactions with older generations. Additionally, I explore the narratives of young girls and women whose loved ones were serving in the army during the war, notably those who had their brothers in the army.

Lastly, my third participant is Ani Tavitian. Ani is a 41-year-old psychologist and children's rights defender, who worked in several prominent institutions in Armenia, including SOS Children's Villages, the Ministry of Justice of Armenia, and the Human Rights Defender's office. As a psychologist working with the Pan-Armenian Association of Psychologists, she helped soldiers and families who sought her psychological assistance during the war and its aftermath, similar to Marine's contribution. My close friend's mother is a psychologist and works closely with Ani, so she suggested that I talk to her, and Ani quickly agreed! Because my capstone involves a mental and psychological element, I explore the topic deeply through the help of a psychologist who worked with families during the war. Thus, Ani has a great profile that fits into my criteria. Moreover, she wished to remain anonymous when I presented her the consent form, so I will use the pseudonym Ani Tavitian to comply with our binding agreement.

My sole issue in my methodology was the fact that I had chosen a specific criterion for my third participant—the wife or girlfriend of a soldier who participated in the war—to continue with the theme of kinship and see the differences of relations and the intensity of the war's impact on women. After many calls to ask my network if they knew a woman with this criterion willing to participate in my capstone, I received numerous rejections. After rethinking this part for weeks, I decided to talk to a psychologist who could provide a different perspective, notably in regards to her profession.

I crafted my questions meticulously, similar yet distinctive to each case after I had done my due diligence about their background, as I conducted life story interviews. It is important to

learn about the narrators' past and make connections with the present, notably their childhood, family heritage, and their lives growing up. My questions were divided into sections, each dedicated to a specific life stage until reaching the war era, its aftermath, and I conclude with reflections and their thoughts looking back at the event and what they went through.

After gathering the recordings, I transcribed the interviews carefully, since they are essential to writing the narratives through creative nonfiction. I have read the transcripts several times while taking notes to prepare for the data coding and mapping process, involving making annotations on the transcripts and finding common themes in the three women's stories. This step is crucial to organize the stories and transform them into a written narrative in a long essay format.

To conclude, my methodology entails the principles of feminist epistemology, feminist practices in oral history, and elements of creative nonfiction. These key elements allow me to approach women's narratives with intellectual rigor and emotional depth. These also contribute to challenging the dominant narrative and discourse in Armenian society and providing the framework for amplifying women's voices that have been long marginalized by valuing positionality, subjectivity, and storytelling. Through these frameworks, I explore how war shapes gendered experiences and psychological realities in Armenia.

### **Prologue**

This project is a curated collection of narrative portraits centering the lived experiences of Armenian women affected by the 2020 Artsakh War. It seeks to bear witness to the psychological and emotional toll of the war from an intimate, gendered perspective. Rather than offering a detailed political analysis or war report, this work invites the audience into a textured space where memory, voice, and silence coexist—where pain and resilience are inseparable

threads in the fabric of daily survival. These are not abstract statistics or political arguments; they are raw, personal truths, shared with courage and vulnerability.

I embarked on this journey because I believe in the power of storytelling as a form of justice and resistance. Growing up surrounded by stories of loss, migration, and generational trauma, I became aware of how many voices—especially those of women—remain unheard in the retelling of national and geopolitical events. In this project, I explore these stories and amplify voices to hold space for complexity and to respect the agency of each narrator.

Each narrative is a result of a shared dialogue, a negotiation of memory, and careful active listening to what is said—and sometimes what is not. I do not claim to represent all Armenian women’s experiences nor attempt to generalize trauma. Instead, I offer deeply personal accounts that reflect broader and underexplored realities of war. I hope that my project enables readers to not only understand but *feel* the weight that these women carry not only in the aftermath of war but for a lifetime.

### **We were not at the front, but we were in the war**

*A narrative on the invisible wounds that Armenian women carry in the aftermath of the 2020 Artsakh War*

The 2020 Artsakh War transformed an entire nation. While soldiers are glorified for their sacrifice for the homeland, many fail to notice the **mental health consequences** that it had on women, who continue to endure their sufferings in the shadows, leaving a lifelong scar. Many fail to notice the importance of **women’s duty in the war**—one that prevented numerous suicide attempts, one that has dedicated countless hours to volunteer service and aid to soldiers, one that has stood by families of fallen soldiers when she was waiting for her own son’s arrival at home

safely. While they blame the elites for this tragedy, many fail to realize that women are more than capable of **bringing change** to the dysfunctional militarist system to prevent the repetition of the catastrophe lived back home.

“We didn’t live. We just existed,” said Arevik Mkrtchyan, a young woman from Hrazdan as she impatiently awaited until her brother returned from the war.

When the war erupted on a warm September day in 2020, Arevik was only 18. The day started like any other—a walk around the city center with her parents. As she came home and scrolled through social media, the screen read “War has started.”

At first, her family underestimated the storm as they assumed that it would last a couple of days, akin to the 2016 war. But by October 1, her older brother, Gegham, had signed up as a volunteer and left for war.

“It gives me shivers remembering that moment,” she recalled. “That was one of the nastiest things I’ve ever had to feel in my life.” She thought that she would never have to see him again. “And then he just left,” she continued. “The house became empty.”

For three months, Gegham remained at the top of a mountain, isolated from humanity, manning missile equipment. Whenever he could, he sent a text, saying, “*Ես լավ եմ*” (I’m fine) to his family. That was it. The silence became suffocating.

She lived with her mother and maternal grandmother in Hrazdan, and they barely spoke to each other. They didn't sleep. They didn't eat. The house grew colder by the day, similar to an abandoned one. She remembered feeling an immense guilt. She felt guilty for having food on her table. "If I eat this piece of bread, there's a soldier who's going through hell right now," she said. "How can I eat this bread?" Eventually, the psychological toll impacted her physical health as well—losing hair, weight, and sleep.

Their lives revolved around one particular item: the television. The first channel, ՀԱՆՐԱՍԿՈՒՄ, was always on. Every day, they sat in silence as the devastating list of fallen soldiers scrolled across the screen. It was a loop of hell. "We were carefully examining the list, hoping we wouldn't see Gegham or Mkrtchyan," she said.

By the end of the war, although Gegham returned home alive, thankfully, Arevik continued to experience the mental health consequences of the war. She doesn't speak about her trauma—not to friends, not to family. "Part of me thinks that they won't understand the depth of it," she said. While she values her family and friends, she prefers avoiding discussing the war with them, mainly to avoid receiving pity from her friends.

Her way of coping is silence. "I deal with trauma by just blocking it in my head," she said. "My body just forgets." That silence wasn't inner peace—it was suppression. Words were too exposing, too sharp, too provoking. Instead, she tucked her trauma and conflicting emotions away inside her, as there was no one to turn to, no safe haven to cry or share with.

This silence reflects a broader reality among Armenian women during the 2020 Artsakh War—one where suppressing emotions becomes a temporary survival mechanism. It wasn't exclusive to young women like Arevik; silence also marked the experiences of mothers of soldiers, who lived with a different yet equally crushing fear of losing a loved one.

“Since Ivane is our only son, we tried doing everything to make sure that he wouldn't have to go to military service during difficult times—even be exempt from it,” Marine Khachikyan, a middle-aged woman from Noyemberyan, said as she remembered the turbulent days of the 2020 Artsakh War.

A lawyer in the Municipality of Davitashen, a district in Yerevan, Marine's experience of the war was also long and exhausting as a professional who worked with families, and most importantly, as a mother whose son, Ivane, served in the army during that period.

Unable to reach him for days—or even weeks—Marine spent her days anxiously waiting for Ivane to send a message and reassure her about his situation and wellbeing. A natural musical prodigy, he was a member of the military band, but there was no guarantee that he would be safe; at any moment, Ivane could be stationed in other divisions as per demand.

Although Marine avoided speaking about what she felt during the war, I witnessed her experience myself, as my family hosted her for a couple of days in our apartment. She spent sleepless nights, unable to eat or rest, consumed by fear of her son's life. The anxiety etched itself into her face, even in silence. Like Arevik, she watched the news religiously, following

every update provided by the Ministry of Defense. Her phone rang frequently, but the phone calls were not from her son, which often gave her false hope and even disappointment. Each headline and post on social media intensified her anxiety due to uncertainty. Marine did not speak much, but her silence spoke volumes; it was the kind that filled the room with fear.

The war's mental health consequences on women were intertwined with their duties.

For Marine, working with families of fallen soldiers in Davitashen was extremely difficult, as she dealt with their grief and her own sorrows. During the war, as a lawyer at the municipality, she was responsible for collecting data about the missing and fallen soldiers. In the aftermath, Marine was assigned to work with families of fallen soldiers, guiding them in order to process the benefits they were entitled to. Recalling these days, she said “We visited the parents of the fallen. Every family had its loss, pain, grief... Hundreds, thousands of families' lights were extinguished.”

Her duties weighed heavily on her as the stories of pain and grief she encountered every day added to the psychological toll of the war. “We lived through the pain of every parent who lost a child—we cried with them and went to Yerablur,” Marine said. She added that she built friendships with the families of the fallen soldiers and visited them on the soldiers' birthdays. “There are no words of condolence that can truly measure or ease their grief, but at the very least, attention—showing that we care—is absolutely necessary,” she continued.

While women like Marine remained in close contact with these families, others like Ani Tavitian, a middle-aged psychologist from a small village in the Tavush province, helped them find a path forward. “The importance is being able to change someone’s life positively, whether through big or small efforts—even in psychological work with the mothers of the fallen soldiers,” Ani said when reflecting on her experience in the 2020 Artsakh War.

While she did not have family members participating in the war, unlike the other two women, Ani worked closely with soldiers, families, and notably women during this time and in the aftermath of the war.

Having vast experience, with over 20 years working in the field, Ani was more than fitting for working in emergency situations. Describing herself as someone who does not get immersed in her emotions due to her years of training for war contexts, she said “I cannot say that I was free of fear, but I needed to be strong and determined.” Although she hadn't fully recovered from the side effects of COVID-19, Ani rushed to hospitals in Yerevan, where she was urgently needed to talk to mothers and families of soldiers. “The first 15 days were very difficult, but I had enough strength not to panic or break down, and I was able to listen to those tragic stories,” she said.

As she showed her courage and strength vis-à-vis her patients, Ani felt the mental health consequences of her job two weeks after the war broke out. As the physical and psychological toll accumulated, she sought different methods to relieve her emotions and cope with the intensity of her job. This was done through crying, journaling, and talking to a psychologist. “Every day, when I got home, I would quickly go to the bathroom, cry under the shower, and

then interact with my family members,” she said, highlighting that if she didn’t do this, she would break down in front of her parents. She experienced a tough psychological phase until December, and then she started working with psychologist associations. There, she met other psychologists and sought professional help by talking about the war’s impact on her wellbeing. “Writing helped so much that I no longer needed to seek professional help,” she added, emphasizing the importance of journaling to maintain our mental wellbeing.

Ani’s role in the war and its aftermath was deeply emotional. She remembered speaking with families in crisis, or others who were depressed or diagnosed with mental diseases, navigating the impossible task of informing mothers that their son had died. “In a particular case, I told an old couple that their two sons died, and the woman started hitting her head against the wall,” Ani said. In other cases, she explained, what looked like suicide attempts were, in fact, a failure of the body to cope with extreme psychological or physiological pressure. “This isn’t suicide—it’s illness,” she mentioned. “The body couldn’t bear it anymore.”

Importantly, Ani noticed a pattern among women—how unresolved grief turned into aggressive behavior. “Emotions build up and turn into rage—not against specific people, but against the world,” she explained, suggesting that the feeling of injustice lingered. In certain cases, Ani explained, mothers attempted to find closure from their son’s sacrifice—“My son told me, ‘I will defend the homeland until the end,’ and who was I to tell him not to?” — but others spiraled into depression as they felt like their child’s death was senseless. “That’s when mothers try to find meaning in their loss,” Ani said. “And when they can’t, it becomes unbearable.”

Across the three women—Arevik, Marine, and Ani—a powerful, recurring call for change arises: the urgent need for change in the local governing system and societal mindset in times of war. Each of them, in distinctive ways, identifies systemic gaps that could have been avoided and caused lasting sufferings during the war, especially among women.

Ani highlighted the state's unpreparedness. "We didn't have a strategy for providing psychological support during wartime—the country simply doesn't have that kind of strategy," she said. She explained how the system was disorganized, with the need for mental health support emerging only among families who are dealing with loss. Ani also described how many psychologists did not have the appropriate training for war situations and did not help out families as they did not bear the psychological toll of the war and intensity of the job. "We need practitioners who can deal with real-life trauma," she continued. In the long term, Ani aims to contribute to public health so that she could implement national strategies herself.

Arevik focused on the need for raising awareness about mental health services as the concept of wellbeing remains stigmatized among the local population. "It's so important to provide accessible and visible mental health support or counseling," she said. "These people cope with an intense amount of trauma, and they don't know that it's important to process it and talk to someone about it." She stressed the need for free counseling service for soldiers as a crucial step for recovery. Her suggestions reflect the lack of basic psychological infrastructure in a post-war country, similar to Ani's views.

Marine reiterated the need for remembrance of the fallen soldiers and the public's acknowledgement of loss, not just on occasions but throughout a lifetime. "The issue remains unresolved; it's still relevant today," she explained, adding that war remains an open wound that cannot be stitched. For Marine, this acknowledgement is not limited to mourning—it refers to educating the younger generation the need for a stronger state and secure future.

Despite the scars that they carry, Arevik, Marine, and Ani continue to show their courage, resilience, and commitment to healing, whether it concerns their own wounds or those of their communities. Their stories show that recovery does not end on the frontlines but begins through caring for our mental health, remembering our heroes, and pushing for reforms. By telling the stories of women, Armenia can be home to a compassionate and prepared society, one that ceases to neglect the invisible wounds of women in a post-war environment but rather empowers them to lead the way through lasting peace.

### **Epilogue**

For the first time, I experienced women's narratives about the war, and they told me their touching childhood stories, anecdotes, secrets,... These interviews were long, emotional, and even draining. Nevertheless, it is this project that gave me the chance to meet such amazing women and get to know them on a deeper level. Our giggles and tears turned into a beautiful connection and thought-provoking conversation.

Although I experienced the war myself when I first moved to Armenia in the summer of 2020, I did not see it through their distinctive lens. This project was eye-opening to me as I was unaware of the deep sorrows that these women endured from the start of the war. My knowledge

of women's experiences in the 2020 Artsakh war was limited to my observations, which was only the tip of the ice.

It would be a lie if I said that I did not underestimate the emotional toll of this project and its effects on my mental health. Regardless, I was able to withstand all obstacles thanks to my amazing capstone supervisor and support team members, who were extremely supportive of my decisions throughout the process. I am grateful to have chosen this topic as my capstone project, and I am grateful for the women who gave me their time, tears, laughs, and energy into the creation of this project.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview Guidelines

#### Life Story Interview: Marine Khachikyan

##### Biographical Information

- a. When/where were you born?
- b. What are/were your parents' full names?
- c. Do you have any siblings?
  - i. What are their names?
  - ii. What are their ages?
- d. Are you/have you been married?
  - i. What is/was the name of your husband?
  - ii. When/where were you married?
- e. Do you have any children?
  - i. What are their names?
  - ii. When/where were they born?

##### Family Heritage

- a. Can you tell me about your mother's parents? Do you remember your grandparents?
  - i. Were your grandparents from the same town/city/region as you?
  - ii. Did they work? What were their occupations?
  - iii. Did they help raise you? Were you close to them?
  - iv. Was either of them a strong influence on you?

v. [Repeat for father's parents]

b. Can we talk about your other relatives from the older generations?

c. Do you remember them? Did they play a role in your life?

d. Can you tell me about the relationship between your parents and their parents?

e. Can we talk about your parents? Let's start with your mother.

i. Can you describe her character to me?

ii. How is your relationship with her? Did it change over time?

iii. What kind of work did she do? Did she always do that kind of work? Did she continue working after she had her children?

vi. [Repeat for father]

## **Childhood**

a. Do you remember what your first home looked like?

i. Can you describe it?

ii. Who did you live with?

iii. Did you have any responsibilities at home?

b. Can we talk about your neighborhood?

i. Did you know who your neighbors were?

ii. Have you spent time with your neighbors? Do you share any memories?

iii. Did they help out your family in times of need?

c. Did you have close friends? Can you tell me about them?

i. Did you see them often?

ii. How did you spend your time together? Did you play any games?

- iii. Were you allowed to play with whom you liked?
- d. When they weren't working, what did your family members do?
  - i. Did you spend a lot of time together?
  - ii. How did you spend vacations with your family?

### **Youth/Schooling**

- a. At what age did you go to school?
  - i. What schools did you attend? Can you describe them?
- b. Can you describe your teachers?
  - i. What valuable lessons have they taught you?
- c. Which subjects did you enjoy the most?
- d. Can you describe your most cherished memories from school?
- e. How are your relationships with your old school friends?
- f. Can you describe your takeaways from your school years?
- g. Did you know what you wanted to study after graduating? What was your dream job?
- h. Which university did you attend?
  - i. What did you study?
    - ii. How many years have you studied this field?
    - iii. Did you enjoy your university years? Was it easy to integrate?
  - vi. Can you please share some memories from this period?

### **Work/Community**

- a. When did you leave home?

- i. Did you live by yourself?
- ii. Did you stay in your hometown? Why did you make this choice?
- b. Can you tell me about the community you lived in?
  - i. Can you describe the neighborhood to me?
  - ii. Did you know your neighbors? Were you close to them?
- c. Did you make friends in your new community?
  - i. Did you have a favorite place to meet with your friends?
- d. When did you start working?
  - i. How did you get your first job?
  - ii. What was your first occupation?
- e. Can you tell me about a normal day at work?
- f. Can you tell me about your coworkers and the work environment?

### **Marriage and Children**

- a. Can we talk about your husband?
  - i. Can you describe his character?
  - ii. How/When did you meet?
- b. How is your relationship with him now?
  - i. Do you still live together?
- c. Can you tell me about your children?
  - i. How is your relationship with them?
  - ii. Do you still live together?
  - iii. Who did you talk to if you were worried about them?

- vi. What values did you aim to teach them since their childhood?
- d. Is your relationship with your children different from your relationship with your parents?  
How?
- e. What were your hopes and dreams for your children?
- f. How old are your children now?

### **Military Service**

- a. When did your son start his military service?
  - i. Where did he stay? In which region?
  - ii. How long was his service?
- b. How did you feel when he first started this new experience?
  - i. Did he talk to you every day?
  - ii. What would you do if he didn't respond?
  - iii. How did you cope with fear and uncertainty?
- vi. Was your husband there for you? Did he support you?
- c. Did he visit you when he could?
  - i. If yes, how often did he visit?
  - ii. How long would he stay?
  - iii. How did you spend time together?
- d. How did your son feel about this military service?
  - i. How did he cope with fear and uncertainty?
- e. Looking back, what would you think about when you talk about your son's military service?

**War**

- a. How did you feel when you first heard or read the news about the war?
  - i. How did you cope with your stress and fear?
  - ii. Were you able to sleep?
  - iii. Whom did you talk to to relieve your emotions?
  - vi. Was your husband there for you? Did he help ease your emotions?
- b. How did your husband feel about the situation?
- c. How did your son feel during the entire 44 days?
  - i. Were you able to talk to him?
  - ii. Did he have limitations in communication? What were they?
  - iii. How long were you able to talk?
  - vi. Were your conversations monitored?
  - vii. How did he describe his days during the war after he came back?
- d. Did you send him anything during the war?
- e. Did you know if he was safe compared to his peers?
- f. How did your life change during the war?

**The Aftermath**

- a. How did you and your husband feel after the war ended?
- b. How did your son feel?
- c. How did you all deal with trauma?
  - ii. Did you visit a therapist or psychologist?
  - iii. How long did it take to relieve your emotions and stress?

vi. Did you take any medication?

vii. [Repeat for son]

d. When did your son return from his service?

i. Did you all feel?

ii. How did your relationship with your son change after this?

e. How did you continue your life after the war?

i. Were your family members by your side when you needed them?

ii. How did your life change after the war?

### **The Mental and Psychological Impact**

a. How did the war affect your mental and psychological well-being?

i. If there were changes in your behavior at home, work, or within your community, how would you evaluate them?

ii. Did you notice any changes in yourself, probably physically? How?

iii. Can we talk about your recovery from this challenging period? How long did it take?

### **Memories/Looking Back**

a. Have you had enough time to gain distance and talk about these issues?

b. How did you assess the situation, experience, and emotions with time?

c. Looking back, can we talk about the key takeaways from the war and its aftermath?

i. Who do you talk to about this?

ii. Today, does talking about the war make you feel the same way you did before?

iii. Do you think that you have fully recovered from the stress and anxiety?

- vi. Has your perception of this experience changed over time?
- d. What do you think about when you talk about the war?
- e. What are your hopes for your son's future and your family now?
- f. How do you think that society can help support mothers like you whose sons served in the army during the war?
- i. What could have been done better by Armenian society and the government?
- g. Do you know other women with a situation similar to yours?
- i. If yes, do you talk to them, probably to check in about their well-being?
- ii. How is your relationship with these women today?
- iii. When you talk about war with them today, how do you feel?
- h. Is there anything you would like to add that we didn't cover?

### **Life Story Interview: Arevik Mkrtychyan**

#### **Biographical Information**

- a. When/where were you born?
- b. What are/were your parents' full names?
- c. Do you have any siblings?
- i. What are their names?
- ii. What are their ages?

#### **Family Heritage**

- a. Can we talk about your parents? Let's start with your mother.
- i. Can you describe her character to me?

- ii. How is your relationship with her? Did it change over time?
- iii. What kind of work did she do? Did she always do that kind of work? Did she continue working after she had her children?
- vi. [Repeat for father]
- b. Can we talk about your siblings?
  - i. Can you describe their character to me?
  - ii. How is your relationship with them? Did it change over time?
  - iii. What kind of work do they do?

### **Childhood**

- a. Do you remember what your first home looked like?
  - i. Can you describe it?
  - ii. Who did you live with?
  - iii. Do you have any responsibilities at home?
- b. Can we talk about your neighborhood?
- c. Did you have close friends? Can you tell me about them?

### **Youth/Schooling**

- a. What schools did you attend? Can you describe them?
- b. Can you describe your teachers?
  - i. What valuable lessons have they taught you?
- c. Which subjects did you enjoy the most? Why?
- d. Can you describe your most cherished memories from school?

- e. How are your relationships with your old school friends?
- f. Can you describe your takeaways from your school years?
- g. Did you know what you wanted to study after graduating?
- h. Which university do you attend?
- i. What do you study?
  - ii. How many years have you studied this field?
  - iii. Do you enjoy your university years? Can you please describe them?

### **Work/Community**

- a. Today, who do you live with and where?
  - i. Did you stay in your hometown? Why did you make this choice?
- b. Can you tell me about the community you live in?
- c. Do you have friends in your new community?
- d. Are you currently working? What is your current position?
  - i. When did you start working?
  - ii. What was your first occupation?
- e. Can you tell me about a normal day at work?

### **Military Service**

- a. When did your brothers start their military service?
  - i. Where did they stay?
  - ii. How long was their service?
- b. How did you feel when they first started this experience?

- i. Did they talk to you every day?
- ii. What would you do if they didn't respond?
- iii. How did you cope with fear and uncertainty?
- vi. How did your family and friends support you?
- c. Did they visit you when they could?
  - i. If yes, how often?
  - ii. How long would they stay?
  - iii. How did you spend time together?
- d. How did your brothers feel about military service?
  - i. How did they cope with fear and uncertainty?
- e. Looking back, what would you think about when you talk about their military service?

## **War**

- a. How did you feel when you first heard or read the news about the war?
  - i. How did you cope with your stress and fear?
  - ii. Were you able to sleep?
  - iii. Whom did you talk to to relieve your emotions?
- b. How did your family feel about the situation?
- c. How did your brothers feel during the entire 44 days?
  - i. Were you able to talk to them?
  - ii. What kind of limitations did they face?
  - iii. How long were you able to talk?
  - vi. Were your conversations surveilled?

- vii. How did they describe their days during the war after they came back?
- d. Did you send them anything during the war?
- e. Did you know if they were safe?
- f. How did your life change during the war?

### **The Aftermath**

- a. How did you and your family feel after the war ended?
- b. How did your brothers feel?
- c. How did you all deal with trauma?
  - ii. Did you visit a therapist or psychologist?
  - iii. How long did it take to relieve your emotions and stress?
- vi. [Repeat for brothers]
- d. When did your brothers return from their service?
  - i. How did your relationship with your brothers change after this?
- e. How did your life change after the war?

### **The Mental and Psychological Impact**

- a. How did the war affect your mental and psychological well-being?
  - i. If there were changes in your behavior at home, work, or within your community, how would you evaluate them?
  - ii. Did you notice any changes in yourself, probably physically? How?
  - iii. Can we talk about your recovery from this challenging period? How long did it take?

**Memories/Looking Back**

- a. Have you had enough time to gain distance and talk about these issues?
- b. How did you assess the situation, experience, and emotions with time?
- c. Looking back, can we talk about the key takeaways from the war and its aftermath?
  - i. Who do you talk to about this?
  - ii. Today, does talking about the war make you feel the same way you did before?
  - iii. Do you think that you have fully recovered from the stress and anxiety?
  - vi. Has your perception of this experience changed over time? How?
- d. What are your hopes for your brothers' future and your family now?
- e. How do you think society can help support families whose sons served in the army during the war?
  - i. What could have been done better by Armenian society and the government?
  - f. Do you know other women with a situation similar to yours?
    - i. If yes, do you talk to them, probably to check in about their well-being?
    - ii. How is your relationship with these women today?
    - iii. When you talk about war with them today, how do you feel?
  - g. Is there anything you would like to add that we didn't cover?

**Life Story Interview: Ani Tavitian****Biographical Information**

- a. When/where were you born?
- b. What are/were your parents' full names?
- c. Do you have any siblings?

- i. What are their names?
- ii. What are their ages?

### **Family Heritage**

- a. Can we talk about your parents? Let's start with your mother.
  - i. Can you describe her character to me?
  - ii. How is your relationship with her? Did it change over time?
  - iii. What kind of work did she do? Did she always do that kind of work? Did she continue working after she had her children?
  - vi. [Repeat for father]
- b. Can we talk about your siblings?
  - i. Can you describe their character to me?
  - ii. How is your relationship with them? Did it change over time?
  - iii. What kind of work do they do?

### **Childhood**

- a. Do you remember what your first home looked like?
  - i. Can you describe it?
  - ii. Who did you live with?
  - iii. Do you have any responsibilities at home?
- b. Can we talk about your neighborhood?
- c. Did you have close friends? Can you tell me about them?

**Youth/Schooling**

- a. What schools did you attend? Can you describe them?
- b. Can you describe your teachers?
  - i. What valuable lessons have they taught you?
- c. Which subjects did you enjoy the most? Why?
- d. Can you describe your most cherished memories from school?
- e. How are your relationships with your old school friends?
- f. Can you describe your takeaways from your school years?
- g. Did you know what you wanted to study after graduating?
- h. Which university do you attend?
  - i. What do you study?
  - ii. How many years have you studied this field?
  - iii. Do you enjoy your university years? Can you please describe them?

**Work/Community**

- a. Today, who do you live with and where?
  - i. Did you stay in your hometown? Why did you make this choice?
- b. Can you tell me about the community you live in?
- c. Do you have friends in your new community?
- d. Are you currently working? What is your current position?
  - i. When did you start working?
  - ii. What was your first occupation?
- e. Can you tell me about a normal day at work?

**Military Service**

- a. When did your brothers start their military service?
  - i. Where did they stay?
  - ii. How long was their service?
- b. How did you feel when they first started this experience?
  - i. Did they talk to you every day?
  - ii. What would you do if they didn't respond?
  - iii. How did you cope with fear and uncertainty?
  - vi. How did your family and friends support you?
- c. Did they visit you when they could?
  - i. If yes, how often?
  - ii. How long would they stay?
  - iii. How did you spend time together?
- d. How did your brothers feel about military service?
  - i. How did they cope with fear and uncertainty?
- e. Looking back, what would you think about when you talk about their military service?

**War**

- a. How did you feel when you first heard or read the news about the war?
  - i. How did you cope with your stress and fear?
  - ii. Were you able to sleep?
  - iii. Whom did you talk to to relieve your emotions?
- b. What kind of psychological challenges did the families you worked with face during the war?

- c. How did you approach your work during those 44 days? What kind of support did you provide?
- d. Were there specific cases or experiences that deeply affected you personally or professionally?
- e. How did you manage your own mental well-being while supporting others in crisis?
- f. Did you collaborate with other professionals, organizations, or institutions during the war?
- g. Were there moments when you felt helpless or overwhelmed? How did you handle them?

### **The Aftermath**

- a. After the war ended, what were the most common psychological issues you observed among families and individuals?
- b. How did you help people process their grief, trauma, and loss?
- c. Were there particular cases or stories that stayed with you?
- d. How did your role as a psychologist evolve after the war?
- e. What were the biggest challenges in providing mental health support after such a large-scale crisis?
- f. Did you notice any differences in how different groups (soldiers, mothers, children, or displaced families) processed their experiences?
- g. What kind of long-term psychological effects do you think the war had on Armenian society?
- h. How did your life change after the war?

### **The Mental and Psychological Impact**

- a. How did the war affect your mental and psychological well-being?

- i. If there were changes in your behavior at home, work, or within your community, how would you evaluate them?
- ii. Did you notice any changes in yourself, probably physically? How?
- iii. Can we talk about your recovery from this challenging period? How long did it take?

### **Memories/Looking Back**

- a. With time, how do you reflect on your role during the war and its aftermath?
- b. Have your perspectives on trauma, resilience, and healing changed through your experiences?
- c. What key lessons have you taken away from this period in your life?
- d. Do you still work with families affected by the war? If so, how has your approach evolved?
- e. Do you think Armenia has made progress in addressing war-related mental health issues?
- f. If you could change one thing about how mental health support was handled during and after the war, what would it be?
- g. What are your hopes for the future in terms of psychological support for war-affected families in Armenia?
- h. Is there anything you would like to add that we didn't cover?

## Appendix B: Consent Forms

### Համաձայնության հավաստագիր

Հայաստանի ամերիկյան համալսարանում (ՀԱՀ) «CHSS 280 Բանավոր պատմություն. կենսապատումների հավաք» առարկային գրանցված ուսանողների կողմից անցկացվող բանավոր պատմության հարցազրույցին մասնակցելու համաձայնություն: Սույնով հավաստում եմ, որ համաձայն եմ մասնակցել ՀԱՀ Հումանիտար և հասարակական գիտությունների ֆակուլտետի դասախոս դոկտոր Հուրիկ Ադդարեանի (հեռ. 060 612769, էլ. հասցե [hourig.attarian@aua.am](mailto:hourig.attarian@aua.am)) ղեկավարությամբ Գայա Բայանի կողմից իրականացվող բանավոր պատմության նախագծին:

### Նախագծի նպատակը

Տեղյակ եմ, որ այս նախագծի նպատակն է հասկանալ, թե ինչպես են բանավոր պատմությունն ու հիշողության աշխատանքը հնարավորություն տալիս ուսումնասիրել հանրային ու անհատական պատմության միջև կապերը: Գայա Բայանի անցկացրած կենսապատման առանձին հարցազրույցի նպատակը 2020 թվականի Արցախյան պատերազմից տուժած հայ կանանց պատմությունները լուսաբանելն է ընդհանուր նախագծի համատեքստում:

### Ընթացակարգը

Հասկանում եմ, որ հարցազրույցը անցկացվելու է մասնակցի տանը կամ մեկ այլ պատշաճ վայրում, և տեսագրվելու և/կամ ձայնագրվելու է: Որպես մասնակից ես պատմելու եմ ինչպես է 2020 թվականի Արցախյան պատերազմի ազդեցությունը կանանց վրա: Տեղյակ եմ, որ հարցազրույցները տևելու են մոտ երկու ժամ, բայց այդուհանդերձ մասնակիցները կարող են որևէ պահի դադարեցնել հարցազրույցը, հրաժարվել պատասխանել որևէ հարցի, կամ որևէ պահի դուրս գալ նախագծից: Հասկանում եմ, որ եթե ցանկանամ հարցազրույցը երկու ժամից ավելի երկարաձգել, ինձ այդ հնարավորությունը կընձեռնվի:

### Ռիսկեր և օգուտներ

Հասկանում եմ, որ երբեմն կենսապատում պատմելը կարող է զգացմունքային առումով դժվար լինել: Տեղյակ եմ, որ որևէ պահի կարող եմ դադարեցնել հարցազրույցը, ընդմիջել կամ հրաժարվել շարունակել: Հաշվի առնելով, որ ուսանողների նախագծերը ներլսարանային ցուցադրման մաս են կազմելու (կայքով և/կամ հրատարակումներով), իմ պատմությունը, իմ թույլտվությամբ, նույնպես ներկայացվելու է:

### Մասնակցության պայմանները

Որպես մասնակից ես ինձ հասանելի կլինեն ձայնագրված և գրի առնված տվյալները՝ դրանք ստուգելու նպատակով: Նախագծի ամբողջ տևողության ընթացքում, ես հնարավորություն կունենամ վերանայել ու հաստատել անգլերեն թարգմանությունը, եթե նյութը հայերեն է:

Հասկանում եմ, որ որևէ պահի կարող եմ հետ վերցնել համաձայնությունս ու հրաժարվել մասնակցել նախագծին՝ առանց բացասական հետևանքների:

Հասկանում եմ, որ այս նախագծի տվյալները գիտաուսումնական նպատակներով կարող են հրատարակվել՝ տպագիր կամ թվային տարբերակներով:

Իմ հարցազրույցի ինքնության բացահայտման և վերարտադրման առումով (Ընտրեք տարբերակներից մեկը).

\_\_ Զամաձայն եմ, որ **ինքնությունս հայտնի լինի**: Զասկանում եմ, որ ինքնությունս կարող է բացահայտվել այս հարցազրույցի արդյունքում հրատարակված նյութերում կամ ելույթներում: **Զասկանում եմ, որ կարող եմ քողարկել իմ պատումների մեջ հիշատակվող մյուս անձանց ինքնությունները, եթե այդպես նախընտրեմ:**

\_\_ Զամաձայն եմ գիտաուսումնական նպատակներով այս հարցազրույցի նկարների ու ձայնագրությունների վերարտադրմանը որևէ հաղորդամիջոցով (վեբ կայքեր, վավերագրական ֆիլմեր և այլն):

**ԿԱՄ**

\_\_ Զասկանում եմ, որ իմ մասնակցությունն այս ուսումնասիրությանը **գաղտնի է** (ուսումնասիրությունն անող ուսանողն ու առարկան դասավանդողը կիմանան, սակայն չեն բացահայտի իմ ինքնությունը): **Զասկանում եմ, որ կարող եմ քողարկել իմ պատումների մեջ հիշատակվող մյուս անձանց ինքնությունները, եթե այդպես նախընտրեմ:**

\_\_ Զամաձայն եմ, որ չնայած իմ հարցազրույցից որոշ նյութեր կարող են հրատարակվել, սակայն ոչ մի ձայնագրություն կամ պատկեր չի կարող վերարտադրվել:

**Արխիվացում (Ընտրեք տարբերակներից մեկը).**

\_\_ Զամաձայն եմ, որ իմ հարցազրույցի գրի առնված տարբերակը և/կամ ձայնագրությունը կպահվեն հատուկ նախատեսված կոշտ սկավառակի (այլ կրիչի) վրա, ապահով տեղում:

**ԿԱՄ**

\_\_ Զասկանում եմ, որ երբ ուսանողների նախագիծը ավարտվի, ուսանողը կոչվի ցանցի ձայնագրությունը և/կամ տեսագրությունը (սակայն ես կարող եմ ունենալ հարցազրույցի իմ օրինակը):

**Այն դեպքում, երբ ընտանեկան լուսանկարներ կամ փաստաթղթեր են նկարվել կամ սկանավորվել (Ընտրեք տարբերակներից մեկը):**

\_\_ Զամաձայն եմ, որ հետազոտություն անող ուսանողը պատճենահանի ընտանեկան լուսանկարներ և փաստաթղթեր առաջադրանքի մեջ օգտագործելու և հարցազրույցի ձայնագրության հետ արխիվացնելու համար: Թույլ եմ տալիս նաև, որ հետագայում այլ հետազոտողներ այդ լուսանկարներն օգտագործեն իրենց հրատարակումների մեջ:

**ԿԱՄ**

\_\_ Զամաձայն եմ, որ ուսումնասիրություն անող ուսանողը պատճենահանի ընտանեկան լուսանկարներ ու փաստաթղթեր միայն նախագծի շրջանակներում օգտագործելու համար:

ՈՒՇԱԴԻՐ ԿԱՐԴԱՑԵԼ ԵՄ ՎԵՐԸ ՇԱՐԱԴՐՎԱԾԸ և ԶԱՍԿԱՆՈՒԲ ԵՄ ԱՅՍ ԶԱՄԱԶԱՅՆԱԳՐԻ ԿԵՏԵՐԸ: ԶՈԺԱՐԱԿԱՄ ԶԱՄԱԶԱՅՆՈՒԲ ԵՄ ՄԱՍՆԱԿՑԵԼ ԱՅՍ ՈՒՍՈՒՄՆԱՍԻՐՈՒԹՅԱՆԸ:

Մասնակից՝  
Անուն ազգանուն (խնդում ենք գրել տպատառ) \_\_\_\_\_

Ստորագրություն \_\_\_\_\_ Ամսաթիվ \_\_\_\_\_

Զարցազրույց վարող՝

Անուն ազգանուն (խնդրում ենք գրել տպատառ) \_\_\_\_\_

Ստորագրություն \_\_\_\_\_ Ամսաթիվ \_\_\_\_\_

Եթե որպես բանավոր պատմության նախագծի մասնակից որևէ պահի հարցեր կունենաք ձեր իրավունքների վերաբերյալ, կարող եք կապվել ՀԱՀ Հումանիտար և հասարակական գիտությունների ֆակուլտետի դասախոս դոկտոր Հուրիկ Ադդարեանի հետ (հեռ. 060 612769, էլ.հասցե՝ [hourig.attarian@aua.am](mailto:hourig.attarian@aua.am)):

## CONSENT FORM

Consent to participate in a capstone project conducted at the American University of Armenia (AUA). This is to state that I agree to participate in the capstone project conducted by Gaya Balian. The capstone director is Dr. Hourig Attarian of the College of Humanities & Social Sciences at AUA (tel.: 060 612769, email: [hourig.attarian@aua.am](mailto:hourig.attarian@aua.am)).

**PURPOSE:** I have been informed that the purpose of the project is to explore how the 2020 Artsakh War affected Armenian women's mental and psychological health. Within the bigger context of the project, the interview conducted by Gaya Balian is meant to focus on the experience of women who had family members, friends, and loved ones who participated in the war and how they were impacted.

**PROCEDURES:** I understand that the interview will be conducted in participants' homes or another appropriate place, and might be recorded on video. Alternatively, the interview may be conducted on Zoom or another online platform. As a participant, I will be asked to reflect on my personal perspective and experiences of the 2020 Artsakh War, exploring how it impacted me firsthand. The interview will last from one to two hours, however, as a participant I am free to stop at any time, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the project at any given point. I understand that if I wish to extend the interview for more than two hours, I will be provided that opportunity.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** I understand that the interview involves the sharing of my personal views and opinions, which will be treated with the utmost care and consideration. I have been informed that I am free to stop, take a break or discontinue at any time. There are no risks involved in partaking in this interview.

**CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION:** As a participant, I will have access to all the recorded material for verification purposes. Throughout the project, if and when the material produced is in Armenian, I will have the opportunity to review and verify the English translations.

\_\_\_ I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences.

I understand that the data from this project may be published in print or digital format for academic purposes.

In terms of **identification and reproduction** of my participation:

I agree to **disclose my identity**. I understand that my identity may be revealed in any publications or presentations that may result from this interview.

I agree to the reproduction of sound and images from this interview by any method and in any media for academic purposes (which may include webpages, documentary clips, etc.)

**OR**

I understand that my participation in this study is **confidential**. My identity will be concealed. I will be given a pseudonym in any publications or presentations that may result from this interview.

I agree that while data from my interview may be published, no sound or images from it may be reproduced.

**When photographs, artifacts or documents are scanned or photographed**

I agree to let the student researcher copy family photographs and documents for use in the student project.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

INTERVIEWEE:

NAME (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

INTERVIEWER:

NAME (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a capstone project participant, please contact Dr. Hourig Attarian of the College of Humanities & Social Sciences at AUA (tel.: 060 612769, email: [hourig.attarian@aua.am](mailto:hourig.attarian@aua.am)).