

Gender and the Making of “Standard” Knowledge in the Karabakh Conflict Studies

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Abstract: Research on the Karabakh conflict has mainly focused on military dynamics, territorial negotiations, and regional power competition. Within this dominant literature, the social and gendered dimensions of war, such as displacement, household adaptation, and women’s roles in community survival have received comparatively limited systematic attention, despite their relevance to how the conflict has shaped everyday life since the early 1990s and after the 2020 war. This article examines gender inequality in how knowledge about the Karabakh conflict is produced and recognized. It argues that (1) research on gender is often treated as a secondary topic in conflict studies, and (2) even when such research exists, frequently written by women, it is less likely to become widely visible, cited, or used as a standard reference in the main literature on the conflict. To assess this, the study traces the development of gender-focused research over time and conducts a structured comparison of indexed publications using OpenAlex, showing how publication formats, indexing systems, and citation practices shape which studies become most discoverable and reusable. The findings indicate that the apparent scarcity of gender analysis in Karabakh scholarship is partly produced by academic visibility structures that privilege strategic analyses over research on displacement, social recovery, and everyday wartime adaptation.

Keywords: Gender bias, Karabakh conflict, citation gap, knowledge production, Armenia-Azerbaijan

1. Introduction

For nearly three decades, the status of Karabakh and surrounding districts remained unresolved following the first war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. During this period, these territories were under Armenian-backed control, while internationally they were recognized as part of Azerbaijan. The dispute generated recurring violence, prolonged displacement, and persistent instability, becoming one of the central security issues in the South Caucasus. In 2020, renewed large-scale hostilities significantly altered territorial control, with several districts coming under Azerbaijani administration (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2024).

Against this backdrop, the scholarship on the Armenia–Azerbaijan relations, precisely, Karabakh conflict has developed primarily within a strategic and geopolitical analytical tradition. Foundational works, most notably Thomas de Waal’s *Black Garden*, established a widely adopted interpretive framework centered on diplomacy, interstate rivalry, military balance, and negotiation processes. Over time, this orientation has shaped expectations about what constitutes core conflict expertise and which types of studies are most likely to be treated as standard entry points into the literature.

Alongside this dominant trajectory, a separate but growing body of scholarship has examined the conflict through the lens of everyday wartime experience and social change. Research on displaced Azerbaijani women (Najafizadeh, 2013), practitioner-based field studies on women's security concerns and peace priorities (Kvinna till Kvinna 2019), and empirical analyses of women's daily survival, care work, and adaptation in war and post-war settings across the South Caucasus (Ziemer, 2020) have all demonstrated that gendered social processes are integral to how the Karabakh conflict has unfolded and been lived. Similarly, Claudia Ditel's study of women's agency in the Nagorno-Karabakh context highlights how grassroots initiatives and everyday practices can operate as informal confidence-building mechanisms that challenge militarized social environments.

Despite these contributions, the integration of such research into the central interpretive frameworks of the Karabakh conflict remains uneven. Gender-relevant studies on Karabakh are often produced by women scholars or by practitioners working closely with affected communities, but they tend to circulate through interdisciplinary journals, edited volumes, or policy-oriented venues rather than through the core conflict-security outlets that shape standard reference lists. This raises a broader question about how conflict knowledge is organized and evaluated within the field: why do some strands of Karabakh research become routine reference points, while others circulate mainly in specialized, interdisciplinary, or practitioner-oriented venues?

This article argues that the apparent scarcity of gender scholarship in Karabakh conflict studies is not primarily an intellectual absence, but a structural visibility distortion shaped by citation hierarchies, publication formats, and indexing infrastructures. Because discoverability strongly conditions what is routinely read, taught, and reused, these visibility structures can also influence which problem-definitions become "standard" in the field and which remain treated as supplementary. The article makes three contributions: (1) it conceptualizes the Karabakh field's "standard knowledge" as an outcome of gendered recognition mechanisms rather than topic relevance alone; (2) it maps how gender-relevant work on Karabakh circulates across formats and venues that are less likely to become canonical entry points; and (3) it provides bibliometric evidence from the OpenAlex database, comparing general conflict publications with those classified under gender-related topics, to show how indexing systems and search classifications make some types of research far more visible and reusable than others. It further links these visibility patterns to downstream effects in curricula, policy framing, post-war framing and mediation narratives, without implying intentional "ignoring," but rather unequal positioning of gendered perspectives as structuring lenses.

2. Strategic Bias in Conflict Studies and Its Effects on Gender Research

Research on armed conflict and security has generated a substantial body of academic and policy-oriented literature, yet this literature has developed within a knowledge environment that systematically privileges particular subjects, methods, and authorial profiles. Analyses of military strategy, territorial integrity, interstate dynamics, military capabilities, and great-power involvement have dominated the field. By contrast, social and gender-sensitive perspectives have remained marginal. This imbalance reflects not a lack of gender relevance to conflict dynamics, but a broader epistemic hierarchy embedded in conflict and security studies.

Empirical mappings of research agendas in leading conflict and security journals show that gender-sensitive analysis constitutes only a small minority of publications and is rarely treated as a primary analytical framework. A large-scale review of articles published in the *Journal of Peace Research* and comparable conflict journals finds that gender appears infrequently as a core variable in studies of war and armed conflict, despite the civilian and social character of many contemporary conflicts (Melander, 2005, p. 2). Similarly, systematic assessments of security studies show a persistent prioritization of “hard security” themes, especially military force over gendered dimensions of conflict. In their account of international security studies, Buzan and Hansen illustrate this trajectory as well by explicitly noting the later inclusion of feminist approaches in the field of international relations (Buzan & Hansen, 2009, p. 135).

Using data from the Teaching, Research, and International Policy (TRIP) project on peer-reviewed publications between 1980 and 2006, it has been observed that women constitute approximately 25–30% of authors publishing in leading International Relations journals. Yet their work receives significantly fewer citations than comparable male-authored research, even when controlling for journal rank, methodology, and topic area (Maliniak et al., 2013). Citation gaps of roughly 30–40% have also been identified across political science subfields, indicating that reputational authority accumulates unevenly and systematically along gender lines (Dion et al., 2018).

These patterns are supported by bibliometric analyses of core IR journals indexed in Web of Science and Scopus. They show that women-authored articles are underrepresented among the most highly cited publications and are less likely to be assigned as foundational readings in graduate-level syllabi. Importantly, gendered citation patterns cannot be understood independently of the institutional environments in which knowledge is produced. Editorial leadership and board composition matter because they signal what kinds of scholarship are treated as central and field-defining. In political science, the gender distribution of editorial positions often mirrors the gender composition of the subfields that govern particular journals, thereby reinforcing existing epistemic hierarchies (Dion et al., 2018).

If we speak in numbers, between 2007 and 2017, the *American Political Science Review* (APSR), the discipline’s flagship journal, was consistently led by male editors. Although women constituted between 25% and 67% of associate or co-editors in particular years, the journal had no female editor-in-chief during this period. Across the same decade, APSR’s Editorial Board was 36–43% female, broadly reflecting overall APSA membership. In 2017 specifically, APSR again had a male editor, with women comprising 33% of associate editors and 67% of editorial board members. This illustrates a pattern in which women become more visible in advisory roles than in ultimate gatekeeping positions (Dion et al., 2018).

A different case emerges in Political Analysis (PA), governed by the Political Methodology section (Polmeth), one of the most male-dominated areas of the discipline. Since 2007, PA has had only one female editor, and that appointment occurred within a shared editorial team rather than a sole editorship. Typically, just one of three or four associate editors is a woman, and the editorial board has ranged between 16% and 28% female, closely tracking the gender composition of the methodology subfield itself. By contrast, *Politics & Gender* (P&G), governed by the APSA Women and Politics section, represents the opposite institutional extreme. The journal has been led almost exclusively by women, with 100% female editors, 75–100% female associate editors,

and 86–89% female editorial board membership. Taken together, these three cases show how editorial authority reproduces subfield demographics and shapes expectations about whose scholarship is most likely to be published, circulated, and cited (Dion et al., 2018).

These structural contrasts have clear implications for citation behaviour. Where women constitute a clear critical mass, as in politics and gender, female-, male-, and mixed-gender author teams are expected to cite women's scholarship at similar rates. In contrast, political methodology, still heavily male-dominated, is expected to exhibit pronounced gender citation gaps, consistent with earlier findings from Political Analysis. APSR, as a generalist journal spanning the discipline, holds an intermediate position, reflecting both its broad remit and the fact that approximately 37.5% of APSA members self-identify as female (Dion et al., 2018).

Disciplinary comparisons reinforce this logic. Across the social sciences, methodological subfields tend to be male dominated, but the magnitude of gender imbalance changes by discipline. For example, in 2013, women constituted only 24% of economists, compared to 32% of political scientists and 52% of sociologists. These differences are reflected in the editorial composition of leading methodology journals. Between 2007 and 2017, women accounted for roughly 4–16% of editorial leadership roles in *Econometrica*, compared to 7–21% in *Sociological Methods & Research* (Dion et al., 2018).

By and large, these patterns can be framed through two mechanisms widely discussed in the literature on gendered citation practices. First, a “Matthew effect”, which explains that research associated with the dominant group becomes more central and more frequently cited, partly because there are fewer women to cite in male-heavy subfields. Second, a “Matilda effect” can persist even as representation improves: women's work may still be treated as less central or less authoritative, and therefore receive weaker recognition in citation practices. Citation behavior thus reflects not only individual author choices but also the gendered organization of disciplines, subfields, and editorial gatekeeping (Dion et al., 2018). Dion, Sumner, and Mitchell also investigate how often men and women cite female scholars in political science and method journals. They find significant gender differences in citation behaviour. As summarized by Sara Mitchell in an interview, “Male authors cited women's work at a rate of 14% lower than their female peers” (Rachael Pells, 2018).

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that gendered patterns of recognition in conflict and security studies are structurally embedded in citation practices, editorial gatekeeping, and disciplinary hierarchies, shaping which forms of research become visible, reusable, and eventually treated as standard knowledge.

3. The Development of Gender-Focused Research on the Karabakh Conflict (2000–2024)

When applied to Karabakh scholarship, the hierarchy described in Section 2 is visible in where gender-relevant work tends to appear: it is more often published in interdisciplinary journals, edited volumes, or practitioner reports than in the core conflict-security outlets that anchor canonical reading lists.

Before 2020, gender-lensed Karabakh research appeared sporadically and largely outside mainstream security journals. Najafizadeh's study of Azerbaijani IDP and refugee women from the First Karabakh War, published in the *Journal of International Women's Studies*, is a key example: it

foregrounds women's narratives and coping strategies, but its venue places it closer to gender/interdisciplinary audiences than to canonical conflict-security bibliographies (Najafizadeh, 2013).

There was a noticeable change around 2019, with practitioners, policy organisations, and even academics doing more gender-focused work. The increased international focus on the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda in the late 2010s (United Nations Security Council, 2020) and the resurgence of international attention to the Karabakh conflict before to the second war in 2020 both occurred during this time. When taken as a whole, these elements created momentum for including women's experiences into the creation of conflict knowledge. A landmark example is a major 2019 report by the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation titled *Listen to Her: Gendered Effects of the Conflict over Karabakh and Women's Priorities for Peace*. Produced by an international women's peacebuilding NGO and based on extensive field research with women affected by the conflict, the report documents gender-specific security concerns, displacement experiences, livelihood disruptions, and peace priorities largely absent from dominant narratives. In its opening, it presents itself as "the first in-depth examination of the effects of the Karabakh conflict on women, their livelihoods, and agency". The report underscores that presenting women's everyday concerns can "reconceptualise the notion of peacebuilding" in the conflict, drawing on feminist peace and security approaches (Kvinna till Kvinna, 2019, p. 12).

This surge was also supported by the WPS policy climate. Since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) (UN Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, 2000), international frameworks have increasingly emphasized women's participation in peace processes and the gendered impacts of conflict. By the mid-2010s, global reviews of the WPS agenda highlighted persistent knowledge gaps regarding women's roles and needs in conflict settings (Coomaraswamy, 2015). In the late 2010s, donors and NGOs operationalized these priorities through funded projects on specific conflicts, including Karabakh, which contributed to the production of reports such as *Listen to Her*. However, much of this output circulated through policy and civil-society venues rather than core security journals, limiting its uptake into canonical conflict bibliographies.

Another notable example is the 2020 edited volume *Women's Everyday Lives in War and Peace in the South Caucasus*, edited by Ulrike Ziemer. This academic collection positions itself explicitly as a corrective to decades of geopolitically dominated analysis of the region. In the overview, the volume's primary aim is "to shift the pre-occupation with geopolitical analysis in the region and to share new empirical research on women and social change" (Ziemer, 2020). Its chapters examine themes such as widowhood in conflict, care economies among displaced families, women's grassroots peace activism, and social survival strategies in Karabakh's uncertain environment. The volume also frames women's navigation of wartime life (through informal economies, community support networks, or mourning and memory) as part of how conflict unfolds and how its impacts are managed. This approach aligns with contemporary feminist peace research, which argues that gender dynamics are woven into the fabric of conflict and peace processes rather than being external "soft" issues.

The 2020 volume and other similar collections therefore once again signal that gender is present in the Karabakh knowledge landscape and is analytically consequential.

4. Citation Patterns and the Dominance of Strategic Narratives: Karabakh Conflict Scholarship

Within literature on the Karabakh conflict, an unequal distribution of scholarly attention is reinforced through citation practices as well. A prominent example is *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War* (Thomas de Waal, 2003, later edited in 2013), which quickly became an unrivaled reference work on the Karabakh conflict and remains widely cited as an authoritative source (Broers, 2015), (Khalilzade, 2024). Published by a major press, the book has been extensively reviewed in venues such as *Foreign Affairs*, and it appears frequently in mainstream overviews by policy institutes. Major conflict analyses and histories in high-visibility outlets (e.g., Carnegie Endowment reports, Crisis Group briefings) routinely cite *Black Garden*, further reinforcing its canonical status. By contrast, gender-focused work is far less visible in the highly cited core of Karabakh bibliographies and citation networks.

Examples clarify how this asymmetry works in practice. The report “Listen to Her” is widely referenced in NGO as well as policy forums and has informed advocacy initiatives (Hilditch, 2021). Yet because it was released as a standalone report rather than a journal article, it has minimal presence in commercial citation databases. Similarly, academic contributions on peacebuilding and gender inclusivity in the Karabakh context often appear as book chapters in edited volumes, which are unevenly indexed at the chapter level. One example is a chapter by a young female Azerbaijani researcher examining women’s exclusion from the Karabakh peace process, published in a report called *Corridors – Proceedings Vol. III* (Relitz, 2021, p. 66). Such chapters typically do not get systematically indexed in Web of Science/Scopus.

More recent peer-reviewed research confirms that gendered dimensions of the conflict remain underrepresented in leading conflict and peace journals. For example, a 2025 study in *Nationalities Papers* analyzes women’s participation and exclusion in Armenia-Azerbaijan’s post-war peace process, concluding that substantive inclusion remains very limited due to persistent structural factors, such as societal barriers, and even women’s self-exclusion, rather than simple oversight (Vassileva, 2025). Yet even such a contribution has not (to date) been treated as a standard “entry-point” reference for conflict studies in the way strategic narratives are.

Another example is Sinéad Walsh’s chapter “Gender, Conflict, and Social Change in Armenia and Azerbaijan,” published in the *Routledge Handbook of Gender in Central-Eastern Europe and Eurasia* (Walsh, 2021). While it offers valuable analysis of how gender norms and the Karabakh conflict interact, it appears as a handbook chapter (Chapter 41) rather than a journal article.

Further evidence comes from regionally focused studies. A 2023 qualitative study in the *Mediterranean Journal of Gender and Women’s Studies* conducted interviews with rural Azerbaijani women in Barda to document their experiences of war and their ideas for peace. The study “Rural Women in Peacebuilding and Peacekeeping: Azerbaijani Rural Women’s Perspectives on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict” (Babayeva, 2023) provides grounded insights, but it was published in a national/regional journal not indexed by Web of Science or Scopus. Likewise, feminist perspectives that link lived experiences to broader structural inequalities often circulate as op-eds or blog pieces without formal citation tracking. For instance, Walsh’s 2014 article in *OpenDemocracy* critiqued the “masculinised structures” of the OSCE Minsk Group and the exclusivity of the negotiating format, arguing that the all-male, great-power approach was failing to

produce peace. Yet because such contributions appear in media outlets rather than scholarly journals, they “drop out” of academic accounting (Walsh, 2014). A similar dynamic can be observed in Claudia Ditel’s chapter *Women’s Transformative Power in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, which situates women’s grassroots peace initiatives and experiences of militarized patriarchy as analytically relevant to conflict dynamics. This chapter has limited citation uptake to date (Springer metrics: 5 citations) (Ditel 2022).

To examine whether gender-focused research on the Karabakh conflict is disproportionately produced by women scholars, the study conducted an author-level review of key gender-related publications identified in the literature (e.g., Najafizadeh 2013; Ziemer 2020; Walsh; Ditel 2022; Twum et al. 2019). Author gender was identified based on publicly available academic profiles and institutional biographies. While this approach does not capture the full universe of authorship and should be treated as indicative rather than exhaustive, the review suggests that a substantial share of gender-focused Karabakh research is authored or co-authored by women. This pattern is consistent with broader findings in International Relations that women scholars are more likely to publish on gender-related topics, while receiving comparatively lower citation uptake in mainstream security literature.

Rather than reflecting a lack of scholarship, this distribution points to uneven pathways of recognition and uptake. Strategic and geopolitical accounts continue to define the core interpretive framework of the conflict, while gender-sensitive research remains only marginally integrated into the venues through which academic legitimacy and influence are consolidated.

5. Visibility in Academic Databases: Evidence from the Karabakh Literature

Another major factor shaping the gendered landscape of conflict knowledge is the structure of academic indexing and language hierarchies. Global citation databases heavily privilege English-language publications and journals indexed on major commercial platforms. Research on the Karabakh conflict published in Azerbaijani, Armenian, Russian, or in local academic journals is far less likely to be indexed in these databases, and thus effectively “doesn’t count” in global citation metrics (Rafols et al., 2016). Even high-quality studies and important regional policy papers may remain invisible to scholars conducting literature reviews through these indices. This is a known systemic issue: English has become a near-universal requirement for indexing in selective databases, producing the “systematic exclusion of large segments” of non-English or local scholarship from global visibility frameworks (Nazarovets et al., 2026). In the Karabakh case, gender-relevant knowledge produced in local languages or regional contexts can be doubly marginalized: first by language, and second by venue. If one relied only on globally indexed sources, one might conclude that the conflict’s literature is almost entirely gender-blind and authored mostly by men, a conclusion that reflects indexing bias at least as much as it reflects the underlying reality of knowledge production.

Studies show that the Web of Science, for example, is strongly biased toward English-language journals. Scopus provides somewhat broader international coverage, but both databases underrepresent non-English-speaking and developing countries in their indexed corpora. English therefore overwhelmingly dominates both major citation databases. In Scopus, 92.64% of indexed documents are published in English; in Web of Science, the proportion is even higher at 95.37%. The gap is substantial: in Scopus, the next most represented language is

Chinese at only 2.76% of indexed publications; in Web of Science, Spanish ranks second at 1.26% of total content. These figures demonstrate how English-language scholarship structurally shapes what becomes visible in global indexing systems (Singh et al., 2021), (Vera-Baceta et al., 2019, p. 4).

Many contributions that center women’s experiences or social dimensions circulate in formats that are less index-friendly: NGO reports, policy briefs, local university journals, or chapters in conference proceedings. Therefore, even though such works circulate widely among practitioners and local experts, they also remain weakly “countable” in the bibliometric layer (Singh et al., 2021).

To identify whether gendered analysis is structurally marginal within the Karabakh conflict scholarship, I conducted a structured comparison using OpenAlex, as institutional access to Scopus was not available. Using identical conflict identifiers – “Nagorno-Karabakh,” “Karabakh,” and “Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict,” I first constructed a general conflict corpus without applying any topical filters, keeping all years and all publication types. This baseline search produced 3,946 publications. I then applied a topic restriction. Because additional related concepts generated zero results, I was required to select only one available classification, “Gender, Security, and Conflict,” which yielded 11 publications. This means that gender-centered conflict analysis represents approximately 0.28% of the total indexed Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict literature in OpenAlex ($11/3,946 \approx 0.28\%$).

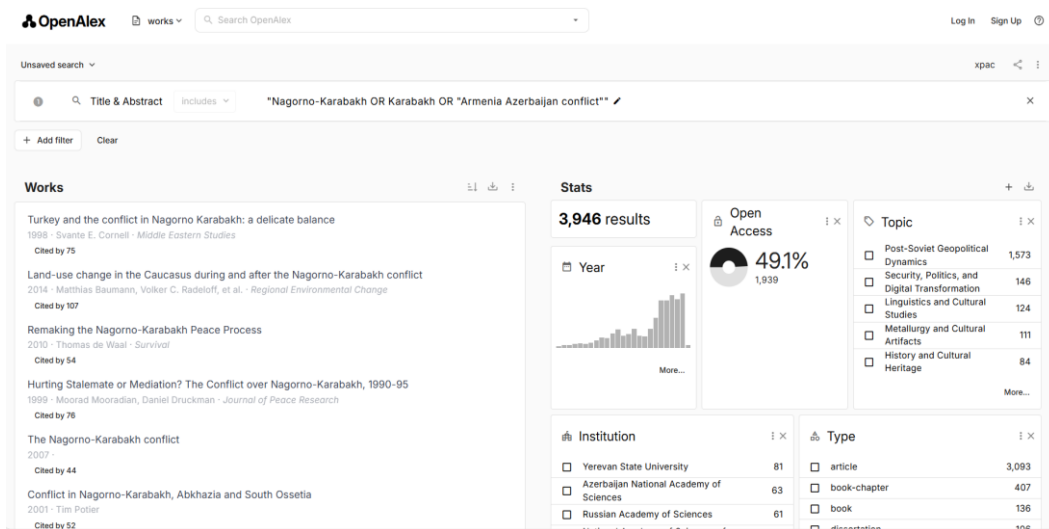


Figure 1. OpenAlex comparison of general Karabakh conflict publications

Data extraction was conducted on 13 February 2026, providing a fixed temporal snapshot of the OpenAlex database. As mentioned above, the precise search queries combined the conflict identifiers “Nagorno-Karabakh” OR “Karabakh” OR “Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict,” and searches were applied to titles and abstracts rather than author-supplied keywords to capture publications explicitly referencing the conflict in their core descriptive metadata. No restrictions were imposed on publication types, allowing articles, book chapters, books, and dissertations to be included so as to reflect the full diversity of publication formats through which gender-relevant research circulates. The OpenAlex interface was accessed with “extension package” (xpac) to improve coverage and filtering functionality, which may produce minor numerical variations across

repeated queries but does not alter the overall proportional imbalance identified. OpenAlex topic classifications operate through algorithmic clustering based on citation networks and semantic similarity across titles and abstracts rather than manual subject tagging; thus, assignment to the topic “Gender, Security, and Conflict” reflects probabilistic topical proximity inferred by the database.

The thematic structure of the general corpus further illustrates the imbalance. Dominant clusters include Post-Soviet Geopolitical Dynamics (1,573 publications), followed by concentrations on security, politics, digital transformation, history, and cultural heritage. Gender does not appear as an intersecting or secondary topic within these dominant clusters. Publication formats also reflect structural asymmetry. In the general conflict corpus, 78.4% of outputs are journal articles (3,093 publications), the format most strongly reinforced by citation systems, syllabus construction, and reputational accumulation. By contrast, in the gender-classified subset (n = 11), six outputs are journal articles, three are book chapters, one is a monograph, and one is a dissertation, indicating a more dispersed format distribution. Institutional patterns reinforce this marginalization. The general corpus is anchored in major regional research centers, including Baku State University, the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, Yerevan State University, the Russian Academy of Sciences, and institutions that function as central nodes in the production and reproduction of conflict expertise. The gender corpus, by contrast, is concentrated in a small number of non-core institutions, with visible clustering in institutions such as the University of Winchester and isolated contributions from others, including Tallinn University, and with no representation from principal academic centers directly connected to the conflict. Indexing infrastructure further amplifies this disparity: while 2,857 publications in the general corpus are registered in Crossref, only eight of the eleven gender-classified outputs are Crossref-indexed and one in DataCite, limiting their algorithmic visibility and citation potential.

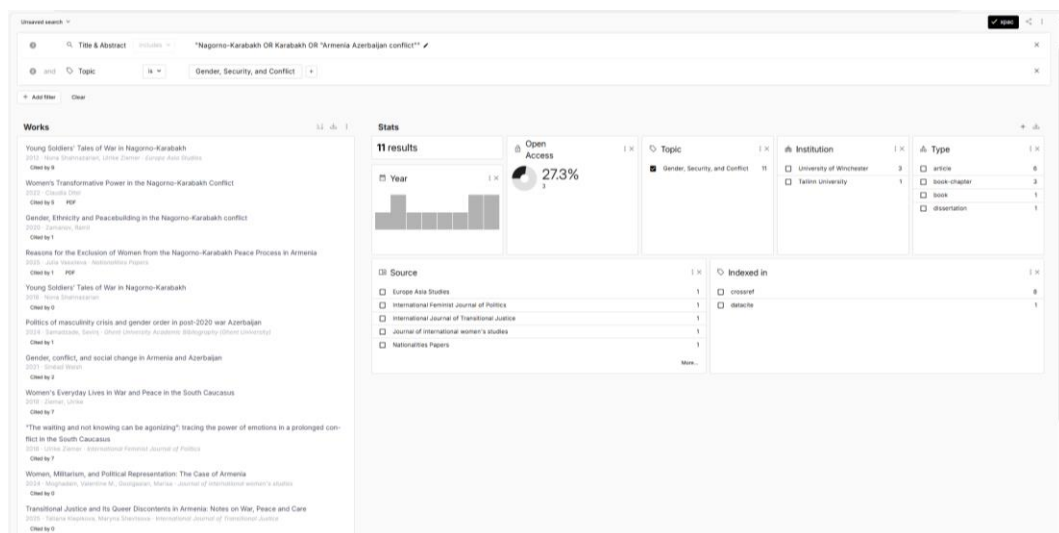


Figure 2. OpenAlex comparison of gender-classified Karabakh conflict publications

Taken together, the OpenAlex findings on the Karabakh conflict reinforce the broader argument of this section: what appears as thin gender literature in mainstream discovery systems is less a reflection of intellectual scarcity than of how bibliometric infrastructures filter and amplify particular kinds of conflict knowledge. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge methodological limitations: OpenAlex relies on automated indexing and machine-learning topic

classification, and therefore may not capture works that engage gender implicitly without using explicit terminology in titles or abstracts. The results presented here should thus be interpreted as an approximation of visibility patterns within a major open bibliometric database rather than an exhaustive census of all gender-relevant Karabakh scholarship. The selection of OpenAlex was motivated by its transparency, reproducibility, and open accessibility, which allow systematic comparison in the absence of subscription access to Scopus or Web of Science.

6. Consequences of Asymmetric Knowledge Visibility

The asymmetric visibility identified in academic databases is not only a descriptive pattern of publication circulation; it also has practical consequences for how the Karabakh conflict is taught, governed, and reconstructed. When certain forms of knowledge, primarily strategic, territorial, and military analyses, achieve higher citation density and institutional recognition, they are more likely to inform curricula, policy frameworks, and international mediation agendas. Conversely, perspectives that remain less visible in core databases, including gender-focused analyses of displacement, care economies, and everyday recovery, tend to exert weaker influence on the design of post-conflict governance and peacebuilding priorities. The following subsections trace these consequences across three key domains: teaching syllabi, policy design, and post-war reconstruction and mediation practices.

6.1. Effects on Teaching Syllabi

Evidence from Azerbaijani university syllabi suggests that Karabakh-related content can enter teaching primarily through a national history framework, which in turn helps define what counts as “standard” knowledge for students encountering the conflict through formal curricula. For example, a 2024–2025 “Azerbaijani History” syllabus approved by the Department of Caucasus Studies and Azerbaijani History within the Faculty of International Relations and Regional Studies at Azerbaijan University of Languages frames the course as contributing to historical memory includes dedicated modules on the conflict over Karabakh and surrounding districts, the 2020 war, and the post-war period, including reconstruction and return-related themes. At the same time, the visible bibliography foregrounds general national history textbooks and official/legal materials, while gender-focused conflict scholarship does not appear in the assigned readings, indicating that gendered aspect of the conflict again remain peripheral within the curricular knowledge structure (Azerbaijan University of Languages, 2024). A similar structural tendency can be observed in international teaching architectures: A course “Ethno-Political Conflicts in the Caucasus,” offered at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic, situates Karabakh as one case study within a broader theoretical sequence on ethnicity, nationalism, escalation, and reconciliation, drawing on core readings such as Cornell’s *Small Nations and Great Empires* and Suleimanov’s work on ethno-political conflict alongside canonical ethnic-conflict literature. In this design, Karabakh is approached through mainstream ethno-political conflict frameworks rather than through gender or WPS perspectives, illustrating how curricular organization across different academic contexts can reproduce a dominant knowledge pathway in which strategic, territorial, and escalation-focused analyses are simultaneously positioned as foundational, while gender-sensitive perspectives enter, if at all, as supplementary lenses (Brisku, 2019).

6.2. How does it influence policy design and post-war reconstruction frameworks?

Policy design in the post-2020 Karabakh context can be documented as being organized primarily around territorial reintegration, infrastructure rebuilding, and human security tasks such as demining, which aligns with how “standard” conflict knowledge often foregrounds state capacity, stabilization, and physical recovery. At the strategic level, the Government of Azerbaijan’s “Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development” frames national development priorities around themes such as a competitive economy, inclusive society, and environmental sustainability, while also explicitly linking medium-term development to post-conflict recovery imperatives in the liberated territories (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021). In parallel, the President of Azerbaijan’s official “Great Return” portal consolidates post-war measures under the concept of return, reconstruction, and reintegration, and links to the Presidential Order approving the “1st State Program on the Great Return to the Liberated Territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan”, indicating that the core policy architecture is programmatic and logistics-oriented, which focused on settlement planning, service provision, reconstruction (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, n.d), (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021). Complementing this national policy framework, the World Bank’s Azerbaijan Country Economic Memorandum (2022) identifies the reconstruction of liberated territories as a near-term development priority and discusses post-conflict recovery primarily in macro-fiscal, infrastructure, and investment-planning terms, illustrating how mainstream recovery analysis conceptualizes reconstruction chiefly through territorial development and public investment lenses (World Bank Group, 2022).

Post-war reconstruction frameworks are likewise evidenced as being built around phased physical rehabilitation, demining, restoration of basic services, and the creation of enabling conditions for return. In parallel, international development documentation underscores operational recovery constraints, particularly mine clearance: UNDP’s global mine-action financing compendium includes Azerbaijan among supported contexts, highlighting clearance and national mine-action capacity-building as essential preconditions for safe return and reconstruction timelines (United Nations Development Programme, 2021, p. 4).

At the same time, policy design in Azerbaijan has incorporated economic recovery and entrepreneurship dimensions that intersect with post-conflict reintegration, yet these frameworks largely operationalize gender as a targeted policy field rather than as a core analytical lens shaping the overall recovery strategy. OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) assessments note that the government mainstreamed MSME-focused (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise) policymaking through the establishment of the Small and Medium Business Development Agency (SMEDA) under the Ministry of Economy in 2017 and through initiatives under the Strategic Roadmap for the Production of Consumer Goods at the Level of Small and Medium Entrepreneurship. These measures included credit guarantees, entrepreneurial training, export promotion services, and specific support instruments for women’s entrepreneurship, demonstrating that gender equality considerations are present within economic policy design but primarily as sector-specific interventions rather than as an overarching framework guiding post-conflict reconstruction or territorial reintegration policy (World Bank Group, 2022, pp. 162-164). The same OECD analysis further notes comparatively low levels of female ownership and women’s representation in management positions and recommends strengthened coordination, monitoring, and support measures for women’s entrepreneurship, indicating that gender remains

an evolving policy area where capacity-building continues to be pursued rather than a fully embedded structuring principle across all policy domains.

This dual pattern is analytically significant: gender is institutionally recognized within policy instruments, yet its incorporation tends to occur through discrete programmes, such as women's entrepreneurship incentives, resource centers, and ministry-level gender focal points rather than through a comprehensive gender-analytical framework applied across all dimensions of post-conflict governance.

6.3. How does it affect international mediation narratives?

International mediation narratives around Karabakh since 2020 can be evidenced as being structured first by ceasefire/implementation logics (security arrangements, corridors/communications, return logistics), and then by normalization logics (border delimitation, connectivity, peace treaty language, and "rights and security" framing), which tends to reproduce the same hierarchy identified in the literature: the conflict is narrated and "manageable" primarily through state-to-state stabilization toolkits, while gender-sensitive perspectives are rarely positioned as the organizing lens of mediation. The 10 November 2020 Trilateral Statement (Azerbaijan–Armenia–Russia) codifies this baseline mediation architecture in explicitly operational terms, such as cessation of hostilities, deployment of a peacekeeping contingent, parameters for the Lachin corridor, return of IDPs/refugees, and restoration of regional economic and transport links, i.e., a framework centered on security governance and territorial-administrative implementation rather than on social recovery dynamics or gender-differentiated effects of displacement and return (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, n.d).

In later European Union-facilitated formats, the narrative shifts toward state normalization and institutionalized peace parameters: in his remarks after the 1 June 2023 meeting (including Armenia, Azerbaijan, France, and Germany), European Council President Charles Michel foregrounds workstreams such as progress toward a peace treaty, border delimitation, unblocking transport connections, and discussion of the "rights and security" issue in the Karabakh context, again reflecting a mediation storyline anchored in sovereignty/territorial arrangements, connectivity, and security assurances as the primary grammar of peace-making (Council of the European Union, 2023).

Within this framing, the conflict is predominantly narrated as a problem of interstate relations, territorial governance, and geopolitical balance, which positions military escalation, ceasefire mechanisms, and border arrangements as the core objects of mediation. This does not imply that international mediators ignore social or gender issues, rather, it indicates that the primary narrative structure of mediation remains anchored in state-centric conflict resolution logics, where stabilization, normalization, and treaty-making constitute the main reference points for defining progress in the peace process.

7. Discussion

This section interprets the article's findings on gendered visibility by situating the OpenAlex results within broader dynamics of knowledge production: the Karabakh literature's most easily discoverable "default reading" remains structured around strategic and geopolitical analyses, while gender aspect of the conflict circulates through less visible citation channels. As shown in OpenAlex query using identical conflict identifiers ("Nagorno-Karabakh," "Karabakh," and "Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict"), the baseline search yields 3,946 indexed publications, while the "Gender, Security, and Conflict" classification returns 11, or about 0.28%. In practical terms, a scholar searching standard databases for "Karabakh conflict" is therefore statistically far more likely to encounter military, diplomatic, and geopolitical work than gender-relevant research, even when the latter exists and is directly conflict-specific.

The second result concerns format. In the general Karabakh dataset, journal articles dominate, which matters because journal articles are the format most reliably indexed, easiest to retrieve, and most likely to accumulate citations. By contrast, much of the gender-relevant Karabakh work that this article traces travels through edited volumes, policy reports, and regional or interdisciplinary journals routes that are less consistently indexed at the chapter level and less likely to be pulled into mainstream conflict bibliographies. This helps explain a recurring Karabakh pattern: gender-focused contributions (e.g., Najafzadeh on displaced Azerbaijani women; Kvinna till Kvinna's field-based "Listen to Her"; Ziemer's edited volume on women's everyday war/peace lives; Ditel's peer-reviewed chapter on women's agency and informal confidence-building) circulate, but they do not become routine entry points in the way Black Garden does. For gender studies and social transformation research, the implication is concrete: when the most visible Karabakh explanations are built primarily from strategic sources, the social mechanisms that shape long-term recovery care burdens, livelihood rebuilding, household adaptation after displacement, and community-level coping risk being treated as "context" rather than as part of the conflict's core dynamics. For inclusive development debates, this matters because policies built on a narrow evidence base are more likely to miss how war reorganizes daily life and social resilience over time.

The overall conclusion is therefore not that gender research on Karabakh is missing, but that it is less likely to be seen and reused under the current visibility rules of the field. A more balanced Karabakh knowledge architecture does not require replacing strategic analysis, it requires making gender-relevant conflict knowledge easier to find, cite, and teach so that explanations of the Karabakh conflict reflect not only negotiation and battlefield outcomes, but also the social transformations that have shaped the region since the 1990s and after 2020.

8. Theoretical implications for conflict studies and International Relations

The first theoretical implication is that "standard knowledge" functions as an infrastructural category, not only an epistemic one. In conflict studies, baseline explanations often emerge through repeated reuse: what is easiest to retrieve becomes easiest to cite; what is easiest to cite becomes easiest to teach; what is easiest to teach becomes easiest to treat as foundational. This creates a feedback loop in which strategic and state-centric frames, already well aligned with dominant publication venues and indexing systems, acquire the status of default conflict expertise. The article's core claim, then, is that canonical authority in conflict research is partly generated by discoverability conditions, not only by argumentative strength. This matters for IR because it shifts the unit of analysis from "bias in individual

scholarship” to field-level production of authority: knowledge hierarchies can persist even when gender-relevant research exists, if it is systematically less legible to the infrastructures that govern review articles, syllabi, and citation networks. Put differently, the paper reframes gender marginalization in conflict knowledge as an instance of epistemic stratification: a structural ordering that determines which kinds of evidence become part of what the field routinely counts as conflict explanation.

A second theoretical implication concerns what conflict studies often treat as “context.” When gendered displacement, care burdens, and household adaptation are positioned as supplementary, the field risks naturalizing a division between “core conflict dynamics” (escalation, bargaining, territorial control) and “social consequences” (everyday survival, recovery labour). Yet many of the processes that stabilize or destabilize post-war environments, such as return decisions, livelihood rebuilding, local legitimacy, community security are mediated through household-level constraints and gendered labour. The paper therefore suggests that epistemic hierarchies do not merely produce representational imbalance, they can produce analytic incompleteness by making some causal mechanisms less likely to be theorized as constitutive of conflict and peace.

9. Policy implications for inclusive reconstruction in the South Caucasus

The policy relevance of this argument is not that reconstruction frameworks “should” become gendered for normative reasons, but that inclusive reconstruction requires evidence completeness under conditions of limited attention and high operational pressure. Post-war recovery agendas in the region understandably prioritize demining, infrastructure, services, and administrative reintegration. The risk identified here is a sequencing problem: when the most visible and reusable knowledge emphasizes territorial and infrastructural recovery, social recovery evidence is more likely to enter policy as a cross-cutting appendix rather than as baseline diagnosis. In practice, this can affect what is measured and therefore what is managed. If needs assessments and monitoring indicators are not designed to capture gender-differentiated constraints on return (care responsibilities, access to livelihoods, documentation barriers, mobility and safety concerns, sectoral employment patterns), then “successful return” may be evaluated primarily through physical outputs (housing units, roads, utilities) even when social reintegration and livelihood sustainability remain uneven.

The implication is procedural: inclusive reconstruction is strengthened when institutions treat gender-relevant dynamics as planning variables, not only as vulnerability narratives. That means embedding gender-disaggregated baselines into return and livelihood programming, building consultation mechanisms that surface household-level constraints early, and making implementation learning visible through indicators that can travel across policy documents and donor reporting. In this sense, the article connects knowledge visibility to governance capacity: what is legible in the evidence base is more likely to become legible in policy design, and what remains peripheral in research infrastructure is more likely to appear in policy only as an afterthought or a targeted program rather than as part of the core theory of change. The final implication is methodological and comparative. The approach developed here, linking bibliometric visibility to downstream knowledge pathways (teaching and policy framing), is portable to other conflict settings where large bodies of gender-relevant evidence exist but may not become canonical within security-oriented literatures. Comparative research could test whether similar “visibility-to-standardization” mechanisms operate across: (a) Ukraine, where a vast policy and academic ecosystem has emerged and where the question is whether gender/WPS knowledge becomes more fully integrated into mainstream conflict canons or continues

to circulate partly in specialized policy and gender focused communities; (b) Georgia's protracted conflicts (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), where long-term displacement and everyday governance are central, enabling a test of whether protraction strengthens social lenses or further entrenches strategic frames; and (c) the Balkans, where extensive transitional justice and peacebuilding scholarship allows a different test: whether mature gender and civil-society research becomes standard when the institutional architecture (EU integration, peace agreements, donor fields) is dense, or whether indexing and format dynamics still sort it into parallel literatures. These comparisons would not only assess generalizability but also clarify boundary conditions: under what institutional and publication ecosystems does gender-relevant conflict knowledge become truly field-defining rather than merely present.

10. Conclusions

This article has argued that the apparent thinness of gender-focused Karabakh conflict scholarship in mainstream discovery environments is not best understood as an intellectual absence, but as an effect of how academic visibility is produced. The contribution is therefore not simply descriptive ("gender is under-cited") but diagnostic: it identifies the mechanisms, indexing coverage, publication formats, and citation cascades through which some conflict knowledge becomes standard and other knowledge becomes specialized, even when both are empirically relevant to understanding war and post-war change. The central idea is that epistemic hierarchies are not an abstract academic concern: they shape the empirical completeness of conflict explanation and the practical completeness of recovery design. By showing how visibility structures help decide what becomes "standard," the article identifies a concrete leverage point for both scholarship and practice: improving the discoverability, citability, and teachability of gender-relevant conflict research is a way to strengthen the analytical foundations on which post-war governance and peacebuilding priorities are built without displacing strategic analysis, but by reducing systematic blind spots in what the field treats as foundational knowledge.

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