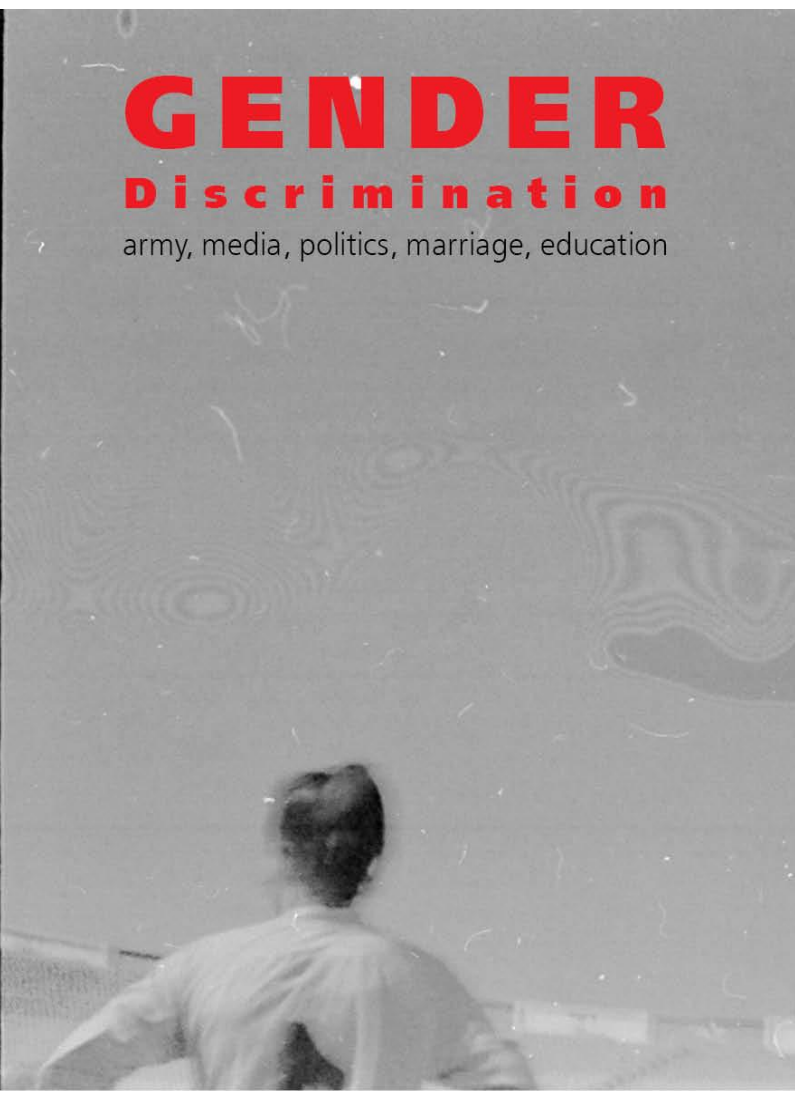


GENDER

Discrimination

army, media, politics, marriage, education

Gender Discrimination



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In this collection of articles various manifestations of gender discrimination on different levels and in different areas in Armenian society is presented. A collection of articles covers the issue of gender discrimination in politics, media, education, army and marriage. Analysis of gender discourse in Armenia gives an opportunity to understand methods and practices that are used to construct, reproduce and reinforce gender discrimination.

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GENDER DISCRIMINATION: ARMY, MEDIA, POLITICS, MARRIAGE, EDUCATION

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TOUGH OBEDIENCE: HOW IS MILITARIZED MASCULINITY LINKED WITH VIOLENCE IN THE ARMY?

Milena Abrahamyan

In 2005, the case of private Andrey Sichyov, who was subject to violence while serving in the Russian army, became known as one of the most cruel cases of “*dedovschchina*”¹ in the world. Officers had forced him to crouch on his feet for hours and had severely beaten him, as a result of which, Sychyov suffered multiple injuries leading to the amputation of both legs, along with the removal of his reproductive organs. These kinds of brutalities, as well as sexual abuse, suicide, forced food and water deprivation, denied healthcare are all widespread occurrences within the armies of different countries. Academics mostly reflect on military institutions, such as the army and its structure, in order to understand cases of violence within them. However, *militarized masculinity* has never been subject to research for the purpose of identifying the root causes behind violence within the army. It is not surprising that the concept of masculinity is so normalized within the army that it is not being questioned at all. In most societies, masculinity is generally not perceived as something, which needs to be scrutinized.

This study attempts to raise issues related to militarized masculinity within the army and understand the extent to which militarized masculinity influences levels of violence within the same institution. For this purpose, a small scale case study of the Russian and Swedish armies has been conducted. More than 10 interviews have been implemented with conscripts from the Swedish and Russian armies who served in the time period between 2006 and 2011. These interviews have been followed by a comparative analysis. The study in its entirety is based on feminist and constructivist theories. More specifically, the concept of structuration theory was applied as a tool for analysis in order to understand the link between militarized masculinity and violence

¹ In Russian the word *Dedovschchina* literally translates to 'rule of grandfathers' where the higher ranking officers in the army (*dedy* or grandfathers) enforce violent initiation acts upon new conscripts.

within the army. The theory of structuration is concerned with conditions that regulate continuity of institutions (structures) or their transformation, and thus, the reproduction of systems. These structures can be divided into sections, i. e. relations between actors and collectives (groups), which in different systems are organized as regular social practices.

Henceforth, this study reflects on structures of masculinity and violence. By dividing those structures into smaller parts, the study makes those power relations, which determine factors and actions of masculinity and violence within the army, more comprehensible.

Militarized Masculinity

In order to define militarized masculinity, the term has to be split into parts and understood within the framework of production and reproduction of *gender roles*, *gender relations* and *gender performativity*.

And what do we mean when we say *gender*? Many people consider gender to be the socially constructed sex of a person based on their biological sex. In this kind of thinking gender is perceived as one's social sex, which in a sense differentiates between biological and social concepts. However, according to gender theory, biological sex is just as much a construction as social sex. This means that the sex of a human being does not carry any essential significance, whereas gender is the expression and revelation of bodies, identities and experiences of human beings. Academics who study this issue² refer to individuals who are *intersex*, *transgender* and beyond the *gender binary*, whose mere presence within society problematizes the concept of biological and social sexes as such.

Coming back to the theory of structuration, gender can be considered one of the factors, which validates masculinity. However, since gender does not operate in a vacuum, it is important to understand how masculine gender roles and the relations, which stem from those roles, operate within a given context.

² The theme is explored by different feminist scientists, such as Judith Butler, Sandra Harding, Donna Haraway, etc.

Gender Roles: How is Gender Expressed?

Gender roles are those behaviors, which society expects from individuals based on the social reality that they live. In many societies it is assumed that, for example, a woman has to occupy the spheres of family, education, fostering and care, whereas a man has to be active in the public, political and leadership domains. Closer to the topic of the military, two examples relate men to having to assume the role of a protector in times of war, as soldiers, while women ought to be caring nurses.

Certainly there are exceptions. There are a number of examples in the world, where individuals disrupt masculine or feminine roles, which would otherwise fit the imagined sexual and gender specific behaviors society expects of them. Since gender roles are not in fact fixed, all individuals - regardless of their defined gender identity - challenge these seemingly permanent masculine and feminine gender norms from time to time. However, there are a number of punitive measures taken within society, which function as methods to prevent transgressions from the hegemonic gender systems in place. This study shows examples from the Swedish and Russian armies, where men who do not conform to the behaviors of militarized masculinity are subjected to humiliation, harassment, and other forms of violence inflicted by their peers. It can be concluded that gender roles are directly linked with relations, which exist between individuals.

Gender Relations: What is Done with Gender?

In order to understand how power relations impact the gender system and thereby, to be able to understand *what is done with gender*, it is important to clarify how people reproduce *gender relations* in their everyday lives. When we speak of the gender binary, it becomes clear that masculinity and femininity are simultaneously contradictory and complementary concepts. In order for masculinity to exist, it has to confront femininity. As a result, relations stemming from gender are expressed through gender roles and the exaggerated differences of those gender roles. If being feminine means being passive, then being masculine must entail being active. If femininity is associated with peace, masculinity is associated with war. In this duality the functioning power relations are such that those attributes linked to masculinity are more valued than the

ones linked to femininity. Thus, in the gender power system, masculinity is privileged over femininity. As it was already mentioned, gender is not fixed. Thereby, one can disrupt the gender role he or she is ascribed. But when one understands the rules of gender, it becomes clear that when a man challenges the gender role assigned to him, he deprives himself of the privileges of masculinity. Henceforth, men *perform* masculinity in order to reproduce those power relations, as a result of which they will have the possibility to continue maintaining power and all privileges stemming from it.

Gender Performativity³: How is Gender Done?

To perform or *do* gender is both dependent on power relations, as well as reproduced through power relations. Gender performativity does not account for having or being a gender. This theory considers gender a tool of power, which is applied in social reality based on needs, expectations and desires. Hence, even if we were to insist that gender is a construct and thereby it can be deconstructed, we will without a doubt come face to face with a system of power - such as the gender power system - where not performing gender as it is accepted within society would entail being deprived of certain privileges, especially for men. Consequently, by performing the gender roles we are expected to perform, we continue reproducing the gender power system.

Seeing how power relations are reflected in gender relations between men and women, it is not surprising that such power relations also exist between men themselves. In different contexts acceptable masculinity is expressed through the dominant men and the dominating masculinity of that context. Hegemonic masculinity⁴ refers to the type of masculinity, which is deemed the most successful and beneficial in a given context. In other terms, the type of masculinity that a man should aspire to is the kind that dominates and through which it is possible to dominate. On a global scale, the current form of hegemonic masculinity is directly linked with the kind of power, which can be obtained through material resources, political power, markets, territories and

³ Judith Butler, the person that introduced the concept of gender performativity, writes about it in her book on *Gender Trouble*

⁴ In order to learn more about hegemonic and subordinate masculinities read Connell, R.W. (1995): *Masculinities*.

most importantly, control over identity discourse. In many contexts this means that belonging to a dominant masculinity does not automatically translate to being positioned at the top of the hegemonic masculine power pyramid.

Hegemonic masculinity plays an important role in the construction of *subordinate masculinities*. Since masculinity is constructed in relative antagonism to femininity, its hierarchy is configured in such a way where the types of masculinity, which have traces of femininity, are humiliated and devalued, as a result of which they end up on the bottom of the pyramid. Hence, if you are a man that has deviated from your assigned gender role (voluntarily or not voluntarily), then you become a weakling, feminine, “not a true man.” Thus, subordinate masculinity is a feminized form of masculinity, which does not fit into the accepted gender system in such a way as to harness the same value as other forms of masculinity. This is how homosexual, transgender, non-white and other marginalized masculinities are perceived within the hegemonic masculine hierarchy.

Militarised masculinity is a form of hegemonic masculinity. This term is applied to those masculinities, which have been shaped through the military institution or establishment, and are built and constructed as a result of military service. Many societies believe that boys become men through initiation into the military institution. Militarized masculinity aspires and contributes to the accomplishment of power and violence, while the army is an institution, which produces violence. It is important to note that constructivist theory does not consider men to be inherently violent. Instead, masculinity is violent not by nature, but by being produced as violent through military service.

In order to understand how militarized masculinity is constructed as the opposite of femininity in the context of the army, it is important to recognize gender differences and power relations stemming from those differences. Heather Höpfl⁵ uses the term “cancellation of the feminine” in order to highlight one of the key features of militarized masculinity. Since one of the key goals of the military is to defend women and children, particularly mothers - who embody the nation and the motherland - women and feminine qualities are perceived as disruptive elements to military logic and practice. In the same vein, subordinate

⁵ Höpfl, Heather J (2003): "Becoming a (Virile) Member: Women and the Military Body"

masculinity is also considered an unacceptable performance of gender within the military, a system which rejects and expels such expressions of masculinity that do not conform to the norms of masculinity within the army. According to militarized masculinity the “true man” has to be devoid of any feminine attributions.

In order for it to be possible to eradicate femininity from within the army, it is crucial to separate the peaceful civilian from the conscript. According to militarized masculinity, a peaceful civilian is someone who has feminine traits, from which it is required to move away if one is to acquire a “true” masculine image. As a result, one of the main focuses of military training is the destruction of a soldier’s civilian identity. Most of the preparatory training of military service is an effort to eradicate any and all traits of femininity from within the men serving.

Militarized masculinity is dependent on the construction of an enemy. Gender theory makes use of comparisons to construct the binary opposition between masculinity and femininity. Just as the soldier is conditioned to consider the enemy as the “other” - someone who does not deserve to live – and thereby justifying the destruction of the enemy through violence and killing, so is the same logic used to justify eradicating femininity to make it possible for militarized masculinity to occur. It follows that the army is a system in which the soldier is being taught to use violence as a means of destroying the ‘other’, where that ‘other’ can be just as much perceived as the enemy both within the same army unit or beyond it. Femininity - perceived as the total opposite of masculinity - becomes the “enemy other”, which needs to be dominated and destroyed.

In reality, if we are to accept that the ideal of masculinity to which a soldier needs to aspire is impossible to attain, then it becomes clear that militarized masculinity is, in fact, impossible. This idea says a lot about the military institution: as a soldier you are not only required to show strength and command, but you are also required to obey superiors with higher rank, such as officers, sergeants and commanders. Henceforth, if you are to attain this impossible masculinity in order to be considered part of the system, then you are constantly forced to be confronted with the process of eradicating femininity.

Violence

This study does not consider violence as something that is natural. Quite the contrary, violence is a construct within social reality, which is produced in human relations and reproduces violent humans. According to Hanna Arendt, violence in essence performs a function, and it is not an end in itself, but a means⁶.

If we come back to the theory of structuration, which concerns the conditions that regulate the continuity of structures, and thus, contribute to the reproduction of systems, then we can say that violence is the most influential and powerful condition and means, which ensures the reproduction and continuity of not only the military system, but also the gender power system.

This study defines violence within the army both as direct and indirect. If we are to consider that the army as an institution of violence already carries within itself the qualities of indirect violence, then direct or physical violence is the consequence of this indirect or latent violence⁷.

Dedovschchina is one of the most widespread types of violence within the military. Although, the military institution claims that this kind of treatment helps new conscripts bond and develop close relationships, preparing them to overcome the difficulties and cruelties of war, in fact, these initiation rites serve the purpose of preparing newly conscripted soldiers to get used to using violence as a means. In other words, practices of dedovschchina use violence as a means to produce soldiers who will reproduce this system of violence. In this context, it is important to reflect on how militarized masculinity uses violence within the army as a tool to produce men as violent.

Observing the existence of militarized masculinity and violence within the Swedish and Russian armies, this study identifies the link between militarized masculinity and incidents of violence occurring within the military. As a result, it is impossible to distinguish between violence, such as dedovschchina occurring within the army, and military training.

⁶ Hanna Arendt, *About Violence* (1970)

⁷ Johan Galtung. *Violence, Peace and Peace Studies*, (1970)

Examples from Russian and Swedish Armies

In order to identify the link between militarized masculinity and violence within the army, a series of interviews with conscripts who served in the Swedish and Russian armies from 2006-2011 were conducted. The Swedish and Russian armies were picked as cases of study, since they are quite distinct from one another, which allows for a comparison of the types of militarized masculinity present between these armies, including their impact on violence within their military institutions. In both cases the interviewees were chosen from a pool of soldiers drafted into the army. The interviews were mostly directed at identifying expressions of militarized masculinity within each army. Simultaneously, the violence within Swedish and Russian armies, documented between 2006-2011, were studied and later combined with the stories of militarized masculinity taken from interviews with conscripts.

Militarized Masculinity in the Swedish Army

In interviews with Swedish conscripts competitiveness was the main attribute molding militarized masculinity within the Swedish army. This was a type of competitiveness, which was associated with the possibility of the soldier to become superior in all spheres. One of the conscripts was saying: "You exhibit solidarity with the group in which you are included, thus, entering into competition with the other groups within the regiment... then on a larger scale, the regiments compete within the unit and so on." All this was being conditioned and encouraged by the commanders and was viewed as something healthy to do for a soldier in order to advance within the army ranks. Another conscript said: "In our regiment we had soldiers who had served in Afghanistan and were quite arrogant, they used to tell us that we were sissies..." By calling soldiers who had not served in Afghanistan "sissies", those soldiers became perceived as more feminine. Thus, a soldier who had not done military service in Afghanistan became the bearer of a subordinate masculinity, which made it possible for those soldiers who had served in Afghanistan to compete and confirm their type of militarized masculinity as the dominant one.

These interviews also revealed that there was an aversion to feminization within the Swedish army's type of militarized masculinity. This was revealed, for example, through bullying, which targeted soldiers with long hair,

big hips or traits that deviated from the norms of masculinity. In this context, disgust of homosexuality was common practice. In a similar vein, anything that was seen as negative was labeled as “gay”. One of the conscripts, however, believed that this phenomenon was not so different from derogatory expressions occurring regularly within society at large.

Violence within the Swedish Army

Violence within the Swedish army carries a more indirect form. *Dedovschchina*, or hazing, as it is known in the English speaking world, is prohibited by law and cases are not officially documented when they do occur within the Swedish army. However, when cases do occur, it is more likely that they will find internal solutions. “It speaks more to informal norms and regulations... as hazing performs certain social and cultural functions” and for that reason it is very hard to prohibit these practices in reality. Often it takes on the form of psychological violence, such as bullying, mean jokes, humiliation through words and emotional pressure. The lack of direct and physical violence within the Swedish army can be explained by the fact that human rights are more protected in Sweden than in other countries. It follows that the rights of soldiers are protected as well.

Although there are no cases of hazing recorded in Sweden, other forms of physical violence surfaced from interviews with conscripts who served from between 2006 and 2011. One of the conscripts who served from 2010 said: “I can tell clearly that many things, which took place did not seem like drills or exercise, they more resembled hazing. Everything was extremely strict and the commanders were very proud that mostly we did not have anything to report...they forced us to compete... For example, they told us to crawl for 100 meters here or there and whoever endured it fully was going to get a coca cola in return.” Another conscript told his commander when he and his fellow soldiers were forced to stay up for long hours into the night: “This is not legal; we are supposed to have 6 hours sleep.” And the commander replied: “What makes you think that I care about what is legal?” Linking militarized masculinity with the violence within the army, one can think of this commander’s attitude as resembling the hegemonic masculinity of the given context, according to which the militarized masculine commander who uses violent means of oppression is above the legal framework of the human rights meant to protect the soldier.

Militarized Masculinity in the Russian Army

During interviews with soldiers who had served in the Russian army the main forms of militarized masculinity prevalent were aversion to feminization and tough obedience. Aversion to feminization related to disagreements within the army in terms of qualities of femininity and anything related to women, which would be acceptable within the military. The main way this became obvious within the Russian army was through expressions of homophobia. One of the conscripts said that “according to my opinion the army is not a place for gays...this relates to what we were saying about masculinity...men who have female qualities... well, it’s weird and goes against nature.” In another interview the former conscript told about one of the tactics employed in the Russian army: “Officers used to call us “fags”. They yelled the word at us, but in reality it did not mean that they thought we were homosexuals. I think it was more a move to show us who was the man in charge and to show us that we were only soldiers obligated to do everything under their command.” Just as gender theory explains: positioning all feminine qualities on the bottom of the hierarchy contributes to the construction of militarized masculinity. In this case, by calling conscripts “fags” the superior commanders confirmed their masculinity within the dominant gender system, where those that rule humiliate others and resort to violence, thereby securing their position at the top of the hierarchy.

The Russian army’s aversion to feminization is strictly linked with tough obedience. This means that the soldier must be tough in order to reach the ideal of the militarized masculinity, while at the same time he must submit to the hierarchy of the military establishment. On the one hand, the soldier tries to reach this ideal of militarized masculinity; on the other hand, he is forced to obey commanders. As a result, the conscript develops aversion toward feminization as a means of resistance to submission.

Violence within the Russian Army

Violence within the Russian army is directly linked to the type of militarized masculinity, which is practiced within the Russian military. Within the Russian army the objectification of homosexuals, or perceived homosexuals, is used by other men to reinstate their dominant position over their peers, who are either homosexual or perceived to be homosexual. This not only entails

psychological pressure, but rather more direct means, such as physical violence. According to gender theory, in order for militarized masculinity to exist there is a need to eradicate all feminine attributes from inside a person. Therefore, sexual objectification or direct rape towards homosexuals or perceived homosexuals is an attempt to eradicate femininity from within the ranks of the Russian army. One of the findings of the study is that this type of a militarized masculinity is linked to the use of more direct violence, which is not covert and is quite physical. Therefore, in the Russian military the attempt to eradicate any traces of femininity is strongly linked to direct violence, resulting from the need to resist unconditional subordination in order to achieve the ideal of militarized masculinity.

Unlike the Swedish army, in the Russian army incidents of violence are being registered by different organisations that protect the human rights of soldiers. Only in 2008, 1239 soldiers have been convicted on the grounds of *dedovschchina*⁸, and already in 2009-2010 cases of *dedovschchina* have increased by 15%⁹. The direct violence of *dedovschchina* exercised within the Russian army takes on forms of torture, beatings, deprivation of food, sleep and shelter, and denial to health services, especially when the soldier has acquired injuries as a result of *dedovschchina*. In many cases the soldier can undergo amputation, become disabled and in the most severe cases violence within the Russian army can lead to murder and suicide.

How is militarized masculinity linked with violence within the army?

Militarised masculinity exists in all armies, as long as military institutions continue to base their ethos on violence by teaching and producing it. By propagating and utilizing violence, masculinity becomes produced in a militarized form. By opposing femininity and other subordinate forms of masculinity, the violence toward soldiers exercised within the army contributes to the reproduction of militarized masculinity.

⁸ *Nepravitelstvennoye Soobshenie: O Situacii s Pravami Cheloveka v Sfere Voyenno-Grazhdanskikh Otnoshenii v 2013 Godu* (2014). Soldier's Mothers St. Petersburg.

⁹ U.S. Department of State (2011): *2010 Human Rights Report: Russia*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.

Two types of militarized masculinity were identified upon studying violence and militarized masculinities within the Swedish and Russian armies. In the Swedish army militarized masculinity mostly occurs through competition and expresses itself through competition between soldiers, units and regiments. In the Russian army militarized masculinity depends upon tough obedience. The latter makes it much more difficult for a soldier attempting to reach the ideal of militarized masculinity, which rejects all forms of submission. In response, an aversion toward feminization develops.

In both cases, aversion to feminization plays a key role in the development of militarized masculinity, but in the Russian army it takes harsher forms and is the main reason for the more overt forms of violence. If we were to compare the Swedish and Russian armies in terms of types of violence occurring within its ranks, the first one has more indirect violent incidents, whereas the second one is more based on direct physical violence.

As a result, it becomes possible to assume that the violence applied toward a soldier is more cruel and direct when the development of militarized masculinity is based on the eradication of femininity in response to tough obedience. It follows that when militarized masculinity simultaneously requires that a soldier be tough and obedient, then the eradication of femininity becomes a means through which to reach the ideal of militarized masculinity, which is impossible to obtain in reality.

UNEARTHING THE GENDER DISCOURSE IN ARMENIA: FROM HYSTERIA TO CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE

Anna Harutyunyan

*“The greatest evil in our country today is ignorance.
We need to be taught to study rather than to believe.”*

Septima Poinsette Clark

Introduction: Armenia before and after 2013

Throughout its 25 years as an independent state, Armenia has become a signatory to a number of international documents, built up a national gender legislation and collaborated with international community for implementing development programmes aimed at gender mainstreaming and gender equality in different aspects of life. Furthermore, the gender discourse has been led by the civil society organizations/NGOs (headed mainly by women, among those women with soviet era leadership experience) who became adept at balancing between discourses of modernity and tradition and accommodating their positions towards “gender” to survive in non-profit sector. In spite of the efforts invested both by the state, civil society and international community, the reality shows that there is no common understanding of the “gender” and related terms and, what is more, there is overuse and at the same time misunderstanding of those, what leads to deflected discourse on gender equality and (re-)produces misinterpretations and further stereotypes.

Until May 2013, the term “gender” had been a subject of more fragmental debates taken place mostly within civil society circles. In May 2013, when the law on gender equality was taken to the National Assembly for final ratification, it brought up to public hysteria around the topic. This marked the foundation of a public discourse on gender, which unearthed the existence of different systems of thought, ideas, attitudes, meanings and narratives on gender. It showed that the buzzword “gender” can be manipulated and used by different social flows, including church representatives, traditionalists,

nationalist youth groups, etc. and misrepresented by the mass media, especially via social media.

The law draft was put on discussion since 2011 by one of the ruling parties Orinats Yerkir (Rule of Law). The first draft was put in many discussions, however, it was continuously turned down and put on the shelf to wait until next discussion. Still in 2012, according to the review of online media, one can mention that overall disposition of the public, as well as the journalists, state officials and civil society representatives, was more inclined towards acceptance of the law. Reviewing the articles published in 2012 in online media, reposted in social networks (Facebook), one can say the overall environment of the discussions and comments under the posts were quite peaceful and more tolerant towards different aspects of gender issues. The government issued a special note “Parliamentary Hearings Dedicated to Gender Equality” both in Armenian and English on the website of the National Assembly (Parliament) of Armenia, which was aimed at providing further updates on the status of the law on gender equality. Then’s speaker of the Parliament shared his hope that these hearings were aimed at “the reinforcement of protection of human rights and democracy in Armenia” and that “the discussions would promote the improvement of the bill”. During those hearings, a lot has been said in favor of gender equality and presented political and legal advantages, as well as historical substantiations for the adoption of the law. The necessity to adopt this law was also discussed from the perspectives of the national security.¹⁰ In his opening speech, the speaker of the parliament Mr. Samvel Nikoyan particularly underlined the historical foundations of the issue. Interestingly, the speaker noted that “the women’s and men’s equal rights are not alien to our national description, it is the component of our culture” and gave a long list of historical evidence that gender equality has always been an integral part of the national laws since 4th Century until the establishment of the first Armenian Republic in 1918¹¹, when women and men had equal rights to vote and to be elected. A

¹⁰ National Assembly of Armenia, Parliamentary Hearings Dedicated to Gender Equality, 2012,

http://www.parliament.am/news.php?cat_id=2&NewsID=4959&year=2012&month=01&day=19&lang=eng

¹¹ The speaker of the Parliament made a detailed presentation on Codes of Shahapivan (443 AD); Rules of Davit Alavkavordi (11th century); Criminal Code of Mkhitar Gosh (12th century); Constitution of King Vatchagan (5th century). The Criminal Code of Mkhitar Gosh prohibited violence against women and imposes criminal

number of civil society groups were invited and given a chance to speak out during the hearings. Back in 2012 gender equality was considered as something important, which should be elaborated into law. Within those discussions, one can often read how different people, starting from state officials up to average public argues that gender equality needs to be restored since historically Armenian woman was granted a lot of rights.

Following those hearings in early 2013, two members of the parliament, who were representatives of the ruling Republican Party, presented their version of the same law and put the new draft law on discussion. When the law was taken to final ratification, the law draft provoked an unprecedented hysteria in the public. The hysteria started in late spring covering whole Armenian internet. Public discussions were held both in social networks. A lot of comments were left under the articles on gender equality law on the pages of different online newspapers. The majority of the commentators claimed that the law on so called gender equality was made to promote “homosexuality” and it was “against Armenian nation”, “ruining Armenian traditions and values”.¹² Among the anti-gender propagators were the Armenian Apostolic Church

penalties on any one committing violence against women. The Code of Shahapivan gave a woman the right to the family property in the event that her husband left her without reasons. It also stated that the woman is entitled to bring a new husband to the same house. The Rules of Davit Alavkavordi required that for a marriage to be valid, the bride and groom should have given their mutual voluntary consent. It said that a marriage is not valid if based on violence. National Constitution of Constantinople (1863) about the women’s property rights, recognition and respect of honour and dignity, law of the woman’s marriage, marriage age, being divorced, marrying for the second time and other rights. And today, according to the speaker, the perception of women’s and men’s equal rights is directly given in Shahamir Shahamiryan’s “Vorogay Parats” (“Snare of Glory”) which was written in 1773, and according to which, women and men are legally equal irrespective of their gender, citizenship and have no right to rule on each other.

¹² Some of the articles published, as well as discussions in different pages against the gender law: “The parliamentarians should decide what gender they have”, published in Aravot newspaper, September, 2013 <http://www.aravot.am/2013/09/28/390689/>, “Public initiatives continue their struggle against the gender equality law”, published in ArmenPress, in August 2013, <http://armenpress.am/arm/news/731106/> “Dar” Acumb (The Century Club), public forums, discussions on gender equality law, www.akumb.am/showthread.php/64741-Կանանց-և-տղամարդկանց-հավասար-իրավունքների-և-հնարավորությունների-ապահովման-մասին-օրենք, July, 2013

representatives who gave interviews and published articles¹³ on the gender equality law inciting further discussions in social networks by transmitting the following message to the whole society: “No to the gender law! No to national decay! For the sake of Armenian family! For the sake of Armenian children! For the sake of our children!”

“This is an ambition of some people, which have the aim to bring the nations to decay. Because this decision does not go along with morality and it goes against the will of the God, as well as against the will of the Nature, as in the Nature every single creature is created in a way that s/he has their own inner system of values. By giving a green light to the gender law we dig a path to the national destruction. We are here on behalf of all the Armenian nation”. Father Komitas Hovnanyan, October 2013¹⁴

One of the features of the 2013 anti-gender discourse in media was that it utilized tools of civil protests, such as going out to the streets with banners against the gender law, particularly with participation of youth, or the “floor” was given to young women who declared the law as anti-Armenian and anti-Armenian woman. Another interesting feature of the discussions in the social media was the prevalence of the discussions and quantity of the comments from the anti-gender camp. Meanwhile, the opposite camp (which might have been existed) was quite silent and in case of posts in discussion forums, in the forms of comments under different articles, in different Facebook pages, were immediately attacked and silenced by the anti-gender people, especially by the Pan-Armenian Family Committee, Stop-Gender Initiative and Mek Azg (One Nation) Group.

¹³ “The Holy Mother See of Etchmiadzin is indirectly against the law on gender equality”, published in Tert.Am, August 2013, <http://www.tert.am/am/news/2013/08/19/gender-law/843218>, Father Komitas is protesting against the gender law in front of the Government building”, published in Aravot.am, October 2013, <http://www.aravot.am/2013/10/16/396662/>

¹⁴ Father Komitas participated in the protest against the gender law, News.Am, October 2013, <http://top-news.am/7/1/news/24168.html>

Knowledge of gender: what is known as gender?

The analysis of the qualitative data shows that the knowledge on “gender” comes mainly from general discussions among public and from media. Significant source of information on “gender” concept were the discussions around the law on gender equality held in 2013. However, in some focus groups, some gender terminology could occasionally pop up in the discussions, especially among youth both in Yerevan and Tavush, which testified that their knowledge comes from seminars held by civil society organizations.

To the introductory question “*what do you understand by gender?*” people would answer mostly “*that is sexual difference between men and women*” or express the first associating definitions “*two words only: woman and man*”. In each focus group discussion there was always someone who would add “that is about equality between woman and man”. “Gender” would be sometimes defined in the context of civil society “as a prerequisite for democracy and human rights”. These kinds of statements were made only among civil society representatives, as well as young student group in Yerevan. One of the Ijevan NGOs representatives explained well that “gender” is a “social condition” among two sexes:

“We need to understand that gender is a social condition and it is a social issue. Let me explain. There is a lot of noise about the gender, but very few know in fact what it means. There is no information about the gender, there is none who can give information who can explain what that concept means. We hardly could introduce the concept “inclusive education”, we spent a lot of efforts on explanation and now everybody knows and understands well. Similarly, it should be explained what gender means. For instance, if we have never tried honey, we would not know if it is sweet or bitter”.

The term “Armenian family” was often linked to “gender” in the discussions and it incited always vivid discussions, as there were people who would not like seeing any possibility connecting “gender” and “family” and argued against. These discussions brought more open-ended dialogues among participants. This kind of statements would provoke counter-arguments, especially among women who tried to argue for the opposite:

“If gender is about equal rights between women and men, then it is about a real Armenian family where everybody plays his/her role with their head down and is respected by the other”, young adult man, Ijevan FGD

“No, hold on, when we say traditional family, we don’t mean particular unique families. We understand an average Armenian traditional family where the woman does everything, cooking and cleaning at home, and man is earning money, where the roles are clearly distributed and where woman is weaker than man. As well as, this is where woman is always under control by man. If your dad helped your mother and vice versa, it was an exemplary family, but not a traditional one”, elderly woman, Ijevan FGD

In the eyes of the discussants of this Ijevan focus group with elderly there was a difference between “*exemplary*” and “*traditional*” families. However, they had difficulty to explain what exactly the difference was. “*Traditional family*” was one of the terms to explore the knowledge of the “gender” and their understanding of gender equality.

Almost in all FGDs participants responded that there is a difference between the “traditional family” of today and the one which existed before. Many participants argued that in fact there is a distortion of the concept “traditional family” and there is a need to explain the public not only the “gender” concepts, but also to educate people about the “real” Armenian family.

“You know we are using the phrase “traditional family” often, but we do not look into the depth of this concept. We don’t know how many positive things there are in this “traditional family”. You asked me where I got to know about gender concept from? First of all, I got to know about gender in my own paternal family. Because when my dad and mum were going to feed the chickens, they were going together. My parents were bringing grass together from the mountains. My mom was standing on the car and squeezing the grass with her feet and my father was placing it into the truck. They were sharing real hard work equally together. And that was the true equality. This is where I learnt about gender equality”, elderly man, FGD, Ijevan

Finally, an interesting statement was made by one of the students in Yerevan, which suggested a different, new and unconventional meaning and understanding for “traditional family”: “*There is no other traditional family that I*

know, but the family of my parents. That family model has been the custom or the tradition family. Me, my wife and my children”.

This statement is based on the personal experience of the young man, which has clear and tangible definition, unlike the popular notion of “traditional family”, which is more imagined (and constantly re-imagined), has little clear premises for the public. This kind of statements provoked further discussions on the definitions: what does tradition mean? What does family mean? Which is the Armenian traditional family? What is counted as traditional? The main drivers of this kind of discussions were mostly young students in Yerevan and Ijevan, who talked more about the socialist past, rather than pre-socialist times. Socialist part was a better reference for them. It was more tangible and clear as they had examples based on their family experiences.

Almost in all the focus group discussions at the local/community level be it with students, non-students, young adults or elderly, as well as with the representatives of civil society, there was always a counter-question to me “*what do you know about gender concept?*”. Or, as in Yerevan elderly focus group, one of the women abruptly interrupted the author’s introductory speech by saying: “*Tell me, why they brought this word to here? I just want to know this. Is this our Armenian word??*” People used to ask “*could you please finally define this concept for us?*” By the end of one of the FGDs, a NGO young representative burst out in the middle of the meeting:

“We are talking of something that we don’t know concretely what. So, my question is to you, A., what does it mean “gender” finally? What does it mean social construct? And then we will talk. We need concrete definition!”, NGO representative, Ijevan

After giving a detailed and comprehensive answer to the question “what does it mean “gender” finally?”, the young man representing an Ijevan NGO seemed far not satisfied. During another FGD in Ijevan, there was such a counter-question right in the beginning, which provoked a little resistance after the answer was given to the participants. By the end of the FGD, the participants said that “*again, like in other seminars, we are living without understanding what gender means in fact*”.

In the Yerevan FDG with elderly, after the author’s definition of “gender” concept, the discussant responded: “*You know, daughter, we do not need these*

definitions, we do not need this gender! This is all about anarchy brought from the West to this country to destroy morality”.

By anarchy, the elderly woman meant the emancipation and liberation of today’s youth, in particular young girls, which was described in quite aggressive terms:

“What do you mean by gender? Does this mean that young girls do whatever they want to nowadays? Whatever they dress and go out? Gender is the G-string pants they are wearing under their pants that the whole society can notice? Sorry, but how can I accept that “gender?”, elderly woman, FGD, Yerevan

The statement about having no knowledge or being confused by the definitions was accompanying all the discussions both in Yerevan and Ijevan. At the same time, in focus groups a number of times the equality and the term gender were split *“maybe the phenomenon is useful, but the word “gender” is confusing”.*

The statement of the representative of an Ijevan NGO summarizes all other similar quotes:

“We have conducted many seminars on gender. When we start talking about “gender” concept, different people perceive it differently: someone would be very indifferent, another one would understand sexual relationship between women and men. But, many people’s perception is based on resistance. Unfortunately, the word “gender” spoiled the possibility to understand and appreciate the meaning of it”, NGO representative, FGD, Ijevan

One of the young civic activists in Yerevan who was among the young people actively advocating for equality and diversity in May 2012¹⁵, argued that many people have resistance towards gender, but they are not curious enough to explore what it really means.

¹⁵ In June 2012 to mark the UN World Day of Cultural Diversity, a group of civil society organizations organized a march for the sake of equality and diversity, which was met with resistance and even violence by nationalist groups who went out to the street towards the diversity activists to stop the march. These nationalist groups announced that the march for diversity was in fact a gay parade and was in favor of spreading homosexuality in Armenia, <https://youtu.be/ZSreViOtgF4>

According to a young Diaspora artist who is making films on gender issues shared her opinion on why people do not look for real definitions in this age of information and rely on emotional statements.

“Hayastantsis (Armenians from Armenia) are usually not open for new knowledge, they do not want to learn... The education in Armenia has been based on memorization for many decades. Nobody cared for critical thinking. If they are told any definition on gender or feminism, they will take it for granted”, Film Maker, KII, Yerevan

The focus group discussants both in Yerevan and Ijevan would react differently on “why do people have no knowledge, and why do not they want to find out more?” One of the rarest positive statements to my question was by one of the NGOs in Ijevan:

“There are also people who start studying the concept of gender and it is very important that they understand that this a social condition. And when they understand this, people would also appreciate and rightly understand the gender equality”, NGO representative in Ijevan

Another civil society representative shared her experience in the past for not having knowledge and being not curious enough about gender, even when she was engaged in a human right NGO.

“Honestly speaking, before those seminars I did not study, read or was not curious about gender. I collaborated with the Women with University Education Association (WWUEA), have attended a number of conferences and meetings. And now I have a number of literature on the topic. The problem is that people don't want to hear about it because of the word “gender”. Gender means sex, which hits one's mind.... that “sex”... you know... In that law [law on gender equality] there is a provision, which says that one will decide his/her gender when s/he reaches adulthood. Do you understand, this is not possible in Armenia, it incites disappointment on gender immediately”, NGO leader, FGD, Yerevan

Where does “gender” leading us to?

Confusion, anger, disappointment and fear: those were the emotions that people underlined in focus groups towards the concept of gender. In the

focus groups with elderly and young adults, especially with the young parents, the conversation sometimes took an unexpected direction and suddenly the confusion with the “gender” and other related notions, has been replaced by anger towards social situation, growing poverty and radicalizing inequality in the society. For example, after making a long speech on how they had been fired in the tobacco factory due to their age and that they could no longer find job because nowadays the employers seek for “good-looking young girls up to 25 years old”, one of the Yerevan elderly women threw out the following statement: *“...after all this happening to us, we do not need “gender – mender”, my daughter. Take your “gender” away! It is not going to change anything”*.

Among those emotions, fear was the most powerful, as it was linked with “something unclear and unknown”, which cannot be a part of the “Armenian values”. In fact, in almost all the focus group discussions, there was a hidden topic behind the words of the discussants, which was the homosexuality and all what is related to the change of sex. On one hand, the discussants did not wish to open discussion on “this topic”. On the other hand, at the same time there were always attempts to gently tackle the connection between homosexuality and gender, though, more in the form of questions:

“I think gender equality is larger now, as we used to understand [meaning there is something we (the society) do not know - author]. It is not just the number of women who should be represented in the parliament. It has apparently a wider meaning and that is why people are afraid of this term! Because, they think that according to the gender concept, you cannot force the child in gender selection. The child chooses his/her gender when s/he becomes adult. People are afraid of this and as you say, these conservative nationalist movements are rising because of that fear. Or for example, now there are a lot of surgeries to change the sex. This is also gender, no?”, young adult/parent, FGD, Yerevan

“These conversations about “gender” are brought up from Europe along with other conversations... I mean homosexuality; young people think they can change their sex, because it is fashionable now”, elderly, FGD, Ijevan

Among the NGOs both in Yerevan and in Ijevan, there was always a statement that this kind of discussions should be held not with ordinary people and all types of NGOs, but rather especially with those, who are doing

women's/gender issues, although in the focus discussion with NGOs there were invited mainly human right, disability- and youth-focused NGOs:

"If it is about women's issues, then maybe it would be good for you to meet with the women's NGOs and not with us?", NGO representative, Ijevan

Still in the beginning of the fieldwork, when trying to organise focus group discussions, one of the striking statements received from the civil society organizations was:

"Why do you need so many NGOs coming to the focus group discussion? I think everybody has the same opinion about gender... Or, better say, all of them have no opinion", NGO representative, Ijevan

Interestingly, especially in the focus group discussions with NGOs both in Yerevan and Ijevan there would be a feeling of double standards: on one hand, some discussants would underline how important is to have the knowledge on gender, how important to transfer it to the next generation and how important is to put this knowledge into a legal framework to transfer gender equality into practice, which is regulated by the law. However, at the same time, as soon as they forget about being an NGO representative sitting in the focus group discussion and start talking about gender not as a meaning belonging to open democratic societies, but rather as an experience of everyday practice, as something habitual, they would shift the discussion from "pro" gender mode to "contra".

This kind of *situated knowledge* was found especially in focus group discussions (NGOs, elderly people, young parents, students, non-student groups). People would eloquently and quite convincingly accommodate their changing positions. This was more evident in FGDs with student groups, who would engage in active discussions and a lot of time contradicting themselves by arguing first for gender equality and then arguing for more traditional roles of women and men.

In the very beginning of FGD in Yerevan, one of the students (young man) opened the floor with a statement that *"thanks to the fact that Armenia is a Christian country, Armenian women enjoy equal opportunities and emancipation, they are equal with men"*. However, at the same time, to the question *"how would you define the roles of men and roles of women in the Armenian society?"*, he stated:

“When I am married, my wife will not go to work. Because, women are born to provide well to the children. Men are born to provide well to their women. Men are to provide enough conditions to their wives to be occupied with children, to provide them with good conditions to have safe pregnancy”.

A general observation was made during the focus groups with elderly of Yerevan and Ijevan indicating women of Yerevan being more radical and conservative towards the concept of “gender”, rather than elderly from Tavush region. Also, if in Tavush FGDs the “gender” concept was defined more a phenomenon between men and women, in Yerevan the focus was made mainly on women and their roles and responsibilities. Another interesting tendency across all FGDs (student, non-student, elderly groups and with civil society representatives) in Yerevan and Tavush, the Yerevan discussants were more inclined to define contemporary woman’s role in the society and find collisions between “how should be the woman” and “how is the woman today”, whereas Tavush FGDs have shown that public understanding of “gender” concept connects with the domestic violence against women, unequal wages among women and men, double burden on women whose husbands have migrated out in search of better employment opportunities (especially in the small towns of the Marz (region), where the situation is more severe due to poverty and lack of opportunities in small urban setting). This knowledge has been acquired through different marz-related development programs led by local and international civil society organizations.

In most of the cases, to the question “where did you hear about gender first?” the respondents would first of all mention the mass media (TV and newspapers) and social media (Facebook). Some of the respondents (among them predominantly NGOs), stated that for the first time they acquired about gender in seminar and educational events. Asking about knowledge transfer done in mass media or civil society events to the public, the respondents of the key informant interviews argued that in fact the knowledge transfer should be challenged and put under question: what kind of knowledge is transferred? Who is transferring the knowledge? Which knowledge is perceived as the “right” knowledge? What are the factors that the gender knowledge is not transferred properly? The interviewees claimed that if there is a number of factors, which impede knowledge transfer and that is the reason why people have no knowledge or have averse perception towards “gender” conversation. According to an artist working in the field, one of such reasons is the lack of

wish among many NGOs, as well as state structures, to transfer knowledge, which would empower women and men for more gender equality.

“Nobody is interested in giving proper education and knowledge, because knowledge is empowering. In the case of gender equality knowledge, who would be interested in empowering the 50% of the population by giving them this knowledge and making them active in the society? The subjugated group is easier to control...”, Film Maker, KII, Yerevan

Among the other reasons mentioned by the respondents were the lack of knowledge and capacity among those who are responsible for educating people in this field, as well as lack of solidarity, agreement and similar messaging among NGOs dealing with gender and women’s issues. According to an international organization representative, responsible for gender program coordination:

“The NGOs are afraid of labels to be stucked to. If in a project there is a LGBT organization, such as PINK (Public Information and Need of Knowledge NGO), the others will not join, because they don’t want to be a part of it. NGOs in Armenia are very cautious”, International Organization employee, KII

This argument has been also complemented by a number of other respondents. Many of the interviewees dealing with NGO sector and gender topic, ascertained that there is a phenomenon in Armenia: NGOs stick only to the issues of their primary affiliation and are not interested in other questions.

“You give a call to a strong human rights NGO and invite them to a seminar on women’s issues. They do not come arguing “women’s issues are not our niche”... If you are an activist you should be interested in all range of the social issues, and should understand that women’s issues are a big part of the human rights”, International Organization employee, KII

During the FGDs, it was also important to see how the knowledge on the “gender” concepts has been reflected from the discussants’ personal life perspective. In most cases, the gender was defined as an abstract concept having no personal context. When the participants across all FGDs were asked what “gender” means for them personally and how they could locate their own experiences as men and women in the context of gender equality, they would either avoid responding or presenting their own experience.

In the focus group with the non-student youth in Ijevan, the discussants were asked a question whether they had heard of any gender issue in their neighbourhoods, if they could share any [personal] story related to gender equality from their family with the group, etc. The group, which consisted of predominantly women and few men, kept a long silence. The lady who arranged the focus group discussions in Ijevan, decided to interrupt the silence and interfered by encouraging the youth not to think from personal perspective, not to speak about personal stories or stories of their families, but rather think in more abstract way. Thus, gender is always impersonal, it is hardly connected with the real experiences of those who is talking about gender. In addition to all multiple denominations that “gender” concept has got in Armenia, gender remains an abstract definition based on rigid stereotypes.

The only moments, when the discussants could relate to personal stories instead of talking in vague and abstract ways, were the references the elderly or young adults were making to the socialist past, where they or their parents “used to live equally and happily together”. The personal stories remain in the past, while having no reflection in present day.

Conclusion: why is there no gender discourse in Armenia?

While the author was trying to understand if there is a gender discourse in Armenia and what is understood and known by *gender* during the focus group discussions and key informant interviews, another question came into the light in the end: why is there no gender discourse in this country? Different interviewees and discussants presented a number of diverse perspectives on why there is no gender discourse. Some of the most frequent arguments are presented as follows:

- *Lack of political wish to empower*: respondents claimed that knowledge has an exceptional empowering force, which leads to establishment of discourse, at the same time, each discourse brings new knowledge, which continues empowering the society. However, there was also the rhetoric question “but, why would the State empower the 50% of the population? Empowered segments of the society can challenge and jeopardize the corrupt State. That is not in their interest”.

- *Politics in between:* some of the respondents (in particular young students) argued that the lack of “healthy” discussions on gender is reasoned by the clashes between European/“Western” and Russian politics in Armenia. As per one of the young man from Yerevan FGD “the hot discussions on the gender equality law, which took place in 2013, had surprisingly coincided with the Armenia’s reconsideration to join the EU Association Agreement and to sign instead the Eurasian Customs Union with Russia”. In fact, the tense debates against the gender equality law taking place in 2013 were contributed a lot by pro-Russian propaganda groups (such as, All-Armenian Family Committee). As a result, during those days when Armenia turned down the Association Agreement with EU, a huge propaganda machine was working against “gender as a European value”, proving how dangerous the gender is for the Armenian family of today and next generations.
- *The bad words gender and feminism:* the words gender and feminism have already been rooted as terms with negative connotation in the Armenian colloquial vocabulary due to a number of reasons. Therefore, back in 2013 after a series of hot debates on the gender equality law, a decision was made to take the word “gender” out of the law draft. When the term was taken out, the public seemed to be more or less satisfied and accepted the law. That is the reason, there is a tendency in the public discourse to go against and resist everything, which concerns “gender” and “feminism”.
- *Lack of capacity among NGOs and other actors:* the interviews with the local and international NGO representatives showed, there is a capacity building issue among NGOs, which would help transferring appropriate meanings and knowledge.
- *From project to project approach:* this concerned criticism towards civil society organizations for implementing projects with lack of sustainability of programmatic interventions. As per the key informatory interview with a Yerevan based NGO, “NGOs are accustomed to deal with the local communities from project to project. There is no intervention in-between the projects, as well as the projects are not sustainable enough beyond their lifespan”.

- *Action based projects and no knowledge-based:* another criticism towards local and international NGOs driving for “*short-term action*”, but “*not for long-term knowledge*”.
- *Lack of cultural translation of the terms into the Armenian context:* the “gender” concepts were adopted without proper contextualization, according to KIIIs with international organization representatives, and therefore, there is a big gap of understanding and information vacuum.
- *Sustaining elite discourse:* a statement prompted by NGOs in key informant interviews in Yerevan suggesting that a circle of NGOs have created an “elite” space for discussions, which is not possible to be mainstreamed and made accessible to the other NGOs.
- *Radicalism in alternative:* at the same time, some interviewees (interviews with art people and representatives of international organizations) underlined that there is also a growing progressive women’s civil society. They are those who are not afraid of talking on sexual violence, sexuality, girls’ emancipation, LGBT rights in Armenia, etc. They represent an alternative power in contrast to the mainstream “elite” women’s NGOs, both are different in terms of their positioning and messaging. However, the progressive wing of women still remain radical for the Armenian context, as per the interviewees. “The alternative is so radical for today’s society, it is sometimes not possible to be perceived”.
- *Fake traditionalism and fake masculinity:* according to a number of key informant interviewees (artists and independent researchers), one of the greatest factors contributing to sustaining the conservative discourse in Armenia (which is basically a rejection of any dialogue) is the “*fake traditionalism*” and “*fake masculinity*”, which serves as an instrument to many men as a self-security and creates further resistance.
- *Total absence of personalization of gender issues:* lack of internalization, representation and manifestation of personal stories, in which one can challenge her/his life, body, standpoint, identity.
- *Lack of critical thinking and lack of self-challenge: the culture of memorization and belief in taken-for-granted knowledge.* There is a lack of self-questioning and self-understanding: who am I and why should I be there standing here as a woman or as a man? How do I become a

woman? What makes me a woman? How sincere and personal/individual am I when I am talking about gender equality? And how beyond the clichés am I when I am talking about it?

- *Lack of grassroots involvement in NGO sector:* lack of grassroots among the civil society, especially among women's NGOs; lack of leaders coming out of grassroots.
- *Lack of intellectuals and art people involved in discourse:* scarcity of intellectual interaction and exchange of knowledge, acceptance of new knowledge and critical challenge of their own knowledge; hunger for intellectual interaction and exchange of knowledge, acceptance of new knowledge and critical challenge of their own knowledge.
- *The lack of interaction and cooperation and solidarity among NGOs:* one of the remarkable reasons for the discourse failure in Armenia is the lack of solidarity and “common language” that different NGOs could speak together and create.

The public perception and knowledge are based on contradictory understandings of gender concepts. The knowledge among public comes mainly from media and public discussions, which produce and reproduce taken-for-granted knowledge. The knowledge of gender consists of different *meanings*, which never form a discourse as there is no *shared knowledge, no shared space and no shared will*.

The two gender discursive perspectives (“conservative” vs “egalitarian”), which currently exist in Armenia are not based on argumentative discussions, but rather each of them excludes the other leaving no space for a discussion. Moreover, each of them consists of many civil society groups, which have different positioning in the society and different messages transmitted to the society. Leaning on all above mentioned lack of knowledge and mixed perceptions of gender concepts one may conclude that in fact there are abstract and impersonal narratives, which do not come together and make up one joint discourse. There are a lot of factors, which impede the gender category to construct acceptable systems of meanings, which would lay down the foundation of a healthy gender discourse. Unless those factors are eliminated by different actors in the field, the public hysteria and its different manipulations will not be replaced by constructive dialogue and will not contribute to the public knowledge on what is gender all about.

**APPLICATION OF SPECIAL TEMPORARY MEASURES (QUOTAS)
IN SUPPORT OF WOMEN IN ARMENIA:
PREHISTORY AND ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTIVENESS**

Tamara Hovnatanyan

Introduction

The application of special temporary measures (quotas) is a widely used and effective tool in ensuring the opportunities for women during elections, as well as overcoming the obstacles that they face. The need to apply this tool is widely discussed and stipulated in a number of international documents, as well as programs and laws adopted in Armenia. The Electoral Code of the Republic of Armenia has stipulated this principle from as early as 2000, and from this perspective the issues of “being for or against the quotas” are no longer up for contention. Nevertheless, in public perception and in the political life some relics of the question still persist, even though it is being gradually transformed into a discussion on the size of quotas and their effectiveness.

There are three types of quotas used throughout the world:

- **Legally stipulated specific number of seats in the parliament.** As a result of these kinds of quotas women constitute 58% of parliamentarians in Rwanda, 25% in Afghanistan, 27% in Iraq.
- **Voluntary quotas**, which are agreed upon within the parties in order to sustain gender parity. This is the broadly used quota type in the world. These kinds of norms were first introduced in the 70s in Western Europe by a number of social-democratic parties. In Scandinavian countries, where quotas were introduced due to the grass movements of women, witness the highest number of female parliamentarians in the world. Generally, voluntary party quotas are a fact of life in more than half of the EU member states.
- **Legally stipulated certain numbers of positions in the party lists during elections.** This kind of quotas is used in a number of states, including Armenia.

Legal Foundations of Quotas

Normative legal base that de jure guarantees the full-fledged participation of women in the political life of Armenia, particularly in electoral processes, includes:

- International documents concerning gender equality ratified by the Republic of Armenia and obligations stemming from the ratification of these documents;
- The Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, State Gender Policy Concept Note and Strategic program of 2011-2015, national legislation, including the Law on ensuring the equal rights and opportunities of women and men of the Republic of Armenia and the Electoral Code.

International Obligations of Armenia Concerning the Application of Special Temporary Measures

The directive to apply special temporary measures (quotas) in order to ensure the appropriate participation of women is part and parcel of the **UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW)** adopted in 1979¹⁶. Article 4 of the convention requires that *"adoption...of special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination."* In 2009, The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women raised its concerns upon the receipt of the third and fourth annual reports from Armenia, stating that 15% quota stipulated in the electoral code is not effective, suggesting discussing the possibility of raising the bar beyond 20%¹⁷.

The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action introduced strategic goals, stipulating the participation of women in directive bodies and decision-making

¹⁶ The UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) requires the member states to "guarantees women equality in political and public life with a focus on equality in voting, participation in government, and participation in "non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country," (Article 7)

¹⁷ The final recommendations of the Committee on the elimination of discrimination against women, 43rd session, 2009, **CEDAW/C/ARM/CO/4/Rev.1**

processes, identifying concrete and coordinated activities aimed at the improvement of political engagement of women. Although the UN principles of gender equality in decision-making bodies is based on 50/50 % representation of both genders, the Beijing Platform also mentioned the concept of “critical mass”, which is defined as the minimal opportunity of women to affect decision-making, thus, requiring at least 30% representation, most particularly in parliaments.

The minimal 30% presence of women is the benchmark that would create the foundation for a 50/50 representation by 2030. This vision of gender equality was stipulated in the concluding session of **Beijing+20**, on March 5, 2015, in the political declaration¹⁸ on behalf of heads of UN member states and was ratified on September 27, 2015, during the meeting¹⁹ of World Leaders, finding its place in the Sustainable Development Goals²⁰.

Prior to that, the **Millennium Development Goals (2000)** through the adaption of Goal 3 on “*promoting gender equality and empowering women*” by the Government of Armenia, defined target indicators²¹ that by 2015, would ensure at least 25% representation of women MPs, ministers, deputy ministers and governors (marzpets), however, the 2015 National Report on the Progress of MDGs stated that this target was not met²².

In European document, a particular importance is attached to the participation of women in electoral processes and particularly to the mechanisms that would help to enlarge it, which Armenia has ratified within its membership in CoE.

¹⁸ Political Declaration off the Fourth World Conference of Women’s Issues during 20th Anniversary (ECOSOC), March 5, 2015, http://www.un.am/up/file/Political%20declaration_Arm_March%205.%202015_final%20and%20sent.pdf

¹⁹Global Leaders’ Meeting on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: A Commitment to Action 27 September 2015, New York, United Nations <http://www2.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/initiatives/stepitup/stepitup-conceptnote-globalleadersmeeting-en.pdf?v=1&d=20150916T215614>

²⁰ Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

²¹ The Adaptation and Progress Report of MDGs, National Report, Armenia, 2005

²² Armenia: Progress Report on MDGs, 2015

The CoE Ministerial Committee already in 2003 through its adopted Resolution No. 3 defined the benchmark of female representation in decision-making, which was no less than 40%²³. In 2006, during the Sixth CoE Ministerial Conference on Gender Equality, Armenia voted for the set benchmark to be achieved by 2020²⁴.

The optimal ratio of male and female representation of 40/60 was introduced to the PACE 2010 Resolution No. 1706 on **Electoral Systems as Tools to Enhance the Representation of Women in Political Life**²⁵, calling upon the CoE member states to discuss the legal issues related to quotas, not only touching upon the (ideal 40%) high proportion of female representation in electoral lists, but also the sequencing of male and female candidates. The document also discussed the application of sanctions against parties (preferably in a form of refusing candidates, instead of paying fines).

The 2012 CoE Resolution No. 1898 on **Political Parties and Women's Political Representation**²⁶ highlighted the obligation of the parties to ensure gender balance in terms of engaging women and promoting their numbers and progress within their structures and throughout the society. The member states to CoE should transition from gender quotas to the principle of equality: this is the directive issued by PACE in its April 2016 session through the adopted Resolution No. 2111 on **Assessment on the Activities aimed at the Improvement of Political Engagement of Women**²⁷. It states that the most effective means for the engagement of women in politics is the provision of quotas; especially where sanctions are applied in cases when legal provisions are not being upheld. For

²³ Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making; <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=2229>

²⁴ 6th European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men ; Resolution Achieving gender equality [http://www.coe.int/t/DGHL/STANDARDSETTING/EQUALITY/05conferences/ministerial-conferences/6th-Ministerial%20Conference/MEG-6\(2006\)2_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/DGHL/STANDARDSETTING/EQUALITY/05conferences/ministerial-conferences/6th-Ministerial%20Conference/MEG-6(2006)2_en.pdf)

²⁵ Increasing women's representation in politics through the electoral system Resolution 1706 (2010)

<http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/Doc/XrefViewHTML.asp?FileId=17809&Language=EN>

²⁶ Resolution 1898 (2012) Political parties and women's political representation <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=19134&lang=en>

²⁷ PACE Resolution No. 2111 (2016) Assessment on the Activities aimed at the Improvement of Political Engagement of Women

<http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=22745&lang=en>

the long run, in order for the quotas to be effective, other support measures are required²⁸. The similar report that served as the basis for the resolution²⁹ highlights the importance of legal provisions regarding quotas in the member states. The report states that recently quotas have been introduced in Albania, Armenia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, Ireland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, etc. The share of women in the parliaments of these countries ranges from 41.1% in Spain to 10.7% in Armenia.

Although efforts are taken to improve the equality, non discrimination and representation of women in respective parliaments of member states, the PACE finds it not fully satisfied by the level of representation currently. Regardless of the fact that more than half of the population of the member states is female (according to the data provided in the report out of 826 mln total 426 mln are women in Europe), 1/3 of these countries have a female representation rate that is below 20%. *This level of representation distorts the essence of a representative body. It is high time to act on it. Member states should revisit their electoral procedures, they are obliged to adopt effective measures that would improve women's participation, which in the long run would ensure effectiveness and sustainability,*" states the report.

The Introduction of Quotas in the National Legislation

The obligations assumed by Armenia under the above stated international documents related to the improvement of political engagement of women has made the country to take the initial steps in adopting the principles provided by those documents, including the introduction of gender quota.

Particularly, in 2010, the Government of Armenia adopted the **Concept Note on Gender Policy**, where it was stipulated that in executive and legislative

²⁸ The resolution suggests to solve the problem via application of universal means, which would include the ones aimed at supporting women, i. e. quotas, creation of possibilities for women to combine their personal lives with the engagement in politics, financing aimed at the encouragement of female participation and engagement in parties, as well as sanctions if these means are not being applied.

²⁹ PACE Report on Assessment on the Activities aimed at the Improvement of Political Engagement of Women <http://website-pace.net/documents/10643/2221023/women-political-representationprov-EN.pdf/be86aa28-1cf8-4f2d-acf2-55e3d70e20f4>

bodies of the country at levels of decision-making the representation of women and men means the following:

“ ...According to the obligations of the Republic of Armenia to introduce change to the Electoral Code, applying 30% gender quota, taking into account the 40/60% share directive provided by the CoE and take necessary steps for gradual improvement of representation of women in highest and senior positions at all levels of executive branch.

...To stimulate those parties that through their actions follow the continued democratization, when forming the governing bodies they take into account the gender aspect and support the progress of women in electoral lists in order to ensure the gender balanced representation³⁰.”

According to the **State Strategic Program (2011-2015) on Gender Policy** it is yet again planned to increase the activities aimed at the application of special temporary measures:

“Apply special measures in order to ensure 30% representation of women in legislature and decision making levels of the executive branch³¹.”

The legal guarantees of special measures are stipulated in the Law on equal rights and opportunities of women and men (article 12):

“...In order to reach a balanced representation of women and men the state can define special temporary measures in elected bodies for the persons from the underrepresented gender (provision 3).

...In elections parties are to participate with candidates' lists based on gender representation as defined by the quotas stipulated in the law (provision 4).”

The participation of women in elections is to some extent also ensured by the **Electoral Code**, moreover with a quite gender sensitive definition, i.e. through the provision of a certain proportion of representation based on gender in the list of candidates from the political parties. Nevertheless, if the quota

³⁰ Concept Note on Gender Policy (2010) http://www.gov.am/u_files/file/kananc-xorh/Gender-hayecakarg.pdf

³¹ State Strategic Program on Gender Policy (2011-2015) http://www.e-gov.am/u_files/file/decrees/kar/2011/05/kar60_1.pdf

guaranteeing the representation of women has increased four-fold (from 5% in 2003 to 15% in 2007 and 20% in 2012 elections), in the same period the representation of women in the National Assembly has increased only two-fold, from 5.3% to 10%.

On May 25, of 2016, the newly adopted Electoral Code ensured number of provisions concerning gender sensitive formulation of candidates' lists from the parties and establishment of committees responsible for the election process³². Particularly, the share of gender based representation of candidates in national and local elections has been set at 30/70³³.

Assessment of Effectiveness of Applied Quotas

In the Electoral Code the women's NGOs have played an active role in pushing for the provision of gender quotas with their recommendations before the 2012 parliamentary elections and now, when the new code was being adopted. However, their recommendations have been incorporated only on a partial basis.

Although, already in 2008, the women's NGOs suggested the 30/70 share of gender quotas for party lists³⁴ with male and female candidates taking at most every third position consecutively, in 2012, before the parliamentary elections, only 20/80 share was introduced in the code.

"Through the proportional electoral mechanism of the elections of parties and coalitions to the National Assembly, starting from the second position in the candidate's list with five position lags (2-6, 2-11, 2-16 up until the end of the list) the number of each gender should not surpass 80% benchmark..."³⁵

³² Provisions concerning the representation of women in Central Electoral Commission and other precinct committees were already stipulated in the previous Code. Due to those provisions already in 2012 elections, 3 out of 7 members of Central Electoral Commission were women, whereas in precinct ones the overall share are 30.5%.

³³ Electoral Code of RA, adopted on march 25, 2016, Articles 83.4; 83.10; 130.2 <http://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=105967>

³⁴ The recommendations have been presented by the Association of women with university education and 23 other NGOs in 2008 and have been considered in 2012, when amending the Electoral Code

³⁵ Electoral Code of Ra, Article 108, adopted in 2011

As the results of the 2012 elections show, on average in party lists women stood at 23%, however, in the end when in the parliament their overall share amounted to only 10.7% (now down to 10%). This fact already shows the ineffectiveness of the applied gender quota.

According to expert evaluations³⁶, *“gender quota lost its intended impact power when the parties after the elections shifted positions and used withdrawals that remained unclear to the public.”* According to the data of the Central Electoral Commission, 25% of MPs that used their right to withdraw were women. The male MPs took their places, even though the women’s NGOs, in trying to keep the effect of the quota in place, had suggested reserving those places only for female candidates, so that if they withdraw, the female MP next on the party list takes the place³⁷.

OSCE/ODIHR elections observation mission of 2012, in its final report on parliamentary elections negatively evaluated the process of withdrawal, stating that *“the large number of elected candidates that had taken the option of withdrawal is concerning from the perspective of respecting the voters’ choice.”* In addition, concerning the effectiveness of quotas they have made the following statement:

“...The effectiveness of quotas as a special temporary measure for candidates needs to be revised in order to reach the de facto equality of rights and opportunities in their role of candidates.

...The parties need to be encouraged to have gender policies and publicly provide the gender sensitive data on membership. It would be conducive to discuss the engagement of women in their governing bodies, as well as adopt more transparent and democratic means of development of party lists³⁸.”

The discriminatory definition of quotas in the Electoral Code also played a role in generating the negative impact, more particularly it concerned the section on *“from the second position in within each five-step intervals 2-6,*

³⁶ Political participation of women in 2012 parliamentary elections, Association of women with university education, Yerevan, 2012; Participation for Changes, Results for Qualitative Researches, Caucasus Sociological Research Center, Oxfam 2012

³⁷ This recommendation was only approved in 2016, when it got incorporated in the new Electoral Code through a separate article.

³⁸ OSCE/ODIHR mission’s final report, June 26, 2012: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/91643>

2-11, 2-16 and so on," which gave the possibility to the parties participating in the elections to include female candidates starting from only the sixth position, this is in a situation, when the minimum requirement for the party to enter the parliament is to ensure the first five seats. As a result of this, a reversal from 2007 results was registered, when within the first five positions the number of women included in party lists had declined four-fold and two-fold within the first ten seats.

The non-satisfactory nature of the applied quota in Armenia is further seen within the context of the joint 2012 report on Women in Politics developed by **Interparliamentary Union** and **UN-Women**. It becomes clear that out of 59 countries, where in 2011 elections have been held; only 17 had quotas in place. In those countries, women have taken 27% of seats in the parliaments, whereas the countries without quotas have seen a 16% share of female MPs³⁹.

Gender Quota in the New Electoral Code

The Constitutional referendum of 2015 transformed Armenia into a parliamentary republic, which increased the weight of parliamentary elections that now are only going to have proportional system with both open and closed lists being introduced⁴⁰. The recommendations of women's NGOs were based on the results of the previous elections, opinion polls, as well as obligations of Armenia stemming from the international documents and national legislation.

³⁹Michelle Bachelet. Highlights Quotas to Accelerate Women's Political Participation. <http://www.unwomen.org/2012/03/michelle-bachelet-highlights-quotas-to-accelerate-womens-political-participation/>

⁴⁰ According to the assessment of experts of Venice Commission, in case of closed lists, everything depends on parties, whereas the introduction of open lists could result in lower numbers of representation for women, as in case of open lists the voters are not required to make their selection based on gender, instead open lists are going to play into the hands of well known male candidates. Report on the impact of electoral systems on women's representation in politics. European commission for democracy through law (Venice commission), June 2009 [http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2009\)029-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2009)029-e)

The recommendations provided by women's NGOs are based on the following arguments⁴¹:

- Regarding women's representation in the national Assembly and at decision-making levels, Armenia is significantly behind the world indicators. Interparliamentary Union's data⁴² suggests that the average representation rate of women globally through their parliaments stands at 22.7%, which means that out of every five parliamentarians in the world at least one is a woman. The highest rates are in Northern Europe with a share of 41.1%, in OSCE member states the rate of female representation stands at 25.7%. The lowest rate of participation of women is registered in countries of Arab World (18.3%) and Pacific region (13.5%). Meanwhile, the level of representation of women in the parliament of Armenia is 10.7%, which clearly shows the existence of discriminatory practices, incomplete utilization of political rights and absolutely inefficient application of human capital in public administration and management, particularly, when taking into consideration that fact that women in Armenia comprise 52% of the population, while among persons with higher education qualifications their share is 60%.
- The surveys have shown that political parties in Armenia are more conservative in their approach to quotas and issues of female representation in the parliament than the general public, which are ready to see more women in the legislature than the parties put on their lists. 57% of the respondents support the application of gender quotas in different levels of political leadership and public administration. Specifically, quotas for legislature have to fall within the range of 30-40%.
- The need for application of quotas becomes more obvious from the dynamics of female representation in the parliament, when observing the

⁴¹ The ratio of 30/70 representation in the parliament was the initiative of four different organizations, Gender thematic group that operates under the co-chairmanship of the UN, OSCE and the Government and unites representatives and experts from 60 local and international organizations, the Association of Women with University Education that unites around 30 regional branches, the Association of Young Lawyers of Armenia with its 3 regional offices, as well as two committees of the Public Council.

⁴² www.ipu.com

elections right from the moment of independence. From 1995 when the first National Assembly was elected up to 2015 with the fifth one being in power, the share of women has grown from initial 6% to 10%. If this rate of change is sustained, Armenia will not be able to reach parity by 2030. The simplest of calculations, shows that in upcoming elections a tangible change would be possible if the quota is set at 30% benchmark along with its effective application.

- The raised bar would also force the parties to start seriously considering policies of party engagement and progress of women, as well as get rid of an approach of involving „non real candidates” in their party lists⁴³.
 - ✓ *„The first two positions of electoral lists of parties, coalitions and each party included in the coalition to reserve for candidates of both genders and starting from the 3rd position for every 3 positions consecutively ensure that any of the genders takes maximum 70%.*
 - ✓ *In regional (local) electoral lists each participating party should ensure that each of both genders does not exceed the share of 70%.*
 - ✓ *In electoral lists of parties, in cases when less represented gendered person opts for withdrawal that place passes on to the next representative of the same less represented gendered candidate.*
 - ✓ *In local elections in the big or agglomerated communities⁴⁴ it is needed to transition to proportional electoral systems such as in Yerevan⁴⁵.*
 - ✓ *The above stated measures that are changed in the Electoral Code need to be combined with the application of auxiliary measures that*

⁴³ Suggestions on the improvement of women’s participation in politics provided by the Gender Thematic Group <http://womennet.am/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/GTG-recommendations-arm.pdf>

⁴⁴ Achieving sustainable gender equality in local and regional political life / Resolution 303 (2010) / The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?p=&id=1601275&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=CACC9A&BackColorLogged=EFEA9C&direct=true>

⁴⁵According to NSS data the presence of women in urban community councils is almost half of the required benchmark, i. e. 5.1% less than in rural communities. In all of the marz level urban community councils the overall number of women is 30. Only 18 out of 866 rural communities have female community heads (2%), in urban communities there were never female mayors registered.

would improve the political participation of women, allowing them to be more competitive within their parties.”

These recommendations have been reflected partially in the Electoral Code. In 2016, the newly adopted Electoral Code for instance⁴⁶ has included the recommendation on cases of MPs resigning and as a result of that any of the genders becomes less represented than 25%, then the mandate is being passed to the representative of the same gender, who is on the party list. It is important that now through the proportional electoral system in Yerevan, Gyumri and Vanadzor none of the genders can be less represented than 25%⁴⁷. In essence, these provisions guarantee that in elected bodies there will be no factions without women.

Apart from that, according to the Electoral Code⁴⁸ in the national and local party lists the ratio of genders is going to be 30 to 70. In the national electoral party lists, the gender representation is going to have a form of one female per triplet of candidates starting from the first place. The 30 to 70 proportion is applied to the party lists for proportional electoral system in the local elections, so that Yerevan, Gyumri, Vanadzor councils are going to be elected through it. However, the transitional and concluding provisions⁴⁹ stipulate that the above stated changes are going to become effective only from 2022, and before that, 25 to 75 ratio is going to be operational.

This approach has raised concerns among the Women’s NGOs, which put forward yet another recommendation, i. e. apply 30 to 70 ratio in 2017 elections⁵⁰. It was rejected with the justification that it was not reasonable to introduce abrupt changes to quotas, as they can create internal problems for the parties. Whereas the distribution of mandates in the Electoral Code for the case of the national elections through the closed combination and for local

⁴⁶ Electoral Code, May 25, 2016 /

<http://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=105967>

⁴⁷ Electoral Code, May 25, 2016 / article 100.3; 141.6; 141.8;

<http://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=105967>

⁴⁸ Electoral Code, May 25, 2016 / articles 83.4; 83.10;

130.2 <http://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=105967>

⁴⁹ Electoral Code, May 25, 2016 / article 144 points 14, 15 and

16 <http://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=105967>

⁵⁰ Suggestion of the Gender Thematic Group to be introduced in the Electoral Code

http://womennet.am/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/GTG-recommendation_-June.pdf

elections through the open combination, is going to lead to the deviation from the 30 to 70 ratio for the party lists. Moreover, taking into consideration that women are going to be underrepresented in open local lists, which is being raised by the experts, including the Venice Commission observation⁵¹, the de facto number of women in the elected bodies is going to be no more than 15%, and in the case of 25 to 75 ratio for the parliament is going to result in less than 12% of representation of women. From this perspective, the postponement is not justified, and abrupt increase of the number of women in the upcoming elections is not going to occur.

Currently, when the new Electoral Code is adopted, the only issue is to ensure the effectiveness of the application of the stipulated quota in the upcoming elections of 2017. It is necessary to realise that the quota is a tool that works well if combined with other supportive measures and in a reality when there are certain preconditions fulfilled in a given society. The most important preconditions are the strong women's movement, the support of the state and the responsibility of the parties. The fulfillment of those preconditions already requires concerted action and commitment in order not to be late.

⁵¹ In parliamentary elections the application of location based lists is not going to guarantee that the de facto number of women is going to be at the stipulated level of the quotas. The experts of Venice Commission have mentioned about it in their observation provided on May 10, 2016, see point 117 (Armenia – preparation of the preliminary opinion on the draft electoral code <http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/events/>): Apart from that the Report on the Representation of Women through Electoral Systems of 2009 states that open or free list application can lead to lower numbers of women being represented (point 80), see the Report on the impact of electoral systems on women's representation in politics . European commission for democracy through law (Venice commission), June 2009 [http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2009\)029-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2009)029-e)

MARRIAGE LAW AND CULTURE AMONG OTTOMAN ARMENIANS, 1860-1914

Hasmik Khalapyan

Introduction

History of European women's movements presents an organized activism for the improvement of marriage institution. As a consequence of this activism, women successfully put pressure on the political bodies to adopt more favorable-to-women laws in matters of personal and marital status.⁵² The Armenian women's movement offers no example of organized activism for betterment of marriage and family identical to the pattern widespread in Europe. Although feminists were zealously fighting for rights to education, paid employment and more active roles in society on the pages of Armenian periodicals, the advocacy for improvement of family and women's rights in it rarely became a topic of concern on the same pages and on the same level. Why were women silent about their personal status and marital rights? In which ways the local socio-political conditions shaped/limited Armenian women's activism in the sphere of family and marriage, and how women themselves adjusted their activism to the local conditions? This paper aims at finding answers to these questions.

The State of Marriage "Culture" and "Law" among Ottoman Armenians and Efforts to Bring Reform

In the period under scrutiny, marriage was a religious act, carried out and registered by the local church. Arranged/forced marriages were a common practice among the Ottoman Armenians. Marriage was regarded as a contractual relation between two families, rather than the marrying couple. The common mood in the period both among religions and secular authorities and

⁵² Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage and the Law in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Carol Dyhouse, *Feminism and the Family in England, 1880-1939* (London: Blackwell, 1989).

the reformers was that the family was deteriorated by marriage “vices” and a struggle was launched by the mentioned parties on legal and discursive levels to stop the “microbes deteriorating our nation.”

Among the vices to fight against was child or early marriage. The most criticized age-related practice was *beşik kertme*, an agreement between the families of infants to have their children marry when they reached puberty. Cases of *beşik kertme* despite the prohibition in 1811 were reported as late as in 1906.⁵³

Dowry was considered yet another vice by the authorities and reformers. The practice of it differed in the cities and rural areas. In the rural areas, the groom’s family was supposed to pay the bride’s family what was called *başlık* (head price), whereas in the cities the bride was supposed to take *drahoma* (*dramozhit* or dowry in cash). *Başlık* and *drahoma* were considered to be the reasons behind the decline in marriage rate, particularly among the socially more vulnerable families.⁵⁴

Religious conversions, as well as appeals to Muslim courts mostly by women were of great concern to the religious and secular authorities. Conversions occurred for the sake of getting a safer and more desirable solution for the case filed. Cases were reported when the couple would convert to Greek Orthodoxy, and then re-convert to the Armenian Church upon the settlement of the dispute.

Polygamy was perhaps perceived as the most alarming “unchristian vice.” Cases of it were repeatedly reported in the provinces. It appears that the Religious Council was particularly zealous in stopping the cases of polygamy and less so other wrong-doings, such as child marriage, forced marriage, dowry, etc.⁵⁵

⁵³ Hakob Papazian, «Գիւղերու անուսնական բարքերէն» [“On Marriage Mores in Villages”]. *Manzume-i Efkar* (October 7, 1906).

⁵⁴ See, *Massis* (June 1, 1885); *Hayrenik* (August 20, 1894); *Byouzandion* (February 24, 1905).

⁵⁵ See, for example, Shahan, [“Marriage Embezzlements in Provinces”]. *Massis* 3756 (February 9, 1885).

The goals set ahead for stopping the family and marriage “vices” was clear to all parties, with opinions largely in accord as illustrated above. What was not clear, however, was *who* had the lead and the say in the reform.

Whose Reform?

Due to the composition of the Ottoman State, the Armenian community (*millet*), similar to the Greek and Jewish communities, was headed by the religious leader, the Patriarch. As long as the Patriarch was the recognized head of the community, secularism among Armenians was internally realistic with limitations only. The National Assembly’s Judicial Committee, which handled family and marriage disputes, bore a dual character, consisting of eight members, four religious and four secular. It was the duty of the Judicial Committee “to resolve family disputes and examine and solve trials passed to the Patriarchate by the Sublime Porte...”⁵⁶ Under the Constitution, if the Judicial Committee found a case “beyond its comprehension,” it was to pass the case to the Religious, Civil or Mixed Councils. If appeal was filed against any of the verdicts of the Judicial Committee, the issue was to be reheard by any of the three above-mentioned Councils too.⁵⁷ Thus, under the Constitution alone, family trials could go to the hands of practically any authority of the Armenian *millet* (religious, secular or semi-religious/semi-secular). The cases could be heard likewise at the Ottoman Muslim courts as Christians were free to take their cases to the Muslim courts. Moreover, what may seem a simple divorce case, could go out of the borders of the Ottoman Empire. Given the subordination of the Patriarch of the Ottoman Armenians to the Armenian Catholicos at the Holy See of Echmiatsin (the Mother Church) in Russian Armenia, marital disputes of Ottoman Armenians were often referred by the Patriarch to the Catholicos when the former either failed or was unwilling to take the responsibility for the case.

Although the national institutions bore semi-secular and semi-religious character, the reform was increasingly understood in the language of secularization and the Church was often blamed for the persistence of ignorance and slow progress. Within the *millet*, the cleavage rested upon a

⁵⁶ *National Constitution*, Article 47.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

simple question: “is marriage a private or public institution?” The religious authorities continued viewing “private” and “religious” as synonymous, and insisted that marriage was a private matter. The “public” and “secular,” on the other hand, were synonymous for the secular authorities too who strived to secularize the institution exactly through opening the contemporary family and marriage situation to “public” debate.⁵⁸ The secular authorities pushed for the development of a unifying legal framework. However, even though under the Constitution, the Judicial Committee could refer cases to the Religious, Civil and Mixed Councils, over time the Religious Council through various decrees at various times had made the Judicial Committee’s decisions subject to its final examination and instead of secularization, in early 20th century marriage had increasingly become an institution dependent on religious authorities which further sharpened the tension between religious and secular authorities and reformers.

Negotiating a “New” Family and Marriage Culture

While secular authorities struggled to gain power in the National Assembly through secularization of marriage, the reformers supported them through a discursive campaign launched in the periodical press and fictional literature. This campaign was to endorse new family structure and marriage culture. Women were central in this discourse. They were singled out as the biggest victims of marriage vices, and their plight was spoken of with concern:

*It is impossible to deny that family and love dramas have increased in number in the Armenian society recently. And particularly it is young women who, at the cost of their own blood, from time to time come to spread in front of the eyes of an indifferent society the hidden sufferings and covered wounds we pass by every day but we have neither the heart nor the time to deal with them.*⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *Minutes of the National Assembly*. Session 7 (August 2, 1885), p. 129.

⁵⁹ Levon Bashalian, «Ահռելի մը վրայ»: [“Over a Dead Woman”]. *Hayrenik* 854 (June 26, 1894).

Women reportedly were particularly oppressed and more in need for protection in the rural areas. Since they lived in multiple and extended families, first they were subjected to the will of their husbands and after his death, to their sons and brothers-in-law. Of particular concern was the fate of wives whose husbands had migrated leaving the family with no support or information about their whereabouts. The abandoned women were considered as “a wound on the body of the nation.” As arguable as the issue of divorce was for other cases, “it is impossible to have two different opinions [in cases of abandoned wives]. It is necessary to support divorce.”⁶⁰

Although the reformers used women’s plight to argue for improvement, they also held women responsible for the declining mores. On a general level, the arguments around women reflected the tensions common to the nationalist discourse which demands of women to both preserve the culture and be markers of change. Due to the pace of social change in the Ottoman Empire, traditional family values were not destroyed as rapidly among the Ottoman Armenians as they were among Europeans. This was a cause for celebration for the Armenian reformers who regarded the Armenian woman as “purer” compared to her European sister.⁶¹

Upper class women were expected to serve as models of motherhood and wifehood to their sisters of lower classes. Keeping wet-nurses was highly criticized as an imitation from Europe and a “bitter fashion.”⁶² Women’s imitation of European “harmful” practices was believed to be at odds to their clinging upon local destructive practices which reformers claimed as alien to the Old Armenian Tradition. Thus, head price (*başlık*) was believed to persist because women “are quite demanding.” Although it was generally believed that marriage rate was in decline because of young educated and westernized men who thought of marriage as burden, the upper class single women were criticized for scaring off men with their love for luxuries.⁶³

⁶⁰ «Ընկեցիկ անայր կիներ»: [“Abandoned Wives”]. *Arevelian Mamoul* 22 (November 15, 1899), pp. 937-44.

⁶¹ «Ամուսնալուծութիւն»: [“Divorce”]. *Massis* (July 18, 1884).

⁶² *Entanik* 6 (December 1, 1883).

⁶³ *Ibid*; *Entanik* 4 (November 1, 1883); *Entanik* 5 (November 15, 1883). Women were blamed for the decline in marriage rate also because of their attachment to their sons and hatred towards their future daughters in law. See, Karapet Stepanian, «Հայրերն ի՞նչ կընեն»: [“What Are Fathers Doing?”]. *Arevelian Mamoul* (May 15, 1902).

On the other hand, when the structure and essence of a “modern” companionate marriage and “modern” Armenian family were discussed and championed, women were expected to serve as markers of change and were accused of hampering improvement with their “backward” ways. It was through the abandonment of old prejudices and alien traditions and embracement of moderate new norms that marriage could be improved and the family could continue being the essence of the Armenian culture. The literary works of the period offered the image of an ideal woman for marriage. She was an educated woman who was to become a helpmate to her husband in a companionate marriage. A strong moral family was seen as the path to progress for the entire society.⁶⁴

Space and Shape of Women’s Struggle

The history of Armenian women’s movement does not offer concrete evidence of women consciously determined to remain single and all the prominent activist women of the time were themselves married. The limited access to paid work might have been one of the reasons. Seeing women’s choice for celibacy as practically impossible under moral and material pressures, Armenian feminists did not call on women to remain consciously single. On the contrary, the decline of marriage rate was of concern for them. If the decline in marriage rate worried reformers in terms of continuation of the nation, for women’s magazine *Artemis*, the concern was related to the unclear fate of a single woman in a society that used double standards for single men and women. Thus, an article titled “Celibates” started with the statement of “What is going to be the future of our girls?”⁶⁵

The tensions at various levels and the unclear fate of a single woman made the Armenian feminists very cautious in developing a critique of marriage as an institution. This was true for women in the Ottoman Empire as a whole too. Deniz Kandiyoti identifies “specific and very significant reasons for men being the most outspoken critics of the Ottoman family system.” Muslim women

⁶⁴ See, for example, Benjamin Yeghiazarian, Լուծեալ Սէր: [Dissolved Love]. (Constantinople: 1894); H. Pashayan, Աղջկան մը յիշատակարանը: [Diary of a Young Woman]. (Constantinople: 1895).

⁶⁵ *Artemis* 7-8 (July-August 1902).

were “more timid or at least cautious” in discussing the family and institution of marriage than men who often used the plight of women to express their own dissatisfaction with the patriarchal family structure:

*This is hardly surprising in a society which offered women no shelter outside the traditional family and a tenuous one inside it... At least initially women may have had a great deal to lose and very little tangible gain in following the steps of their more emancipated brothers. The ‘passive’ attitude of women on this issue was to last well into the Republic and to continue to draw fire from progressive men.*⁶⁶

The review of the limited number of women’s journals, as well as women’s articles printed in journals edited by men would make one conclude that the Armenian women were silent on the issue of reforming family and marriage. However, the review of literary works left by the most prominent feminists of the time illustrates that women were by no means silent on the matter but rather they chose the cautious means of fictional settings and fictional characters for raising their voice against injustices in marriage and family. The protagonist of the Armenian female novels was not, however, the rebellious single woman disregarding societal gender norms and renouncing marriage. Nor did feminists attempt at “chartering her own alternate routes” through their literature as Patricia Murphy has argued for the case of English New Woman novels.⁶⁷ In fictional writing women very often echoed the same concerns voiced by reformers and male novelists, but they put women’s interests and women’s happiness at the center of their works.

Despite the subtlety of the issue and the space within which the issue had to be discussed, women did see themselves as agents of change and considered raising issues as their responsibility. When Srpouhi Dussap was publishing her second novel *Siranush* in 1884, she already had the experience of attracting much attention and criticism with her most radical for the time

⁶⁶ Deniz Kandiyoti, “From Empire to Nation State: Transformations of the Woman Question in Turkey” in *Retrieving Women’s History: Changing Perceptions of the Role of Women in Politics and Society*, ed. S. Jay Kleinberg. (Paris: BERG/UNESCO, 1992), pp. 226-27.

⁶⁷ Patricia Murphy, *Time Is of the Essence. Temporality, Gender and the New Woman* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 120.

feminist ideas. Unlike *Mayda* (1883) mainly arguing for women's work, *Siranush* is entirely a critique of marriage norms in the Armenian society. Aware of the critique she was likely to attract the second time, Dussap nonetheless published the novel, making a self-justification in the "Introduction":

*Perhaps some will again call me impudent for these statements. However, what is impudence for others is simply a responsibility for me... Great is my belief [in my project] as it is based on a conviction. Great is my courage, as it is dictated by the idea of responsibility.*⁶⁸

No matter how critical of the institution of marriage the novels were, they always expressed the authors' positive attitude toward marriage as such. According to Sibil's Bouboul, "A woman's heart has only one thread - that is love; one life - that is the family; one mission - that is motherhood."⁶⁹ Even Dussap with all her radicalism did consider marriage to be the "foundation of the society"⁷⁰ and "a sacred treaty."⁷¹ Zabel Yesayan's Annik in *The Respectable People* (*Shnorkhov Mardik*) is a woman who at the age of twenty declared to her parents her decision to remain single since "her education does not allow her [to have] a subordinate role which was the role women were subjected to in marriage at that time."⁷² Even this somewhat unusual rebellious character, however, is portrayed as extremely unhappy and unfulfilled, spending a "gloomy life" exactly because of her decision to remain single. It is only after Annik starts taking motherly care of Hakob, the adopted son of the family, that this gloominess is somewhat broken. She "put all the fondness of a single woman and motherhood" in Hakob and took this care as her chance to "finally use for a purpose the education that had become useless [due to remaining single]."⁷³

⁶⁸ Serbouhi Dussap, "Introduction." *Siranoush* (Yerevan: 1959), p. 172. The novel was first published in 1984 in Constantinople.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 414.

⁷⁰ Dussap, "Introduction" in *Միրանյշ* [Siranoush], p.167.

⁷¹ Dussap, *Միրանյշ*: [Siranoush], p. 263.

⁷² Zabel Yesayan, *Շնորհքով մարդիկ* [The Respectable People]. (Yerevan: 1959), p. 32. The novel was first published in Constantinople in 1907.

⁷³ Ibid, pp. 32-4.

New Woman and Companionate Marriage

As it appears from women's writings, feminists saw the freedom to choose one's own life partner as the only way to achieve any reform. Forced marriage was unacceptable and harmful for the society because "when there is no love, there is simply the idea of responsibility, and that idea [of responsibility] only appears as a body without soul under the roof of marriage..."⁷⁴ A modern family was to be formed on romantic love and principles of a companionate marriage. Marriage was to be a union of "two souls, a mutual unselfish treaty to work for each other's happiness, lighten one another's burden, and love each other."⁷⁵ The companionate marriage based on romantic love promised to end harms women experienced in marriage and wrote about in their works (e.g. child-marriages;⁷⁶ complicated mother-in-law vs. daughter-in-law relations in extended families;⁷⁷ dowry;⁷⁸ infidelity;⁷⁹ etc) because it would allow women to enter into the union on equal terms with men.

While situating women's happiness in home and family to a large extent, these homes were no longer to be the beholders of the traditional families based on forced marriages. Feminist authors saw women as capable of changing the institution of marriage if prior to their entry into it they themselves had reached perfection. Hence, as (future) wives and mothers, their protagonists had all the qualities women had been empowered to have through campaigns for open access to education, paid employment and social work/charity. The most important of these qualities was education. It was more and more the conviction that it was "not love for beauty and luxury that ruins

⁷⁴ Dussap, "Introduction" in *Siranoush*, p. 167.

⁷⁵ Dussap, *Siranoush*, p. 263.

⁷⁶ When Sibil's protagonist Bouboul leaves Constantinople for a village in Anatolia, Sibil's otherwise poetic language turns into a direct critique of child marriages. According to her, there was not a 12 year old girl in Belejik who was single, and "if one of them had the misfortune of dying accidentally, her fiancé faced a big difficulty in finding a new [fiancée] appropriate for his age." Sibil, Աղջկան սրը սիրտը: [The Heart of a Young Woman], p. 364."

⁷⁷ Marie Beylerian, «Սկեսուրը. Գալառական Կեանքը»: ["Mother-in-Law: From Provincial Life"]. *Artemis* (March 1902), pp. 88-96; Zabel Yesayan, «Քողը»: ["The Veil"] in *When They No Longer Love* (Constantinople: 1925).

⁷⁸ Most novels touch upon this as marriages were arranged or prohibited by parents for some kind of mercenary reasons.

⁷⁹ Dussap, *Siranoush*; Marie Svajian, Բռնի Անուսնութիւն: [*A Forced Marriage*]. *Hayrenik* (1894).

families,” a belief widely spread at the time in criticism of upper class, “but lack of educated enough women.”⁸⁰ Women’s education was to replace the dowry: “One can have an ideal family only when the woman dowry is her brain, diligence or some kind of profession, and a feminine delicate endless affection.”⁸¹ Education would allow young women to enter labor force, which would likewise give them more freedom in their choice for future husbands or to support oneself when they are under the threat of remaining single.

The “modern” married young woman can no longer live in an extended family in which the older members of the family stick to traditional norms. Because they have matured through education, they are ready to be “good wives” and “good mothers” and are no longer in need of intervention of elderly women, such as the mother-in-law, into their household economy and child-rearing. Marie Beylerian’s protagonist Almast finds it impossible to remain affectionate to her husband when she is mistreated by her mother-in-law and subjected to her intervention into the young couples’ life.⁸² Yesayan’s Adile feels like a “house-maid” in the presence of her mother-in-law in the family.⁸³ Both Beylerian and Yesayan render loving relationship between the husband and wife as impossible since as a result of conflict with mothers-in-laws, the young women start seeing in their husbands the reason for their unhappiness.

New Women, Old Homes

Although feminists themselves were often critical of women for the lack of their education, devotion and misbehavior which turned into misfortunes for the family, through idealization of their protagonists they suggested that it was primarily the society at large and men in particular with their “Old Homes” as not yet ready to accept the New Woman as the New Wife of the modern family.

Yesayan found the prevailing mood on progress and modernity incompatible with the persistence of old marriage values. To her, it was

⁸⁰ Sibil, [*The Heart of a Young Woman*], p. 249.

⁸¹ Iskouhi K. Enkserjjan, «Պե՞տք է դրամօժիտ առնել»: [“Should Dowry be Demanded?”]. *Manzume-i Efkâr* (September 2, 1906).

⁸² Marie Beylerian, «Սկեսուրը. Գավառական Կեանքը»: [“Mother-in-Law: From Provincial Life”]. *Artemis* (March 1902), pp. 88-96.

⁸³ Zabel Yesayan, [“The Veil”].

paradoxical that among the upper classes, “dowry in cash ranged from two hundred to five hundred gold, demanded by ... young men, whose trousers, however, would widen or shrink in size to the dictates of Parisian fashions.”⁸⁴ Similarly, feminist authors illustrate in their works that as much as the new educated woman was admired, she was not a desirable wife even for the most educated man. Rather, the New Woman was causing discomfort and fear. Education becomes a misfortune for Yesayan’s Annik when due to it she finds herself in the “dangerous current” of developing a critical approach to society and marriage, and remains single.⁸⁵ Sibil’s brave and talented Bouboul was praised by young men, “and yet many of them would have not dared marrying her.” Having been educated in Europe, Tigran who is engaged to Bouboul, sarcastically expresses his uneasiness with the education of the latter:

*Here comes the most fortunate of all young women of Constantinople... She has twenty thousand besides her beautiful eyes, and has admirers in the amount of hair on her head, but she does not like any man, because she is one of the art-lovers too. Uncle, do you know that being an educated woman in Constantinople is a warrant of becoming an old maid?*⁸⁶

Picturing the society as not yet ready for the New Woman was obviously women’s “payback” for being subjected to constant male critique and negative images in periodical press and literature. Sibil, for example, expressed her discontent with the way Grigor Zohrab, prominent literary and political figure, portrayed women in his literary works. In these works, it appears

*...as though women of mind and heart have disappeared, ceding to women who strive to change family and social life with their physical gifts only... Pay attention! In over forty of his short stories there is not at least one single woman who remains truthful, decent and loyal to her love with heart and mind.*⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Yesayan, Սիլիհսարի պարտեզները [“Gardens of Silihdar”], p. 482.

⁸⁵ Yesayan, [The Respectable People].

⁸⁶ Sibil, [The Heart of a Young Woman], p. 230.

⁸⁷ Sibil, «Զօհրապի հերոսները» [“The Heroes of Zohrab”] in *Works*, p. 164. The lecture was delivered in 1913.

Women-Centered and Inclusive Visions of Change

In the depiction of the New Woman, feminists' literary works in general differ from those of man in the way women's personal happiness is situated at the center of societal happiness. As active as the New Woman ready to enter marriage or already married is portrayed, social work and education are not rendered as self-fulfilling or as substitute for the failed personal happiness. Moreover, women's success in the public life as well as the well-being of the society at large depended on women's personal happiness in marriage, because "[i]f the heart of a young woman is dead for her love, it [the heart] is dead for the world."⁸⁸ Bouboul's established Art-Loving Young Ladies' Society "was to play a great role in the progress of the Armenian females, if the prejudices of their time and their environment did not bring disaster."⁸⁹ A discontent wife's misery would become the misery of the husband as well. Matilda's husband who used his wife worsening financial condition to force her into marriage with him is portrayed by Marie Svajian as having an "unbearable" life and looking "abandoned" with no care.⁹⁰ Women's suffering, albeit silent, could turn into a disaster for the husbands who, taking advantage of the situation, had forced them into marriage. A girl marrying at the age of twelve in Yesayan's short story does not protest loudly, but haunts her husband with her eyes, full of anger, pain and silent hatred, which affect the husband and become the reason for his death.⁹¹ Another heroine of Yesayan, Arousyak suffers greatly from being in a forced marriage so openly and demonstratively that her sufferings drive her husband to suicide.⁹² Thus, the "public" happiness and progress of the society at large, according to feminist authors, were dependent on the private happiness of women as much as women's happiness was dependent on the progress in society, an assertion that fused the lines between the "private" and the "public," the "personal" and the "political."

⁸⁸ Sibil, ["The Heart of a Young Woman"], p. 447

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 205.

⁹⁰ Svajian, ["A Forced Marriage"]. .

⁹¹ Zabel Yesayan, «Աչքերը»: ["The Eyes"]. *Arevelian Mamoul* 50 (1904).

⁹² Zabel Yesayan, ["Hours of Anguish"].

Relating Struggle for Change to the Bounds of Armenian Tradition and Armenian Situatedness

Feminist authors were very cautious not to cross the thin line between “improvement for the sake of the Nation” and “abandonment of Armenian traditional roles.” As much as feminists argued for change, they largely portrayed the “good” young woman as the one who despite enormous sufferings, took the hardships gracefully and obediently. Thus, in spite of their opposition to forced marriages, the protagonists of feminists’ works were obedient to the will of their fathers, sacrificing their own happiness. In their works, the romantic love emerges as equivalent to parental love. Sibil’s Bouboul does not break her engagement to Tigran out of fear of upsetting her father and goes through the incredible pain of choosing between two people most dear to her:

*Day and night the gratitude and affection she felt for the old man competed in her heart with the passionate love she felt for Garnik, and if the former did not defeat the latter, the latter did not defeat the former either.*⁹³

To illustrate the impossibility of Bouboul’s going against her adopted father’s will, Sibil writes: “Who has ever seen the tear of an old man without torture of soul? Who would not be inclined to sacrifice her/his most dear yearning to prevent the sigh of that noble person [the father].”⁹⁴

Dussap praises her heroine for valuing parental love over personal happiness, calling Siranush “a martyr of love decorated by flowers of filial love.”⁹⁵ Moreover, she looks at the society with its customs and traditions at large in an effort to gain the reader’s sympathy for Siranush’ father. For her, every person “has one’s own point of view, according to one’s education, environment and events one has gone through.” There is a difference between evil that comes from “culture” and evil that is intentional. The first one is an “involuntary harm,” while the second one is a “voluntary harm.” The harm

⁹³ Sibil, [“The Heart of a Young Woman”], pp. 295-96.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 225.

⁹⁵ Dussap, *Siranoush*, p. 225.

Siranush's father caused was involuntary: "He is the creator of my life and I am obliged to respect him forever."⁹⁶

Svajian's rebellious Matilda fails to turn down her father's request to marry an older man after the father puts psychological pressure on his daughter. She yields to the pleadings of her old father to sacrifice her own happiness to save the financial situation of the family. "She sacrificed her love to her parents," Svajian writes about Matilda's decision.⁹⁷

Such a picture of protagonists certainly also served as a safeguard for feminists to speak about the harms in marriage without turning it into an abandonment of the Armenian culture. Feminists created a temporal (through diachronic historical comparisons) and spatial (through geographic comparisons) imagination which endorsed critiques without the danger of being labeled immoral and radical. In the temporal and spatial imagination, the Armenian woman appear as the most pure, most decent and most moral certainly also revealing the sincere belief of feminists in the superiority of Armenian women (and culture). Keeping up traditions was a sublime sacrifice that the Armenian woman had to make to prove this. Reflecting on the turmoil that Bouboul felt confronted to choose between romantic and parental love, Sibil creates an idealized character of an Armenian woman:

*A novelist of a new school would have probably laughed at these lines, and a French woman would have perhaps called Bouboul 'an idiot' for feeling conscience-stricken. Yet a well educated young Armenian woman, of who Ms. Geghamoff could be seen as a model, despite the highest degree of mental development and liberal thinking would still listen to the laws of conscience. If she has had the misfortune of making a mistake because of lack of experience, she would have to pay for it with her life.*⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Ibid, pp. 327-28.

⁹⁷ Svajian, ["A Forced Marriage "].

⁹⁸ Sibil, ["The Heart of a Young Woman"], pp. 297-8.

Conclusion

The analysis of the scope of Ottoman Armenian women's movement for improvement of their status in marriage and family necessarily requires the understanding of the legal and political framework within which women acted. The topic of marriage and attempts to reform the institution and the family in general existed in a highly delicate framework both because of the tensions between the clergy and laymen within the Armenian *millet*, and the tensions between the Armenian *millet* and the Ottoman State. Women did not participate in the public discourse on the issue, but rather articulated their concerns against gender inequalities in marriage and family through the mouths of the fictional characters that they created in their fictional writings.

WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION: AGAIN UNEQUAL OR WITH EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES TO PROGRESS?

Narine Khatchatryan

Introduction

In education and particularly in higher education, gender issues are overlooked most of the times, unlike the labor market or politics. Undoubtedly, politics and market being rather competitive spheres, make the gender inequality rather salient, however, if we were to analyze the reasons, it would become clear that many of them stem from education and socialization. Apart from being a site of provision of professional education, higher education institution (HEI) is a site of personal socialization and formulation of professional identity. In these terms, gender practices in HEIs can contribute to overcoming stereotypical perceptions, behaviors and developing the foundations for new behavioral shortcuts.

This article will discuss issues of gender equality in higher education from the perspective of vertical and horizontal segregation, the situation in former Soviet Union and European countries will be presented, and particularly, in Armenia. The second part of the analysis will touch upon the factors that inhibit women to progress through the ranks of higher education institutions, basing it on the interviews and focus group results with female research and teaching staff of HEIs and female PhD students.

Gender Equality in Academia

Gender inequalities in higher education are being examined from the perspective of horizontal and vertical segregation⁹⁹. Horizontal segregation occurs with gendered differentiation of specializations and science spheres,

⁹⁹ Gender Differences in Educational Outcomes: Study on the Measures Taken and the Current Situation in Europe. Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (P9 Eurydice), 2010. (Chapter 8: *Gender Equality Policies in Higher Education*, pp. 97-108).

when as a result of that, certain groups are overpopulated by women and others by men. Horizontal segregation is defined by specificities of early childhood socialization, where family and educational institutions have an impact. Vertical segregation occurs when at each career level women and men face unequal opportunities, which result in lower levels of representation of women at higher levels of institutional management and academia. Reasons of vertical segregation are harder to identify. The latter is mainly explained by the existence of a “glass ceiling”, the combination of non visible institutional and social-cultural impediments that do not allow women to move forward from a certain level.

Vertical segregation is sharper among the teaching research staff of universities. For example, in 2007, 27 EU member states recorded significantly lower levels of female representation at higher posts of academia (on average 44% of women were placed in the junior positions, 36% in mid-level positions, and only 19% were senior lecturers)¹⁰⁰. At the level of professorship the number of women declines sharply. This picture leads to a situation, when in science decision making the number of women at council level is quite low. For example, in 2004, in scientific councils of EU member states the share of women ranged from 7 to 20%, except for Norway, Finland, and Sweden, where women constitute 40% and more¹⁰¹.

The meta-analysis of gender imbalance in science shows that 27 member states of the EU has a small number of women. However, their numbers have started growing faster than that of the men. On average, from 2002 to 2006, the number of women with PhD has grown by 6.8%, whereas for men that number equaled to 3.2%¹⁰².

A similar picture is observed in Eastern Europe and countries of Former Soviet Union. The number of women with higher education and specifically PhD degree has been growing, especially after 1990s. For example, countries of Eastern Europe (except for Czech Republic and Slovenia) have witnessed a

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*, page 104:

¹⁰¹ Mapping the Maze: Getting more women to the top in research. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2008, p. 20.

¹⁰² Meta-analysis of gender and science research. Synthesis report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2012. p. 44-45.

shift in gender balance due to the sharp decline in financing of science¹⁰³. The fact that the number of women has grown in higher education is mainly due to the reality of academia losing its standing as compared to expanding private sector. In these conditions many of the scientists and mostly men, have chosen to leave academia. The comparative meta-analysis of different countries shows that the number of women is bigger in those countries and economic sectors, where R&D financing is lower¹⁰⁴.

The tendency of growing representation of women in science and higher education allows considering the possibility of gender balance over a number of years with more women entering academia. However, even in those spheres, where women prevail in their numbers, in higher managerial positions and academic posts men still do dominate, and most particularly in the countries of Former Soviet Union. In this case, only generational shift with growing numbers of women is not going to introduce corrections in terms of gender balancing of academia, overcoming vertical segregation, if certain gender sensitive programs and policies are not implemented.

In higher education and science the Armenian dynamics of male and female representation repeats the patterns of other post Soviet countries, but there are scarce regular and comprehensive analyses of these developments. The UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations against Women (CEDAW) with its provisions is being upheld by Armenia via regular¹⁰⁵ and alternative¹⁰⁶ reports that suggest certain picture of post-soviet gender balance in higher education and science. However, the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination of Women in its final observations in relation to the combined 3rd and 4th Reports of the Government of Armenia, mentioned that women continue to be segregated around traditionally female subjects, particularly, the observations on higher education indicated that there is still

¹⁰³ Meta-analysis of gender and science research. Synthesis report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2012.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*, page 151:

¹⁰⁵ CEDAW. Second periodic reports of States parties. Armenia, 1999 (Article 10)

<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/233/17/PDF/N0023317.pdf?OpenElement>

¹⁰⁶ Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Armenia in 2002-2007. Alternative Report. Armenian Association of Women with University Education, 2007.

scarcity of representation of women as senior lecturers, professors, researchers, as well as in decision making positions in higher education¹⁰⁷.

The Government of Armenia has adopted and ratified a number of international mechanisms aimed at the protection of women's rights and provision of equal opportunities to both men and women. In 2003, the 2007-2010 National Program on the Improvement of Conditions for Women and Enhancement of their Role in the Society was developed and approved¹⁰⁸. In 2010, through the Government decision the Concept for Gender Policy was approved¹⁰⁹, which also defined the main goals and objectives of gender policy in higher education. However, simultaneously, public documents regulating the sphere of education and science do not reflect any of the provisions of the above stated policy document. Current strategies of education and science so far disregard issues related to gender equality. It also becomes clearer that the public reports related to state strategies and programs in education do not reflect these requirements when reporting the results, consequently not providing any statistics on gender balance. Framework documents regulating higher education institutions have no provisions concerning equality of opportunity for men and women. Generally, for the purpose of understanding the share of men to women and general picture in terms of gender profile in higher education the key datasets come from international organizations.

In 2014, the study titled "Support or Prevention? Social and cultural factor of career progress of women in higher education institutions" based its analyses on the data of the National Statistical Service, revealing horizontal and vertical segregation in higher education¹¹⁰. The analysis draws upon the datasets of 2009-2014 that included information on both state and private HEIs.

The aggregated results suggested clear gender-based distribution in certain specialisations at all 3 levels of higher education. Particularly, women

¹⁰⁷ Concluding observations of the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women Forty-third session 19 January-6 February 2009 (p.7)
http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/ARM/CO/4/Rev.1&Lang=En

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docid=38293>

¹⁰⁹ http://www.gov.am/u_files/file/kananc-xorh/Gender-hayecakarg.pdf

¹¹⁰ The study has been supported by the YSU Center for Women's Leadership and Gender Studies <http://www.y-su.am/files/Narine%20Khachatryan%20ARM%20.pdf>

prevail in education, pedagogy, humanities, biology, chemistry, whereas men prevail on STEM fields. For the period of 2009-2013 women with PhD constituted 17-46%, making it 35% average for the last five years. Only in a few specializations there is a gender parity, i. e. education and pedagogy, humanities, biology and chemistry, architecture and construction. All the other specializations at this level show clear signs of gender disparity. Men with PhD prevail in medicine (average 64%), math and physics (average 77%), social sciences (average 64%), even though the number of women with Bachelor's degree in those fields is equal to that of men and at Master level women even outnumber men in the same specializations. In first two levels (bachelor's and master's) of higher education the aggregated number of women in all specializations is growing from the first level to the second, whereas the overall number of men starts growing from master level to the PhD. On one hand, this is possibly due to the Armenian mentality of valuing education regardless of sex (bachelor's degree is still seen as incomplete higher education, thus, people strive to receive master's degree), on the other hand, the dynamics can be explained given the exemption from being drafted to the army (2010/11 academic year is the first one when that provision of exemption is annulled at master's level, if the male student has been admitted without a state scholarship to the fee paying opening, for PhD the exception is still valid).

In 2009-2013, women with PhD among research and teaching staff prevailed in departments of biology, chemistry (average 70%), education and pedagogy (average 63%), humanities (average 58%) and medicine (average 59%). Male PhDs among teaching and research staff prevailed in physics and math (average 81%), technical (average 79%), geology (average 78%), architecture and construction (average 65%), social sciences (average 58%) and agriculture (average 59%) departments.

At doctoral level there is an entirely different picture. Males with Doctoral level prevail at all departments, even in those ones, where women prevail in teaching and research as well as PhD levels. The same gender disparity is observed when analyzing the academic titles, as according to the Higher Qualifications Commission of the Republic of Armenia, teaching staff of HEIs with PhD and Doctoral degrees after a certain period of teaching and research experience can apply for receiving the titles of associate professor and professor.

Women prevail at assistant lecturer and lecturer levels of HEIs. At the level of senior lecturer the number of men and women is almost equal. The gender balance is somewhat maintained at associate professor's level within the chairs, whereas at higher- professor's, chair's, dean's, vice rector's and rector's levels their numbers fall drastically. In the stated positions the number of women within the studied five years has constituted only 25%.

In scientific spheres of higher education again men prevail, whereas at lower levels women do. If at scientific research staff level women and men have comparable numbers, already at senior researcher's level the male to female share is at 64 to 36 %. Senior, lead and chief researchers within the studied five years have registered 29% for women.

In governance and scientific councils of higher education insitutions the number of women is at its lowest. Since, the membership into these councils is drawn from the staffing and from senior positions mostly, this again puts a limit on engagement of women equally with men, given the huge disparity of male to female representation at higher teaching and administrative positions in HEIs.

Factors that Impede the Porgress of Women in HEIs

Gender roles and dispositions in the society are greatly influenced and conditioned by how women see themselves, position and plan their activities in academia. Women that participated in the interviews mentioned the *Armenian mentality*, which apparently is the most impeding factor. Particularly, respondents mentioned the expectations from women as part of Armenian mentality. The woman as a rule and first of all, has to take her share of responsibility in the family that is related to everyday chores and care of family members, and only after that she is expected to be engaged in professional activities. This reality can result in a situation, which can be called "unintentional discrimination", when there is no direct obstacle and prohibition, but life conditions and the prevailing values are such that women willfully refuse the opportunity to pursue careers in exchange of the wellbeing of their family and immediate relatives. Teaching and research requires additional effort from women even during afterhours in terms of preparing study materials, writing articles, reports, preparing presentations and other things (which are partly conditioned by the fact that in the HEIs the staff is not provided with the required

amenities and office space for organizing the stated activities), and as a result of that the prior stated activities require determination from women in order to reach the set goals.

Not only men think like that, women also take all these responsibilities, which actually are impediments: (...) An Armenian woman will never give her a break in terms of not making a hot meal for her family or not taking her kids to the school, which actually takes a lot of time away from her.
(Doctor, Chair)

The other facet of the Armenian mentality is linked to the psychological qualities and abilities of a woman. There is a certain misbelief that a woman can and is able to progress in science, especially in STEM fields. This public mentality penetrates also the higher education sphere and staff also becomes contaminated by these thoughts.

In our Armenian society the belief that science is not for women, is there to some extent, and that serves as an obstacle for girls to pursue certain things, specifically in serious departments, as they call it among the people. It is common to convince the girl that she does not apply to our department, because they think she will fail. Instead they convince her to choose something light like languages. (PhD, Assistant)

In the society, though it seems that the stereotype is now slowly subsiding, but anyway it is still there, and it is that women are not that able to pursue STEM fields, for example, pursue physics, math. They don't take her seriously, when she tries to establish herself in the field. It requires more efforts from you than from a man at the same level. (PhD, Assistant)

Thus, being socialized in a traditional value system a woman first of all sets such a benchmark that would allow her to fulfill her role of a wife and a mother before anything else. From the other side, setting higher benchmarks and having far reaching goals brings along new responsibilities, complicating work conditions of a woman. Therefore, in family vs. work life choice women

choose the middle way, where they can still make sure that their roles of a mother and a wife would fit into the societal expectations.

In their aspirations, as a research and teaching staff member women still try to find a sustainable and competitive position. The interviews reveal that as a rule, women are mainly driven by and want to reach the level of a PhD and that of an associate professor. This is the limit where they feel safe, as from one side, the scientific degree and the title give them certain level of professional satisfaction, from the other side, it does not add extra responsibilities and burden like it is in cases of Doctoral degree and scientific position of a chair or administrative position of the Dean.

Being a woman I do not want big responsibilities in my workplace, like a management position, I have enough on my plate with my kids and my family. I want to be in peace and receive a decent salary with my specialization. (PhD student)

If it is science and research, naturally it interests a woman and she wants to pursue it, but when it comes to management the ambitions are rather modest. If family responsibilities are equally shared with men, then I think that women too will try to assume managerial positions. Now they know that there is no time for that. (PhD, Assistant)

Women also mentioned that if the family supports them, then they can achieve success and want to continue the professional career. Women were quick to state the importance of their husbands supporting them, which mostly happens, when the husband himself is a professionally fulfilled person. The promotion of women from certain point in their careers is not conditioned by their choice; it is rather contingent on the positions of their families and limits of acceptability.

The limited ambitions of women from one side, and prevalence of men in decision making positions in HEIs from the other hand, actually create a situation, when women find themselves in mid level positions. In the higher circles of the HEIs specific rules of game are set, which is not conducive to the engagement of females at that level. It is quite difficult to decode the rules of that game, but given that men prevail in management it is easy to conclude that it would be challenging for women to operate in a masculine environment.

Mid level is all populated by women. Women do the work, but men do the decision making. (...) When you say something to men, they tell you, what are your issues, tell us and we will solve them. (PhD, Chair)

Smart women are constantly examined and assessed, whereas men do those vice-whatever you name it jobs. Those smart women really work hard and well, but there is a certain ceiling beyond which I think they do not allow them to go up. Smart women are smarter than men, to my opinion, and men seeing that actually block the way so that they do not proceed too much. (PhD, Associate Professor)

In the judgements of women it can be clearly identified that in a masculine culture a woman is seen as something foreign and she feels herself an outsider, starting from speech culture, behaviour, types and modes of relating to others up to ways of solving problems. In trying to keep the power leveraged centralized it is safer and more reliant to keep it within the male circles, as they are based on a certain culture with mutually recognized expectations and trustworthiness, as well as agreements. As a result, decision making mechanisms become non transparent, creating specific internal rules for the game. A woman can be seen as a contender, as well as an outsider, someone foreign to the rules.

Nevertheless, a certain rate of increase of women in HEIs is observed unlike men. Why is it the case? Are there specific mechanisms that lead to the increase of the number of women? Our analysis is rather negative in response to those raised questions. The increase of the number of women in HEIs and their ascendance to mid-level research and teaching positions is rather a consequence than a predetermined policy result. Those consequences first of all are the low levels of salary scale in HEIs and second, the absence of competition in a situation of low salaries.

Research and teaching in HEIs is so far quite low and that creates ample opportunities for women to prevail. Women are ready to work for low remuneration unlike men. The work that pays so low still has some attractiveness to women, as it still leaves room for family responsibilities.

Women are mostly promoted in cases when there are no competing men. When all other things are equal, in the case of a competition, men are given the upper hand. Since the salary of researcher and teacher in HEIs is low and men do find jobs in higher paying end of the labor market, women get an advantage in HEIs.

Conclusion

In a reality of absence of specific gender policies in HEIs horizontal and vertical segregations are first of all cemented by social psychological, socio-economic, and socio-cultural factors. HEI being a desired, allowed and acceptable place of employment for a woman, in the meantime does not ensure the professional progress for her in terms of reaching higher levels of research and teaching positions, administrative and scientific bodies. The increase in the number of women in teaching and research positions is rather a move that solves the staffing problem of the HEIs and is not in anyway a result of predetermined promotion practices. This is a result of weakening competitiveness within the HEIs, which does not positively impact the quality of education and advancement of research and development, and stemming from that it further inhibits the scientific progress and effectiveness of women.

Taking into account the introduction of gender equality policies in HEIs in other countries, it is necessary to develop certain strategic actions for HEIs in order for them to ensure gender equality. The following are the most important ones:

- In strategic programs of education and science introduce provisions concerning gender equality in order to overcome horizontal and vertical segregation through targeted actions;
- In annual reports provide gender disaggregated data and analysis on students, research and teaching staff, as well as the administration of HEIs, thus, conducting the organisations and their internal structures to develop measures and actions aimed at the gender balancing;
- Define specific criteria in the research calls developed by the State Commission on Science, which will provide benefits to female researchers,

especially in STEM fields and all the other ones, where women are underrepresented;

- Establishment of resource centers, which will help women to develop career paths and get ready for promotions;
- Develop gender communications strategies for PR departments of HEIs in order to ensure the sustained communication and campaigns on issues related to gender balance and equality, as well as highlight achievements of female researchers and scientists to promote them and to transform the perceptions.

MILENA ABRAHAMYAN



Milena Abrahamyan was born in 1986 in Yerevan. In 1997 she moved to New York (USA) with her family where she has obtained bachelor's degree in Women's and Gender Studies. Since 2008 Milena has returned to Armenia where she has started to cooperate with women's NGOs along with individual feminists and activists. In order to achieve trust

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ANNA HARUTYUNYAN



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TAMARA HOVNATANYAN



Tamara Hovnatanyan has 20 years of experience in Gender studies and Gender Journalism. She started her work dedicated to protection of women's rights in 1995 as one of the founding members of the Armenian Association of Women with University Education (AAWUE). In 2006 Tamara became the founder and the president of ProMedia-Gender NGO, which unites journalists and gender experts. Tamara is the editor-in-chief of "Woman and Politics" Newspaper insert (since 2007) and WomenNet.am website (since 2011). She is continuously involved in gender researches specifically in the area of women's political participation and has experience in monitoring and gender mainstreaming of documents and development programs.

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