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## GENDER IDENTITY IN NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

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Gender relations play an important role in the regulation of social, economic and political processes of the society. Based on the idea of egalitarianism, they are the starting point for the development of any culture and for introducing open society values. Adequate expression of gender relations leads to the development of human rights protection system, higher potential for self-realization, acceptance of different standpoints and tolerance.

History shows us the difference between the women's movements in Armenia and Europe. During the Soviet rule, women's rights were protected by law. The existence of this liberal legislation in a sense pre-empted the emergence of an active feminist movement. Most rights our western counterparts had to struggle for were granted to all women in the Soviet Union. In the West, each accomplishment in achieving equality in women rights was reinforced through legislation and monitored by relevant organizations.

"In the course of two years Soviet power in one of the most backward countries of Europe," wrote Lenin, "did more to emancipate women and to make their status equal to that of the 'stronger' sex than all the advanced, enlightened, 'democratic' republics of the world did in the course of 130 years." These words bear much truth. During the Soviet rule women were strongly encouraged to be involved actively in professional and social life of the country. The ideology of gender equality and inclusion of all members of the society in social, political and economic processes was seen as a crucial factor in the creation of a highly developed society with high scientific and industrial potential [Gevorgyan, 2001, pp. 30-50].

However, even though it greatly encouraged the positive changes in legislation and the social status of women at the time, emancipation of women and mainstreaming of women's role in the public life did not go hand in hand with a change of gender roles in the society. Most women in Armenia still came back to homes that were overly patriarchal in nature. While a new, emancipated role was granted to women outside their homes, there was little that happened to change their role on the household and family level.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenia went through a period of rejecting everything and anything that was Soviet in nature, whether an achievement or failure. In the absence of functional legal environment, many went back to traditional and somewhat patriarchal views and customs. Interestingly enough, most traditional views adopted at that time were contradictory to the ones embraced by the Soviet regime.

Historically located at the crossroads of East and West, Armenia encompasses different, often contradictory views on gender relationships in the society. The Armenian Constitution guarantees equal rights to all citizens. Articles in the Armenian Criminal Code specifically protect women's rights. The Armenian history has few examples of equal opportunities provided for men and women. These examples include women who actively participated in political, economic and

social life of the country. For instance, according to the 12<sup>th</sup> century Armenian law book, women had the right to initiate a divorce case in the court.

Current Armenian legislation provides equal rights for women and men and there is hardly any need for a drastic legal reform. However, while measures are taken to strengthen legislation and there are constitutional guarantees of the rights of women, much effort is required to ensure the equal participation of women in public life and more effective protection of women against all forms of violence. The real challenge is changing the mentality, raising social awareness of the problem, and regarding women problems and needs as an integral part of effective social and economic development.

Periods of transitions often result in great imbalances in the society. As an outcome of such instability and lack of equilibrium in the society people start searching for renewed identity, in particular gender identity. In these circumstances, the process of importing western concepts of civil society to Armenia was very important, because the old Soviet values had been rejected and new ones had not yet been acquired. To some extent, the values of equality were very similar to those proclaimed by the Soviet leadership, but were now being declared in a western voice. Women were often quick to accept western concepts and ideas, given that their social roles were more flexible.

However, men often fell back to the eastern, patriarchal gender roles, because the process of political and social empowerment of women during the Soviet rule did not include the change in gender roles. Thus, with the collapse of the system, the society, particularly men seeing threat to power in the emancipated western culture, felt more comfortable to gradually revert back to a patriarchal image of a 'traditional Armenian man' that was eventually adopted as an image of national identity. Reformations in the society lead to reformulation of gender constructs.

Search for an identity is an important part of socialization and self-development with gender being the primary source for such identification. Gender identification is not only about belonging to one or another sex and the roles and societal expectations that come with it, but also about the distribution of power. Both men and women look for extent and means of realizing their individual powers. The complex reality for women is that the environment where they seek to realize their power is created and ruled by and for men. In other words, in this masculine structure of power, there is a struggle to identify a gender source of power where men and women identify their own ways of succeeding.

The more noticeable is the difference between men's and women's gender roles, the more obvious are the limitations of freedom and more restricted the access to realizing their individual potential. Let us call this phenomenon "gender disability."

The institutionalization of male power reinforces the subordinate role of women in a given society. While on the one hand this privilege allows enjoyment of male's role as dominant, it stigmatizes behavioural patterns that are identified with females. However, this makes it easier for females to utilize behaviours that are specific to males, as these traits are seen as supreme. In case of men, adopting 'female' qualities is less acceptable and can lead to stigmatization by both males and females.

Michael Kaufman in his article on Men, Feminism, and Men's Contradictory Experiences of Power writes: *"There is in the lives of men, a strange combination of power and privilege, pain and powerlessness. Men enjoy social power, many forms of privileges, and a sense of often-unconscious entitlement by virtue of being male. But the way we have set up that world of power causes immense pain, isolation, and alienation not only for women, but also for men."* [Kaufman, 1999, p. 62]

Expressions that are used to validate this in Armenian and Russian include, "courageous woman" (where the word 'courageous' has 'man' in its root in Russian – "мужественная", or, in Armenian, literally meaning a 'man woman' – "տղամարդ սողիկ"), or 'my daughter is worth a few sons' (speaking of a woman who is active in the social, economic, and/or political arena, taking care of the household, etc.). However, if a 'female' quality is used to describe male behaviour, this is usually done in a derogatory way and can be regarded as an insult. In fact, this truth fits in different cultural frameworks. Robert Connell remarks: "In the symbolic realm, too, the boys claim power. They treat girls as a source of contamination or pollution, for instance calling low-status boys 'girls' or pushing them next to the space occupied by girls. The girls do not treat the boys this way" [Connell, 2002, 15].

These theoretical arguments were confirmed through the findings of a research conducted in 2008 by "Trust" Social Work and Sociological Research Centre. This survey conducted in Yerevan in the frame of "Women's Program" Institutional Partnership with OSI AF aimed at discovering peculiarities of gender identification in Armenian cultural discourse. The research was held in Yerevan with the representation of residents from different areas/districts of the capital. Sampling includes representation by age, gender and education.

In particular, questions addressed during this study included the discussion on the perception of contemporary Armenian men and women; exploration of gender roles and levels of their acceptance; as well as the images of males and females in Armenian literature.

The study starts with existential questions about human nature, their mission in life as a human being in general and as an Armenian in particular. Answering these questions respondents did not differentiate between positive characteristics of an Armenian and/or a human being. The mission of a human being and the mission of an Armenian are similar – to be a "good person," to realize own capacities, to leave one's mark on life.

Table 1 below shows how respondents identified positive qualities as valued in human beings in general, and in Armenian women and men in particular.

**Table 1**

***Positive qualities valued in human beings in general, and in Armenian men and women in particular***

<b>Qualities</b>	<b>Human beings in general %</b>	<b>Armenian women %</b>	<b>Armenian men %</b>
Honesty	34	5	4
Kindness	21	2	3
Hard work	8	8	21
Integrity	7	15	10
Faithfulness to one's family	4	24	23
Discipline	4	0	0
Modesty	3	24	1
Patriotism	0	1	4
Femininity	0	5	0
Masculinity	0	0	17
Traditionalism	0	5	1

These numbers demonstrate the difference between the perceived values for mankind in general and values attributable to males and females in the specific Armenian cultural context. For instance, ‘faithfulness to one’s family’ was only indicated by 3% as a general human quality, whereas for an Armenian male and female, the numbers were significantly higher (23% for men and 24% for women). This demonstrates the importance of the family institute in the context of the Armenian society.

Further, modesty is not seen as an important quality for mankind in general (3%), and is even less important (less than 1%) for an Armenian male while an Armenian woman, according to 23% of the respondents, must bear this quality.

In defense of the thesis discussed above on the utilization of ‘male’ behavioural patterns by females, we saw that the importance of being ‘feminine’ was mentioned by only 5% of respondents, while 17% agreed that masculinity was an important trait for a male.

The study included a discussion of characters from literature. We asked respondents to recall the most memorable male and female characters from the Armenian literature. Qualities that were valued in male characters such as Haik Nahapet, David Sasuntsi, Samvel, Vardan Mamikonyan, Gevorg Marzpetuni, Ashot Yerkat, Agasi, Mets Mher, and others included patriotism, bravery, and courage. Perception of the qualities of female characters also corresponds to the generally accepted ‘female’ traits of integrity, morality, faithfulness, honesty, even though some literary works included instances of change in traditionally framed gender roles, e.g. Anahit, Mets Tikin, Parandzem, Sahakanush. Only one work by Ghazaros Agayan implies the adoption of ‘female’ roles by a male, e.g. traditionally associated with women occupation of knitting techniques was used by the king to engrave the hidden message to Queen Anahit and Anahit led the army to free her husband and won the battle, besides she also ruled the kingdom while her husband was imprisoned.

**Table 2**

***Qualities of male and female characters in the Armenian literature***

Qualities	Female Characters in the Armenian Literature %	Male Characters in the Armenian Literature %
Patriotism	18.0	38.7
Bravery, courage	10.0	13.7
Morality, integrity	13.4	4.0
Honesty	8.7	4.7
Faithfulness and care to one’s family	7.7	1.3

Answering the question which qualities you would like to adopt from these heroes, patriotism and bravery/courage scored the highest points for males (25% and 13%); while morality and integrity scored highest for females (12% vs. 2% for males). The predispositions described in literature in terms of adoption of "feminine" and/or "masculine" qualities are mirrored in real life. We can state that literature could be a great source of socialization. This transmission and development of different social qualities predisposed our gender appearance and acceptance.

In the period of radical changes in the society, the process of social and national identification becomes more complex. The absence of familiar social environment compels to search for renewed, but recognizable identities. Since gender is the first identity given to and adopted by a person upon birth, in times of crisis and ambiguity, gender identity is one of the few things that remain relatively unchanged and stable.

### References

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2. Kaufman Michael, Men, Feminism and Men's Contradictory experiences of Power, Men and Power. Joseph A. Kuypers, ed. Men and Power, Halifax: Fernwood Books, 1999, pp. 59-83.
3. Connell, R.W., Gender, Polity Press, 2002.

**ՀԱՍՄԻԿ ԳԵՎՈՐԳՅԱՆ - Գենդերային ինքնությունը ազգային համատեքստում** - Այս աշխատանքում ներկայացված են գենդերային ինքնության տեղն ու նշանակությունը սոցիալական փոխհարաբերությունների հաստատման ընթացքում: Տրված են գենդերային ինքնության ձևավորմանը բնորոշ տարրերը: Քննարկվում են գենդերային ինքնության դրսևորումները ազգային, մշակութային համատեքստում: Մասնավորապես ուշադրություն է դարձվում Հայաստանում կատարված հետազոտական նյութին, որտեղ ներկայացվում են հայ մշակույթին բնորոշ գենդերային ինքնության յուրահատկությունները:

**АСМИК ГЕВОРКЯН – Гендерная идентификация в национальном контексте.** – В статье освещаются особенности и значение гендерной идентификации в период социальных перемен. Описаны основополагающие элементы, формирующие гендерную идентификацию. Обсуждаются проявления гендерной идентификации в национальном и культурном контексте. В частности, анализируется проведённое в Армении исследование особенностей и составляющих гендерной идентификации в армянской культуре.