

**GENDER AS DANGER: DISCOURSES AROUND
THE NOTION OF GENDER IN 'IRAVUNK' NEWSPAPER IN ARMENIA**

By

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Abstract

The adoption of the law on Gender Equality in Armenia in May 2013 resulted in a massive backlash that soon transformed into one of the anti-gender mobilization/movements widely spread in European and neighboring countries. One of the reasons of a nationalist hysteria and panic around gender in Armenia was the definition of the notion of gender in the law. The efforts of the anti-gender mobilization/movement in Armenia for them successfully resulted in the change of the title of the law to “Law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities of Women and Men in Armenia”. From all these processes mass media was not, of course, excluded, and some of them were widely contributing to the anti-gender panic to spread among the society.

This research analyzes the anti-gender perspectives of understanding the notion of gender. It is aimed at focusing on an Armenian newspaper, Iravunk that is widely known as anti-gender and anti-feminist newspaper in Armenia. In this research I tackle the meanings and variations of the notion of gender in relation to the law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities of Women and Men in Armenia. By approaching the research through both content and discourse analyses methods I show that in Iravunk newspaper the notion of gender is presented as a danger and with predominantly negative connotations.

With an analysis of different variations of the use of the notion, in my analysis I also show that the “gender vocabulary” (gender and human rights related expressions and terms) are co-opted by the anti-gender mobilization/movement and flipped into negative

light. At the end of my analysis I show how the main characters of the anti-gender movement in Armenia establish formalized alliances and develop mechanisms to fight “gender danger” in the Armenian society in both legal and ideological directions.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted from any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

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Signed _____ (Siran Hovhannisyan)

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List of Abbreviations

RA – Republic of Armenia

EREOWM – Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities of Women and Men

LGBT/ LGBTQI+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*, Queer, Intersex and more

EU – European Union

UN – United Nations

WHO – World Health Organization

EEU – Eurasian Economic Union

US – United States

UK – United Kingdom

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

CEDAW – Convention on The Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women

PAPC – Pan Armenian Parent Committee

GBS – Gender Barometer Survey

PINK – Public Information and Need of Knowledge

UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund Armenia

NA – National Assembly

DV – Domestic Violence

WWII – World War II

Introduction

In May 2013, the parliament of Republic of Armenia adopted a law on “Gender Equality” which was one of the prerequisites (alongside with other commitments in response to financial support) of negotiations for the government to sign the documents of Association agreement with European Union. This event particularly raised the contentions among ultra-nationalist groups. These groups have started physically, verbally and virtually attack feminists and LGBTQI+ activists after “Diversity March” a few months later which was organized against “the leading regime, Vladimir Putin’s visit to Armenia, and Armenia’s association to the Customs Union”, and which was disrupted by those nationalists because of the appearance of a rainbow flag during the march (“Pressures on Activists”, 2013). After the adoption of the law on Gender Equality these nationalist groups have started to constantly investigate the activities of NGOs and activists preoccupied mainly in spheres of women’s and LGBTQI+ rights and attack them on social media and online media with direct killing threats, videos, pictures, posts¹, etc.

During this period, an organization called “Pan-Armenian Parent Committee”², became one of the most active opposer of the law. One of the major directions that this committee took in its “work” was the eradication of the law as a threat to national unity and future of Armenian family and values, through presentation of the word “gender” as “homosexuality”, “transgenderism”, “faggotism”, “pedophilia” (Nikoghosyan, 2015:25; Harutyunyan, 2016:17). As a brief conclusion of the above-mentioned story, also based

¹ Gender = G7: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEhUJe17SOA>,
Honorary Genders of Armenia: <http://hanun.am/?p=202>

² Pan Armenian Parent Committee: <http://hanun.am/>

on high numbers/statistics of intolerance towards homosexuality and LGBTQI+ people among Armenian society (PINK Armenia, 2016), the notion of gender itself was presented as a “perversion” that has been incorporated by West (predominantly by Europe and US through open support of EU Delegation and some of the Embassies) through financial support that was given to women’s and LGBTQI+ organizations and activists. These happenings and constant appeals to the government by this and several other organizations to remove the word “gender”, backed-up by massive online and offline support by society, in August 2013 resulted in removal of the word “gender” from the title of the law, by replacing it with words “of men and women”. This change was followed by an important political shift as well when on 3rd of September of 2013 the government of Armenia suddenly announced the country’s membership to Eurasian Customs Union (Eurasian Economic Union³).

In this fashion of events Iravunk was one of the main newspapers that gave a wide coverage of events of Pan Armenian Parent Committee and its affiliated members. Moreover, to spread the “anti-gender” perspective among society, this newspaper published a list of names of people who were either homosexual or members of women’s and LGBTQI+ organizations in Armenia. The names on the list followed by links to personal Facebook accounts of those people, who onwards received hate messages and death threats. The list consisted of the names of people who asked online questions to two contestants from Armenia in a post-Eurovision Facebook live interview. These questions were mostly about their attitudes about Conchita Wurst⁴ and

³ Eurasian Economic Union: <http://www.eaeunion.org/?lang=en#about-countries>

⁴ Conchita Wurst, a singer from Austria, who won the Eurovision contest in 2014, is an enemy both for the culture and the Armenian society. Conchita’s female appearance with a male beard is outrageous for anti-

her victory in that music contest, especially because of their mocking the latter for her look, gender appearance and presumed sexual preferences. In addition, in 2014 the former President of RA, Serzh Sargsyan attended 25th anniversary event of the newspaper (“President Attended 25th Anniversary Event of ‘Iravunk’”, 2014). He had a speech at the event and honored the founder and the editor-in-chief of the newspaper with presidential medals for serving the Armenian nation (“Discrimination in Armenia is Encouraged on State level”, 2014).

With these facts in mind about this newspaper and also because of the ongoing attacks against gender scholars, activists and LGBTQI+ people in Armenia, I have decided to study in more details how Iravunk is contributing in the processes of creation of false meanings and negative connotations around the notion of gender, and with all their efforts they participate in and perpetuate the anti-gender movement in Armenia. By looking at the literature on anti-genderism abroad and the everyday media coverage of the “hot topic” of “gender” in Armenia, in my research I focus on two important aspects of anti-genderism, namely analyzing it, firstly, as a movement, and secondly, scrutinizing anti-gender movement in the context of nationalism and related concepts such as family, masculinity, church and others.

This entire study, both theoretical/literature (chapter 1) and my own analyses (chapter 3), are a contribution to the literature of the global anti-gender movement(s) as well as the studies of nationalism in the Armenian context. Based on one particular anti-gender

gender groups. She is being described as a clear European value that is absolutely imposed on Armenian society through media. <http://www.conchitawurst.com/>

newspaper analysis I am trying to show how in their case exactly media is used to promote anti-genderism among the readers (society).

Even though anti-gender movements, as I am going to show, have similarities in their rising, there are also some differences that make Armenia's case worth studying from that perspective. "Gender panic" in Armenia is mostly related to manifestations of nationalism. Although gender policies are also under constant attack the idea of preservation of the homogenous and heterosexual nation by targeting homosexual, transgender people and feminists is crucial to the movement. The idea of scapegoating in Armenia works in a slightly different manner as well. The peaks of anti-gender backlash are noticed especially in relation to particular politically significant events or expected political changes (such as EU association, EEU membership), during wartimes (such as in April 2015 in Nagorno-Karabakh), and in order to direct the attention of the society on topics other than the country's internal or external politics.

In terms of novelty, what my research is aimed at is bringing a new context to the systematic analysis of anti-gender use of the notion of gender. The idea of "gender vocabulary" and its co-optation by the anti-gender movement in Armenia opens new dimensions of studying anti-genderism in scholarly research.

Importantly, although there are several scholars and activists in Armenia that have already done researches on the anti-gender attacks in Armenia, this research is a unique contribution to that literature also in sense that so far in the Armenian context there was no research tackling the systematic analysis of the use of the notion of gender. Moreover, there is no specific academic or other piece of writing that

approaches anti-genderism in Armenia as a social movement. Also, although, other contributions are mentioning the nationalist character of the attacks, there is again a lack of systematic analysis of how exactly “gender” became a danger for the Armenian nation and how is it spread in the Armenian society. Thus, with this research, I want to fill some of the gaps of studies of anti-genderism in Armenia and have a comprehensive research available for wider audiences.

Chapter 1. Defining Anti-Gender(-ism) or Anti-Gender Attacks as a Movement

1.1. Introduction to Anti-Gender Movements

Since around mid-2000s, a phenomenon called anti-genderism, “anti-genderismus”, as it is coined by Villa (2017:99), emerged in Europe and the neighboring countries. Although Villa’s focus is mainly on Germany, her interpretation of anti-genderism can be spread in other contexts as well. “Anti-genderism is a bridging signifier for a variety of anti-statal, anti-EU, mainly ethno-nationalist racist and/or xenophobic, aggressively heteronormative and overall anti-pluralistic constellations...”, she writes (Ibid). Amongst available literature on anti-genderism, “gender” and “genderism” are terms to describe mostly negativity and danger of gender policies, reproductive rights, and feminism (Graff and Korolczuk, 2017a; 2017b).

The negativity and the danger around the notion of gender are the main concepts I want to explore in this research as a contribution to the literature on anti-gender movements and on nationalism. In recent years, with the rise of anti-genderism in regions other than Europe, like central Asia and Caucasus, a debate has started on the establishment of anti-gender mobilization as a movement with no borders. The constant “triggering of events” (Scott, 1990:15) happening in different parts of the world shows that anti-genderism is being established as a movement and has both specific and shared nationalist attributes that are less explored in the Armenian context so far.

Anti-gender movement is one of the latest newly established movements that has been active against so called “gender ideology”, laws and policies promoting gender equality and so on. This movement triggered mobilizations alike in different parts of the world: in Western, Central, Eastern Europe, Russia and neighboring countries, South Caucasus, etc. Anti-gender movements in their global and local agenda fight against perversion, pedophilia, European colonialism, murder of children and use of their organs for transplantation and soap making (Graff, 2014:432; Nikoghosyan, 2015:25). The movement itself has different shapes and names. In Central Europe, for example, in Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, it is known as “anti-genderism”, “fight against gender ideology” (Graff, 2014:432; Kovats, 2017:175; Peto, 2015:126-127). In Armenia, for instance, it is known as “Gender Hysteria” (Harutyunyan, 2016:17), “Anti-Gender attacks” (Nikoghosyan, 2015:25), “Fight for Juvenile Justice” (“Juvenile Justice is not an Infanticide”, 2013), “Stop G7”⁵ and so on. Naming, itself, reflects the extent to which the debate (if there is one) between pro- and anti-gender sides is considered by mainstream politics. For, instance, in Armenia, anti-genderism is not yet studied as a movement even though, as I am going to show in this section, it has all the necessary features for being called so.

Some scholars in this field point out that the actual reason for anti-gender mobilization are the geopolitical processes [in different regions], and gender politics is a “scapegoat” for the politics around other issues (Peto, 2015:126). Apparently under the processes of scapegoating, as the literature on anti-gender movements shows, explicitly populist and

⁵ “Stop G7”, <http://stop-g7.com/>

There is an interesting story behind the abbreviation “G7”. In Armenian language the letter “G” is pronounced as “[GU]” (as in guarantee, glad, group, etc.), number “7” in Armenian is pronounced “yoth”, the combination of these two parts is “Gyoth”, which in everyday language is used to mean “fag”, “faggot”.

right-wing politics are covered. As some prominent researchers in this area mention, the use and manipulation of “gender ideology” is not only an end in itself but rather a “glue” for conservatives, intellectuals and activists (Brustier, 2015:34; Peto, 2015: 126-127). In this sense and especially because these mobilizations are mostly perpetuated by radical right-wing groups and officials, their followers and contributors, putting much emphasis on national boundaries and values, calling the other side a group of “naïve idiots and demonized as enemies of the nation and baby-killers” (Graff, 2014:431) makes the topic of gender equality and the use of the word “gender” too “banal”, or more benign (Billig, 1995) for so called “real politics” (Graff, 2014:431-432). But, at the same time, based on Peto’s idea of using it for other purposes makes the topic and its discussion even “hotter” within its banality (Christian et al, 2016).

Perhaps, the movement follows the same ideology around the globe but, as its naming and specific local purposes it serves show, there can be differences to be articulated within this anti-gender discourse depending on context. A significant number of scholars have analyzed and tackled the rise of and the problematics raised by the anti-gender movements in France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Armenia, and so on. The authors discuss and analyze the features, the actors and developments of anti-gender mobilizations and counter-mobilizations (or self-defense) in these three countries. Some of them give an analysis of anti-gender movements in Europe with an emphasis on the mobilization against “gender” and “gender equality” (Kovats, 2017:175-176). Others, such as Graff (2014) and Nikoghosyan (2015) have rather short reflections on their and their other feminist colleagues’ experiences of anti-gender backlash in Poland and Armenia. Some other scholars, particularly in Armenia, analyze the “Gender Hysteria”

back in 2013 and try to find the traces of gender discourse in Armenia (Harutyunyan, 2016:17).

The anti-gender movements and mobilizations are manifold and reflect many features of social movements. In this chapter, I want to show how concepts like nationalism, values, affects, emotions, and so on, are mediated or travel from some political and geographical contexts to others. I also attempt to show how these concepts (or some of them) are shaped both similarly and differently depending on these contexts and specifically in the context of danger.

1.2. “Gender Panic” as Moral Panic: Families and Churches Under Attack

Anti-gender movements have become a serious both professional and personal challenge for those who were and are still working in the fields of gender equality, women’s rights, LGBTQI+ rights, in gender studies discipline, or those who were or are out of the expectations of traditional (or conservative) norms (Kovats, 2017:175; Harutyunyan, 2016:17; Nikoghosyan, 2015:25; Graff, 2014:431). Those who were “anti-gender” and those whom I conditionally call “pro-gender” in this analysis (meaning NGO workers, feminists, women’s rights defenders, gender and feminist studies scholars mentioned above) basically have different and conflicting interests and “unrelated agendas” (Kovats, 2017:175-176).

The research of the roots of anti-gender discourse and “gender ideology” in Western and Central European countries is found in papers related to Vatican (Paternotte, 2015

cited in Kovats, 2017:178). These relations bring the discourse back to 1995 UN Beijing Conference on Women⁶ (which was afterwards named as dedicated to gender mainstreaming) following which “the Holy See included in its documents terms like ‘gender feminists’ and ‘gender agenda’” (Ibid). It is also interesting that other sources refer to it as well. For instance, it is also discussed that the term “gender ideology” was widely circulated among Catholic religious circles after the publication of Dale O’Leary’s “The Gender Agenda” (Kane, 2018). The connection of this discourse with the Roman Catholic Church explains or spreads some light, at least, on its appearance in Poland and Hungary, where “gender ideology” was expected to be “worse than Communism and Nazism put together” (Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek, cited in Graff, 2014:432).

The idea of danger in gender-related issues has similarities in Armenian and Georgian context.⁷ Aghdgomelashvili (2015:11) states that in Georgia, for example, the church published a sort of a statement in which they condemned the “abnormal sexual relations” as a mortal sin which is going to put the nation in danger (Ibid). Moreover, several anti-gay rallies have been organized in Tbilisi and Batumi cities which were headed by priests (2015:12). And these events have happened in case that Georgia decriminalized homosexuality in 2000, and in 2014, “despite opposition from the Orthodox Church, parliament passed an anti-discrimination law prohibiting discrimination because of sexual orientation or gender identity” (Ibid).

⁶ Beijing and its Follow-up, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/>

⁷ Based on my personal observations and also daily discussions among both Armenians and Georgians, I would say that, in general, Georgian society is far more religious than the Armenian society. It is also evident in visiting the church on a daily basis which, I would say, in Armenian context has more of a ritualized or ceremonial character rather than is based on the actual belief.

As both research and practice show church in this anti-gender movement has a crucial role. Particularly, it is functioning both as a main actor in the movement and as a so-called “right hand” for states (especially with radical right-wing politics) to perpetuate the anti-gender agenda and cover up “a deeper and profound change in the European political and value system” (Peto, 2015:127). In his book “The mass Psychology of Fascism” (1970) Wilhelm Reich explains how church is inheriting the functions of the state to promote gender, sexual and reproductive order in society through creation of an authoritarian family as a reflection of the authoritarian state (1970:30). As well as anti-gender movements in this case the state and the church both work on suppression of sexual desires, “moral inhibition of the child’s natural sexuality” (Ibid), which, in its turn, creates docility to the state among society.

The docility mentioned above creates not only specific understandings of gender order but also deepens the illusions of freedom (Durkheim, 1966:5) and self-expression which are constantly reproduced through established social norms. Any kind of, even minor, deviation or divergence from these social currents brings to a backlash and more severe opposition (Ibid). The discussion of reproduction of social currents reflects the above-mentioned idea of regulation of family and children by state through church. This patriarchal regulation (Reich, 1970), shows also the reflections of state biopolitics (Foucault, 2008; Repo, 2016), that constructs the family as an authoritarian unit which realizes the authoritarian and, in some cases, totalitarian politics of the state.

Family in this context can be understood as a “total institution”, coined by Goffman (1991), that keeps its boundaries as close as possible from “external interventions”. In several contexts, and in Armenia particularly, the main panic regarding the laws on

gender equality and prevention of domestic violence was based on the claim and basically the play on affects by anti-gender movement, that the most sacred societal unit, the family, could be intervened by social workers in order to isolate children from their families to put them into organ trafficking (“The Law on Domestic Violence Will Trigger More Violence”, 2017). This backlash is not only the conservatism, fear from social change, and therefore also the reactionary politics (Reich, 1970:6), but also what Irvine describes as moral/sex panic (2008).

In her article “Transient Feelings: Sex Panics and the Politics of Emotions” Janice Irvine (2008) elaborates on the meaning and developments of moral/sex panic through her research on sex education. As Irvine argues, moral panic reflects the relations between non-traditional or “deviant” act and “the reactions of institutions and agents of social control” (2008:6). She cites S. Cohen and C. Vence for both ideas of moral and sex panic respectively (1). Moral panic, in other words, serves the moral politics and the politics of moralizing. Similarly, sex panic “captures the hostile political climate during late-twentieth-century controversies over gay rights, censorship, and sex education” (2).

This moral panic, which in different contexts can be named also “gender panic”, because of the complexity of the discourse of gender, explains how “moral crusaders turn a controversial [or unexplained] issue [gender equality] or marginal cohort [feminists, gay people] into ‘folk devils’” (2008:6): “demonized enemies”, “baby-killers”, “pedophilia, bestiality”, “child in danger” (Graff, 2014:431; Nikoghosyan, 2015:24-25; Kovats, 2017:175). It is also important to mention for this analysis that the framework of moral/sex [or gender] panic is being used by scapegoating not only “sexual minorities” (gay, lesbian people and others) but also “alleged sex offenders” (Irvine, 2008:6). These

“transient feelings”, coined by Irvine, reflect the interconnection between state, political interest groups [NGOs, committees, political parties, churches], social movements [feminist, LGBTQI+ and anti-gender movements], media representations, and individual citizens who themselves constitute multiple, intersecting emotional public (2008:4). Here is where religious institutions, churches are playing their “sacred” role of protectors of human souls from devils.

These emotions and affects, which Gould describes as “human motivation that is nonconscious, noncognitive, nonlinguistic, noncoherent, non-rational and un-predetermined” (Gould, 2010:28) constitute those “transient feelings” (Irvine, 2008) that are drivers interestingly for both pro- and anti-gender mobilizations. As Gould mentions affects and emotions, in this sense, are not only working in favor of those who are eager to fight the existing oppressive currents (seeking social change), but also for those who “generated attachments to normativity and current social arrangements” (social reproduction) (2010:32). So, basically, the friction (Tsing, 2005) that is present in between the anti- and pro- sides, in this case turns out to be a tension, some sort of a clash between the two.

All these transient feelings and affects, together with some invisible control and oppression over the family and its members create a system of reproduction of social norms and values that instead of serving the latter’s benefit and self-realization contribute to the interests of the state and other political institutions. This oppression has also a significant component of nationalism that is discussed in next section.

1.3. Anti-Genderism as Nationalism and Rejection of “Gender Ideology”

Nationalism in this anti-gender context is discussed in connection with loss of masculinity and femininity which is tied up with a mix of gender and sexuality. The threat of “gender” for masculinity is presented by “becoming” gay or transgender (mostly for men), a symbol for lost or absent or effeminate, or, in other words “complicit” masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005:82-85), which is therefore a direct threat for the nation. Femininity, on the other hand, is described as something that is ascribed to category of “woman” and expectations from her essentialized gender roles of childbearing and reproduction of the nation as a duty (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1989; Spike V. Peterson, 1999; McClintock, 1993; Mosse, 1985). This is especially reflected in the context of legislations, such as restrictions on abortion in Poland, ultra-nationalist attacks against laws on gender equality and domestic violence in Armenia, state anti-Soros campaign that executes the NGOs in this field in Hungary⁸ and so forth.

In this context of “real vs. fake” masculinity, which is an important gendered attribute of belonging to the nation (Christian et al., 2016), interestingly, the word “gender” is also impersonalized/ impersonated. According to Graff (2014), Nikoghosyan (2015) and Harutyunyan (2016), since 2013 the word has been used as an adjective and referred to people: “Mr. Gender” in Poland, “Genders” in Armenia and so on (Graff, 2014:431, Nikoghosyan, 2015:25), again in the context of rejecting these people from being worthy for the nation. Phrases such as “all those genders” or “burn those genders” became common in public and social media, referring particularly to feminists and homosexuals

⁸ Hungary: Pro-govt weekly prints list of ‘Soros mercenaries’, <https://apnews.com/6fc8ca916bdf4598857f58ec4af198b2>

that have no right to be Armenian (Harutyunyan, 2016:17).⁹ As Kuhar and Paternotte (2017) mention, in order to make the personification more complete and genuine and through the latter show that it is imposed by some non-local forces, in most of the cases the representatives of anti-gender mobilizations use the word “gender” without any suggested translation. In Armenia it is slightly different. In the context of the fear of the word “gender” there are several options that are discussed: translation, replacement, and no use at all. Although the word “gender” is still continuously used, as the story shows, the compromise between many actors of this debate (including state as the official responsible for the law) was the replacement of the word “gender” in the title with “of men and women”. In this sense, for my research I argue that there is an entire “gender vocabulary” that is being co-opted to show the negativity and danger behind the “gender”.

The opposition to “gender” and “gender ideology” in the discourse of nation and saving its future from it is especially interesting to discuss in the split of what anti-gender movement is fighting against. In Kovats’ article “gender ideology” is analyzed as constructed as an “enemy in Europe” which is reflected in predominantly European regional or geographical context (2017:176). Nevertheless, if Kovats and Graff describe and weave nationalism with Church and Catholicism, in Armenian context presented by Nikoghosyan and Harutyunyan, although church plays an important role in anti-gender

⁹ One of the latest manifestation of this commonality was the comment under a post in on a student page on Facebook which to the question “What interesting flash mob can we organize?” answered “Suggesting collecting a couple of feminists from university and burn them on the university yard”.

<https://www.facebook.com/genderstudiescenter/photos/a.537859286271899.1073741832.519547094769785/1771372329587249/?type=3&theater>

Another manifestation of the consequences of anti-gender movements was just recently when a man attacked a 15-years-old boy with a knife and constantly justified himself by saying that he was thinking “the guy was gay”. <https://theworldnews.net/am-news/15-amya-tghayin-danakaharelwts-heto-argam-h-n-vazel-e-angam-myows-erekhaneri-hetewits-haykakan-zhamanak>

public mobilization (as discussed above), it is not as much active as “newly established ultra-nationalist groups” (Nikoghosyan, 2015:25). These kinds of attacks on women’s and LGBTQI+ organizations and activists reflect the growth of “neo-nationalist extremism in Armenia” (Ibid). In addition, anti-gender movement, while fighting against “gender ideology”, at the same time establishes its own nationalist ideology. Jan Urban in his article “Nationalism as a Totalitarian Ideology” calls nationalism a disease and argues that “all the countries of the post-communist part of the world are suffering from the infection, and its end is not in sight. We are still ideology-addicted; we are all still ideologyholics” (Urban, 1991:776). Apparently, little has changed since 1989 and 1991.

There is an interesting connection between this anti-gender backlash and the vulnerability of resistance Judith Butler and her colleagues talk about (Butler et al., 2016: 5). In this logic those who are or feel vulnerable overcome the latter and try to resist the policies and discourses that oppose or reject their vulnerable conditions (Ibid). In anti-gender context the resistance is coming from both sides: there is a feminist resistance against the vulnerability of their own, and a resistance against feminism and “gender”. By not going into detailed psychoanalytical explanations of this anti-gender resistance of feminism, gender equality and women’s rights¹⁰, I would rather emphasize here the fear from the unknown risks that so-called “gender ideology” presumes for anti-gender movement. Anti-gender backlash, as I see it in this analysis, is one of the manifestations of reacting to the risk of “gender ideology” and “genderism”, and basically “gender hysteria” (Harutyunyan, 2016:17) is a reaction to uncertainty of the future of the values that keep the history of the nation, family, identity and survival static

¹⁰ Even though it would be quite interesting to see also that side but perhaps in my future research.

and going. Basically, the uncertainty of multiculturalism and diversity of identities and preferences (Taylor, 1994) and non-static gender identity and roles (Risman:2009) bring to rejection of gender as a concept as well.

One of the trends that is mediating in the literature on anti-gender movements (in some explicitly, in some not), is the work in coalitions. Nikoghosyan (2015) mentions the Coalition to Stop Violence against Women in Armenia¹¹ which was established long before the anti-gender attacks have begun. She also points out that especially after the “orchestrated backlash” against “gender” some of the active women’s organizations and activists started working on amelioration of their strategies and collaborated more (26). “The experience of being targeted led to greater in-group cohesion, communication, and more trust among the groups” (Ibid). Even though in other works coalitions and work in coalitions are not mentioned, there are other authors, such as Andrea Krizsan and Conny Roggeband, who in their book “The Gender Politics of Domestic Violence” (2017) discuss the coalition building practices within the feminist movement in Central and Eastern European region. Apparently, the defense mechanisms of target side of anti-gender movements do not differ much from other social movements, since they are also choosing and practicing the resistance and/or reacting mechanisms described by Cohen as “coalition building” in queer politics (Cohen, 1997:457). Although Cohen is showing the coalitions in the context of queer politics, in this case, and in the analytical chapter of this research I will show that coalitions work for anti-gender movements as well.

¹¹ Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women in Armenia: <http://coalitionagainstviolence.org/en/home/>

There is interestingly an important difference in these countries in the context of manifestations of their nationalism. In Hungary and Poland, as well as in Western European countries such as Germany and France, features of “femonationalism” (Farris, 2017) have their own separate place in this anti-gender discourse. The concept of femonationalism, is specifically used by Farris to describe the situation in France, the Netherlands and Italy, for instance. But in Hungary especially, there is an obvious perpetuation of the fear from Muslim men by right-wing politics¹² (Kovats, 2017). This fear is spread among public not only around the idea that Muslim men will take local men’s jobs, but also rape local women¹³ (Farris, 2017:10-13). Unfortunately, this idea is not yet discussed in most of the articles, even though Kovats could refer to it in her analysis of nationalism.¹⁴ In Armenia this kind of a nationalism is omnipresent without anti-genderism also because of historical circumstances resulted in hatred towards Muslim religion and culture.

Another significant difference that is worth mentioning regarding nationalism, is that anti-gender movements put a specific emphasis on colonial/neo-colonial power of West (specifically Europe) which is, according to them, imposes “European values” and politics on other countries (Kovats, 2017:176; Harutyunyan, 2016:29). In case of Armenia with its fluid status and undecidedness about European Union Association and membership to Eurasian Economic Union in 2013, it is, more or less, “reasonable” that these groups fear the expected changes in their political systems which can

¹² In addition to the significant amount of scholarly academic literature on anti-gender movements in case of Hungary the overt and public anti-Muslim speeches of the PM V. Orban and his allies could be enough to give evidence for the anti-Muslim public discourse.

¹³ As an evidence of this situation is the Motel Case in Ócsény village in Hungary in Fall of 2017: https://index.hu/video/2017/10/04/ocseny_menekult_angol_valtozat_refugees_migrants/

¹⁴ Although, Kovats, in a newer publication, despite calling the anti-gender movement fundamentalist, argues about nationalist and conservative nature of it (See Kovats, 2018:2).

occasionally bring changes in attitudes as well. But especially for Hungary and Poland, that are members of the EU, it is unclear (or at least not that obvious) why the emphasis is put on Western values and their meanings.

In her article Kovats mentions the omnipresence of “the discourse of foreign forces (like EU, UN, WHO)” (2017:176) but there is no elaboration on where this issue leads to. One of the major anti-gender arguments at the beginning of the movement in Armenia was that European Union, United Nations, World Bank, and other foreign and international organizations, including Embassies of US, UK, and Germany, were supporting NGOs and activists, described as “pro-gender” in the beginning of this analysis, in order to radically transform Armenian traditions and destroy the nation (Harutyunyan, 2016:17). Therefore, these NGOs and their members were presented as enemies and/or foreign agents, “grant-eaters”, that sold their souls and country for money (Sarafyan, 2015). Unfortunately, most of the articles are not discussing the process or sources of resource mobilization but clearly, based on the work being done by the members of anti-gender movement (workshops, websites, press conferences, other events) there should be more thorough analysis of their supporters, “adherents”, “constituents”, and those who set the agenda (McCarthy and Zald, 1977:1221-1222) especially in the pro-Russian and anti-EU discourse.

My further analysis of the literature on anti-genderism shows that these mobilizations in different parts of the world have obtained the status of a movement, but in some they are still regarded as mobilizations, even non-regular attacks. In the previous sections I have tried to show that anti-gender mobilization(s) and the anti-gender backlash have manifold features of social movements. In this regard, they combine nationalism,

religion, traditional values, economic and political regimes and so on. They both spontaneous (affect and emotion based) and organized (with strategic planning and mobilized resources). They include charismatic personalities, such as church leaders and priests, and play on fears of masses. In fact, they are both a danger with their terrible consequences for people's everyday lives, and a challenge for feminists and LGBTQI+ activists to get together, build coalitions, and react. Being regarded a movement or not, the global or transnational anti-gender movement has its specific personal and political causes as well as consequences for future gender and sexuality policies in Europe and beyond which must be scrutinized on ongoing bases.

1.4. A Brief Overview of the History of “Gender” in Armenia

In this section, I will describe the historical context in which gender has been constructed in Armenia. As I will show throughout this brief analysis, the notion of gender and its construction in specifically Armenian context is predominantly, if not entirely referred to women and men, as essential figures for society and the Armenian nation to prosper and survive its history. In my further analysis of the data source I will also show how it is connected to the nation, and how nationalism, masculinity and gender are intertwined in the local anti-gender context. The notion of gender itself came into Armenian policies with the discourses and more possibilities of development in terms of Westernization and Europeanization (meaning the attempts to compare the country with Western progressive and democratic countries) which is analyzed at the end of this section.

Historically, the organization of gender relations in Armenian society were based on strong patriarchal norms, even though Armenian women played prominent roles in cultural and public life. In fact, discussions of women's rights and gender equality in Armenia goes as far back as the sixth and seventh centuries, when, according to contemporary laws and regulations, women and men had equal rights and opportunities with regards to property, divorce, and remarriage (Shahnazaryan, 2007). In general, the whole concept of gender equality and women's rights has undergone significant transformations throughout Armenian history, considering the Babylonian, Hellenistic, and Byzantine Empires, as well as Arabic, Turkish, and Russian influences, creating complex and contradictory attitudes and stereotypes regarding the role of women in society (Ibid).

In the 19th century, two famous women writers, Srpouhi Vahanyan-Dussap (known as Spouhi Dussap) and Zabel Assadour, wrote the draft of the “Declaration of Women’s Rights”, where they touched upon equality between men’s and women’s rights, the right to choose a profession, and women’s participation in community life (Kirakosyan and Margaryan, 2011). Srpouhi Dussap also argued that “a society where a woman is oppressed, her rights and dignity are violated, is an immoral society” (Gender Studies, 2001). In her poems, Dussab also raised her voice against forced marriages and claimed that a woman can be liberated only through paid work (Nikoghosyan et al, 2006). In 1918-1920, during the brief existence of the Republic of Armenia, women made up 8% of the National Parliament, and Diana Abgar became the first Armenian woman ambassador to Japan (Shahnazaryan, 2007:108; Avagyan, 2014).

By the end of 19th century, many Armenian women, along with men, joined political organizations and parties. It should be mentioned that the Armenian women's movement of the 19th century, although influenced by the European women's movement, still had a strong nationalist discourse. In the 19th century, the Armenian community of Istanbul was under the threat of Islamization and feared the loss of their national identity (Shahnazaryan, 2007). Thus, a very strong drive started to educate all Armenians, even in very remote villages, to preserve national values. In a way therefore, the Armenian women's movement initially emerged as a result of the national-liberation movement, and only later started to push an agenda of women's rights and equality between men and women (Ibid).

Already by the end of the 19th century, out of 630 Armenian organizations operating in Istanbul, about 60 were women's organizations (Gender Studies, 2003). It should be mentioned that, even though the mission of these organizations was mainly charity and help to the poor, they were also creating a space for women's civic and political activism. Especially active were two well-known women's organizations, both established in 1879: School-Loving ("Dpraser", "Դպրաստեր") Ladies Association and "Azganver" ("Ազգասպեր", in translation "dedicated to nation") Armenian Women Association (Nikoghosyan et al, 2006).

Unfortunately, these positive developments which had the potential to transform into a national women's movement did not continue during Armenia's Soviet times. Instead, it was replaced by a Soviet ideology of equality which, despite helping women achieve progress, significantly diminished the ethnic and cultural discourses of the movement (Aslanyan, 2010:31, Shahnazaryan, 2007:108-109). According to Khachatryan, during

soviet times policies of gender identity and gender equality were fixed under the light of “Soviet identity”. Each citizen of the Soviet Union was associated first of all with the “Soviet state, socialist society, and values and norms deriving from the latter” (2010:248).

At the same time, socialist ideology in its turn supported and legally strengthened many women’s rights. Moreover, that period of Soviet government in Armenia gave women opportunities for social mobility as well. Under the Soviet Union, women secured representation in areas of education, employment, access to healthcare services, and, most importantly, in public decision making (Nikoghosyan, 2005; Nikoghosyan et al, 2006; Shahnazaryan, 2007; Avagyan, 2014). In addition, women were massively participating in industrial and other sectors as workers (Avagyan, 2014). However, the governments of Soviet republic mainly emphasized the quantitative aspects of gender equality and women’s inclusion in different spheres of activities. They paid little or no attention to the equality in everyday relations and interactions (ADB, 2015:2). That is also one of the reasons why up until now attitudes towards gender equality are conflictual, in sense that the majority of Armenian society thinks that women and men have equal rights in Armenia, despite the everyday violence against women and their extinct representation in decision making and high-salaried positions (ADB, 2015; Gender Barometer, 2015; WV Armenia, 2017).

New challenges to gender equality and women’s advancement arose after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Nowadays, gender equality in Armenia is advocated mostly by NGOs and individual activists. A significant role in the formation of gender discourse play also the international governmental and non-governmental organizations. Despite

some positive developments in gender equality since 1991 independence, including the adoption of international documents such as the Convention on The Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993 by the Armenian government, there are still numerous obstacles for the equal representation of women in all social spheres (political participation and decision making, work conditions and women's positions and salaries in labor market, violence against women and other).

The use of the notion of gender in Post-Soviet Armenia also has predominant references to women's empowerment and their more active participation in politics, labor market, leadership and so on. Particularly for my research, it is important to mention here, that there are several important documents based on which the notion of gender started to be circulated in different areas of decision-making and activism in Armenia. For instance, at the end of 1990s the official documents referred only to women's empowerment (Project on Improvement of Women's Situation for 1998-2000, adopted in 1998). In 2004 another similar project has been adopted by the government of Armenia for years from 2004 to 2010. Starting from 2011 Country Gender Policy Concept Paper and National Action Plan against Gender-Based Violence have been the main official documents that state adopted on annual or four to five years bases. Even a quick look at these papers makes it clear that the projects and actions are emphasizing women's empowerment only. Finally, in 2013, when the former¹⁵ government of Armenia adopted the law on Gender Equality (RA law on EREOWM, 2013) the

¹⁵ I would like to specifically point out the fact of the former government, although there is little evidence that the current government is working on gender issues harder after the "Velvet Revolution in Armenia", coined as such by the leader of the protests in April and May of 2018.

extremely aggressive nationalist anti-gender backlash took over all the media and different groups and became an apple of discord among the Armenian society.

This backlash and the role the media played in this anti-gender mobilization, attacks or movement targeting the word gender and its usage as a foreign element being incorporated in legislations I will present in the next chapter where I will give a more background and detailed methodological explanation for this research.

Chapter 2. Methodology

This chapter is aimed at briefly but also comprehensively explaining the situation with Iravunk newspaper and why particularly I have chosen it as the main data source of my analysis. Iravunk is a quite unique in its work and, despite having similarities with other newspapers in Armenia its uniqueness for my analysis will be evident/obvious as I start exploring what is behind Iravunk's story. I will, first, add some important points to the introduction of my work regarding Iravunk in reference to the usage and meaning-making around "gender" and "gender vocabulary" in the context of the law on EREOWM in Armenia. I will, then, turn to explain how I have approached and set the data for my analysis.

2.1. Background: More about Iravunk

As a continuation to the introduction of this work I will present several additional points about the newspaper. "Iravunk" in translation from Armenian means "right", in legal terms of the word. What is the most contradictory, but which also gives information about their presentation of the concept of right is that in 2011, during their anniversary event, the newspaper has been presented as one of "the leading newspapers in the country that works for national stability, against religious sects, and for human rights" ("The Event of Iravunk's Anniversary", 2011).

"Iravunk" is published since 1989. They have both printed press and since 2012, also online version of the newspaper. The founder and the president of the newspaper is

also a member of the Parliament of Armenia. The editor-in-chief is vaguely contributing in both printed and online newspaper (and some of his articles are included in this analysis) with his own reflections on different problems in Armenia including “gender propaganda”. In May 2018, when Armenia has undergone so called “Velvet Revolution”, the founder of the newspaper and MP from Republican party, asked a question to the new candidate for Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan, whether the latter was going to fight against religious sects, “gender”, and “vulgar feminists”¹⁶ (The elections of PM in NA, 2018). Moreover, Iravunk is basically so close to the former government that it was the first and the only newspaper that announced the possible resignation of the president in April 2018 during the rallies and protests of the “Velvet Revolution” (The Resignation of the new Prime Minister is expected, 2018).

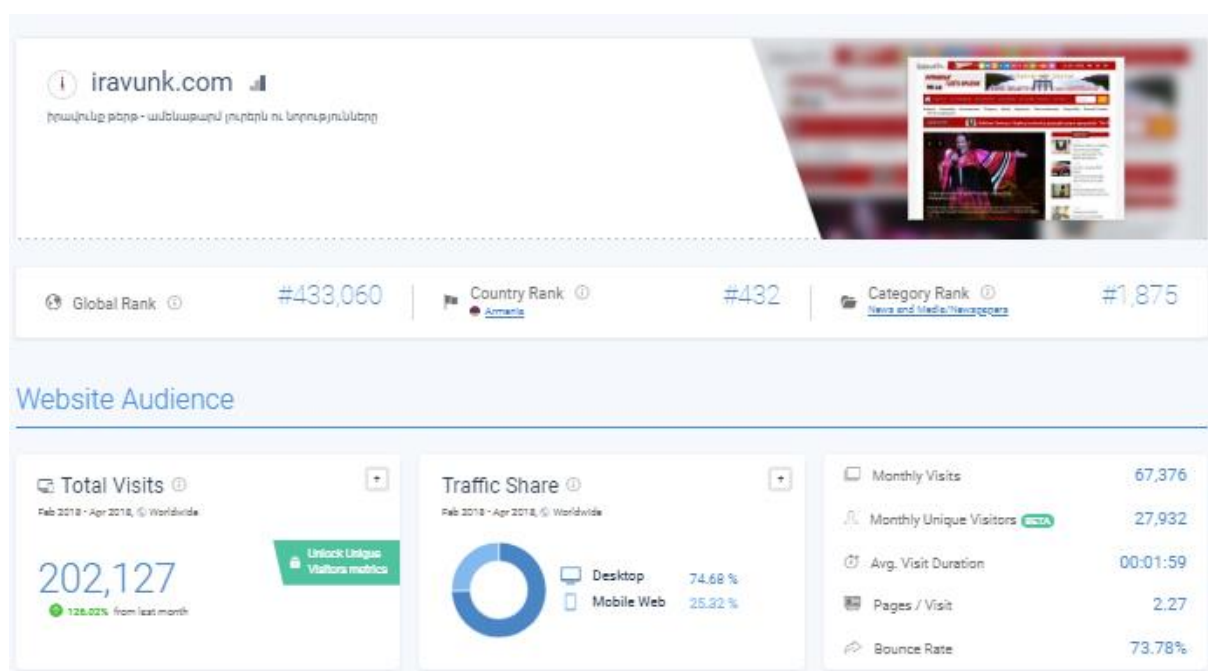


Figure 1. Overview of Ranking and Audience of Iravunk.com; Source: SimilarWeb.com

¹⁶ Link to the hearing and Q&A: 1:41:51 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LkcJ1fly-SI>

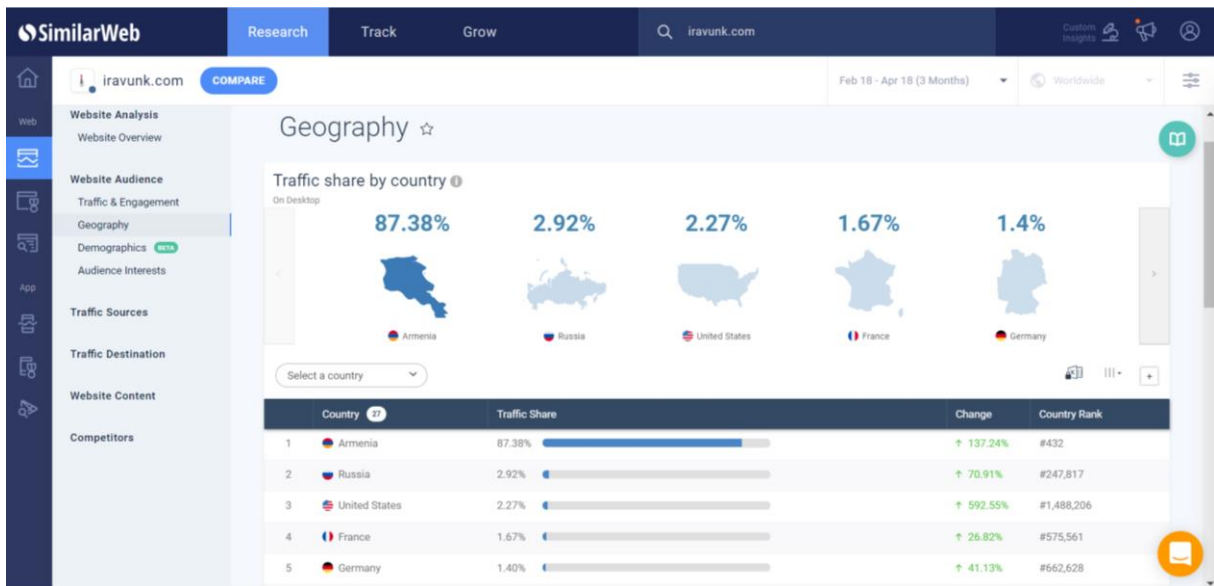


Figure 2. Iravunk's Audience: Geographic Distribution; Source: SimilarWeb.com

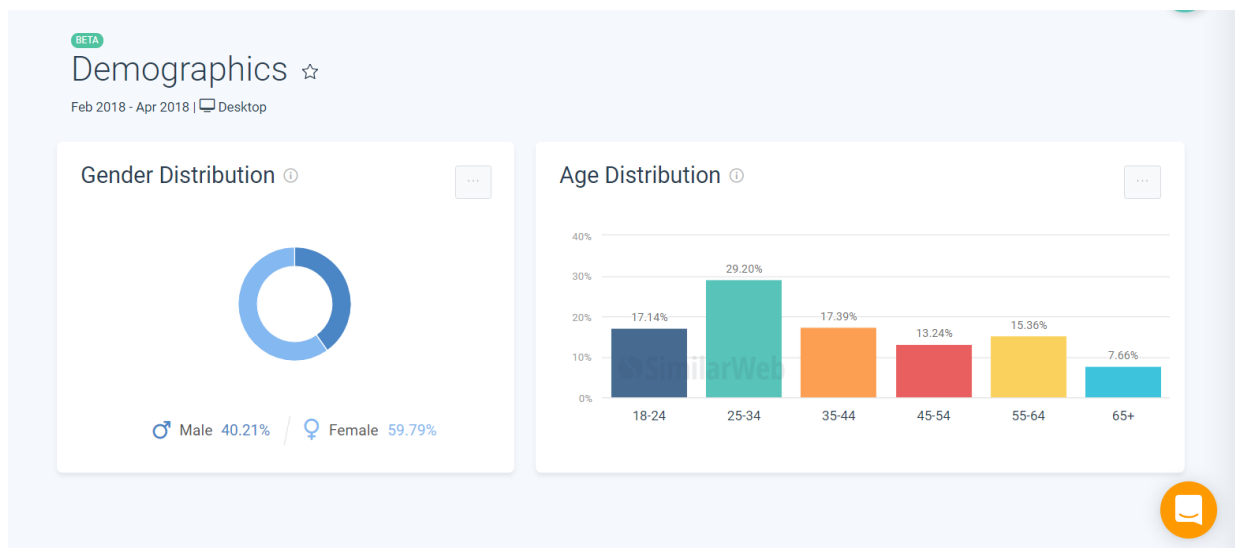


Figure 3. Audience by Demographics; Source: SimilarWeb.com

In fact, Iravunk.com is not the most read or in the list of most read newspapers in Armenia. According to the website “Similarweb.com”¹⁷, during February 2018 to April 2018 (three months traffic calculated by the website¹⁸) Iravunk.com had 202 127 visits. There were 67 376 average monthly visits, the average visit per page is 1 minute 59 seconds. For one visit the audience goes through in average 2.27 pages. Based on the website analytics, 87.38% of the audience is from Armenia, then come very small coverage of the audience from Russia (2.92%), United States (2.27%), France (1.67%), and Germany (1.4%). Interestingly, according to the gender distribution of the audience, more women than men use the website: 40% of the audience are male and 60% are female. The age distribution is also quite wide: although mostly young adults (15-34) are engaged with following Iravunk (46.34%), there are also middle-aged adults (35-54, 30.63%) and older adults (55+, 23.02%), despite the stereotypes about their usage of internet and computers.¹⁹

Aside from technical information, Iravunk’s specificity for my analysis is in the wide coverage of anti-gender agenda and topics in Armenia and globally. Iravunk is well-known for its news content full of humiliation of transgender and homosexual people in the name of realization of the right to freedom of expression, negative targeting women’s non-governmental organizations in Armenia by direct referrals to George Soros and Open Society Foundations, sarcastic manner of writing about the concept of human rights, and so forth.

¹⁷ That is the main search and ranking engine of the world websites used to rank the websites in Armenia, including both news media and other websites. <https://www.similarweb.com/> “SimilarWeb gives you global multi-device market intelligence to understand, track and grow your digital market share.” Retrieved from the website: <https://www.similarweb.com/corp/about/>

¹⁸ This is the data I can have access to without upgrading my own account in SimilarWeb with additional fees.

¹⁹ All the data presented in the paragraph are taken from the SimilarWeb analytics directly.

2.2. Methodology: Approaching, Coding and Setting the Data

For this research based on analysis of online newspaper articles I have used content analysis method with combination of elements from discourse analysis.

Content analysis helps to “understand data not as a collection of physical events but as symbolic phenomena” (Krippendorff; 1980:7). According to Krippendorff, content analysis supposedly can make the quantitative data and analysis more convincing. Content analysis can also “analyze something that is recognizably symbolic as a symbolic phenomenon”, tracing its social role, effects, and meaning” (Ibid).

In terms of discourse analysis Tonkiss mentions that discourse analysis is largely understood as a “data-driven” method because “it is difficult to take any standard approach and formalize it” (1998:250). I will try to explain the choice of the data for this analysis through the processes of deduction and induction (or maybe better to say deconstruction and reconstruction) I have undergone.

The general topic of my analysis was about meanings that were surrounding the notion of gender in media. To narrow down the field of “media”, I have first chosen what kinds of media sources I could analyze and ended up choosing online newspapers. My choice depends on several reasons. First, the accessibility of the material online since I was outside of Armenia, and secondly, because of the abundance of information on “gender” available in Armenian newspapers. At the phase of choosing the exact newspaper for my analysis, I specifically reflected on it through what I wanted to reveal and understand from this study. I picked “Iravunk.com”, mainly because I wanted to analyze news

articles of a website that was explicitly “anti-gender” and largely contributed to anti-gender attacks against women’s and LGBTQI+ rights activists and organizations.

Another important aspect of choosing this website was the fact that my goal is to particularly analyze the anti-gender approach of creating meanings around the word gender in relation to the law of RA on ERROMW. At this moment I rely on basics of discourse analysis, according to which the goal of the discourse analyst is not achieving some “objective” results or truth, but rather interpreting the ways the language is used which is resulting in creation of meanings and construction of the people’s “accounts of the social world” (Tonkiss, 1998:248). “Discourse analysis, while stressing close textual work, aims to analyze language use in its larger social context” (249). Finally, in order to be consistent and fixed in my research I have concentrated on one of the aspects of relation of the word/notion of “gender” to a social event or texts (Fairclough, 2003:24). The choice of this particular social event is not random either: the adoption of the law was a prerequisite for a very important move in the politics and status of the country as well as for the adoption of several other laws (such as prevention of domestic violence that happened in November of 2017²⁰) and Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (which happened in January of 2018²¹).

The first step I have undertaken in this analysis was the general analysis of the website. Since it is a newspaper, I did try to understand whether it was a “quality paper” or a

²⁰ RA Law on Prevention and of Domestic Violence, Protection of Victims of Domestic Violence and Restoration of Solidarity in Family:

<http://www.parliament.am/drafts.php?sel=showdraft&DraftID=9313&Reading=0>

²¹ Armenia signs the Istanbul Convention: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/-/armenia-signs-the-istanbul-convention>

“popular/tabloid paper”²², meaning what the content, the language and the format of the news are. Apparently, the website has both types of content since it tackles politics and economy as well as popular news (such as celebrity lives and especially Kim Kardashian’s), it attracts the reader topically but also not concentrated on many details and different aspects of a topic, it contains pictures, but the number and style of pictures depend on the topics highlighted. Overall, the content on gender is predominantly of tabloid type, according to so called less “seriousness” and approach to those articles. It is also reflected in the use of the word “gender” in the articles.

In sense of coding I have had multiple steps to approach the data, and that is where I combined content and discourse analyses. First, I found all the articles in Iravunk that included the word “gender” (overall, 432 articles with 7 repetitions from the beginning of 2014 until the end of 2017). From all these articles, then, I found those that have direct reference to the law on EREOWM that appeared in different ways; with the official name, “Gender Law”, “Law of Gender propaganda”, “Law on National Perversion”, and so on. Overall, I analyzed 43 articles of different types: editorials, interviews, event highlights, reflective articles. In these articles, the word gender appeared 111 times with different meanings and connotations that I present in the analytical chapter of my work.

In terms of coding, what I did is finding patterns (Tonkiss, 1998:255) by which the word gender and the law create meanings in relation to each other. This, in addition supported the process of articulation of possible negativity created in the process of using the notion of gender in this newspaper. These connotations of negativity and

²² Quality Newspapers vs. Tabloids: a Feature Checklist:
<https://mrwieland.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/handout-checkliste-quality-vs-tabloid-newspapers-rework.pdf>

danger and, also the constant use of “gender vocabulary” in data helped me to come up with the general patterns that I present in more details (as both sections and detailed analysis of concepts) in the next section of my analysis.

Finally, it is important to mention that, certainly analyzing Iravunk does not mean analyzing it as the sole representation of the Armenian online news media. It also does not cover all the media representation of the notion of gender. Despite the shortcomings of an analysis of one particular case, it is important that Iravunk had a great appreciation of the former Government of RA and has an irreversible input in creation of negative attitudes in the Armenian society towards gender-related issues as well as the scholars and activists involved in the field of gender studies.

Chapter 3. The Discourses Around the Notion of Gender in Iravunk Newspaper

This chapter is the data analysis of my research based on the materials I have set as my main source of analysis. I will present these patterns and negative connotations through incorporation of theory into my research and several figures that will help me to visualize those patterns. The structure of data analysis is based on the research questions and the arguments.

3.1. Introduction to Research Questions and Arguments

This research aims to analyze the news of the main anti-gender newspaper in Armenia called “Iravunk”. For my analysis, I take the online version of “Iravunk” newspaper as a data source from which I choose those articles that are directly relevant to the purpose of this analysis. My main goal here is not to analyze the whole newspaper and its content, but specifically to target those articles that are covering the topic of the law on “Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities of Women and Men” in Armenia (EREOWM, 2013). What I specifically plan to do is trying to give a systematic analysis and answer the main question on what are the connotations and meanings of the notion of gender in the context of or in relation to the mentioned law? In this research I argue that “gender” has predominantly negative connotations and is mostly associated with danger. In addition, I also argue, that the terminology used in the context of gender policies is

borrowed or co-opted in the texts of this anti-gender newspaper and presented predominantly in the negative light. To defend this argument, I will also try to answer questions such as what and who are under danger? Where does it come from? How is that danger spread? And what are the mechanisms that this newspaper highlights as best to fight this danger?

3.2. Understanding “Gender”: What Does it Mean in Iravunk?

The notion of gender in Iravunk anti-gender online newspaper is predominantly associated with danger. Danger, specifically in the context of using it in relation to the law on EREOWM in Armenia, has different connotations. Even though those are not, in general, different from global and/or specific regional tendencies, there is a need to explore these meanings and connotations in Armenian [local] context as well. The differences between these regional/country contexts can be found in the applications of the theories as well as in the actual findings of the analysis.

The meanings of “gender” as a danger are in a closed chain of meanings and social practices. Interestingly, whichever meaning is used it is connected to others through different texts (social events; Fairclough, 2003) which makes danger fully evident. There are six major meanings that the notion of gender has in selected Iravunk articles: homosexuality and transgenderism, pedophilia and vicious phenomena, perversion, feminism, homofascism, and western value (Figure 1). In this section I will analyze these meanings and show how they are both interconnected and create the danger of “gender”.

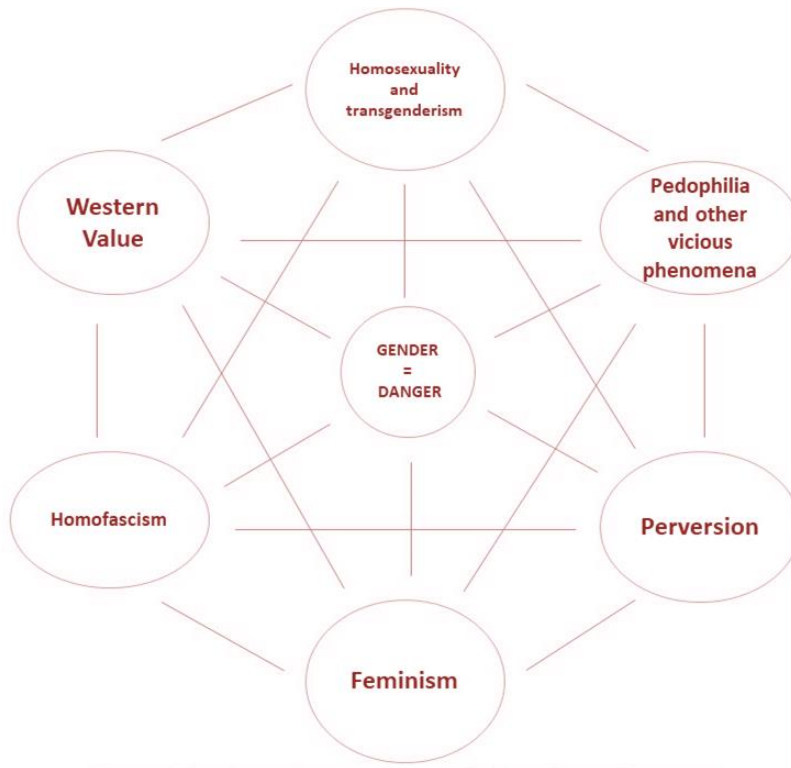


Figure 4. “Gender” as Danger: A Closed Chain of Direct Meanings

First meaning, “gender” as “homosexuality”, is constantly discussed as a mechanism for both local and international actors (NGOs and their supporters, such as UN, EU and others) to make Armenia a “Genderstan”, a country of homosexuals to reproduce.

“With today’s obscenities, defrauds and faggotism, some gender-mender laws, this generation will be spoiled, because it is known that they are going to save this country. Those outside forces want to spoil this generation with their Genderstan, but I want this generation to be properly raised to protect this country.” (Extract from an interview with a film director, December 8, 2015)

Homosexuality, on the one hand, is presented as a threat, and in relation to the law it is perpetuated that homosexual people are going to “make” others homosexual as well,

which means no reproduction will ever be possible and the nation will disappear after its long historical fight for survival. On the other hand, there is an argument that so called “Genderstan” is going to reproduce, which is contradictory to what was mentioned earlier. Apart from being interesting, it was also predictable that these articles would have had contradictions based on their tabloid character of not putting much emphasis on logical and detailed explanations.

As my further analysis shows homosexuality and transgenderism are used interchangeably or mostly in direct relation to each other. In this context of danger, these concepts are expressively described by faggotism and pedophilia, in more negative connotations.

Essentially fixed gender roles and gender identities are in direct co-relation with a person’s heterosexuality. What I found being constantly perpetuated is that “gender” is a big danger to the person’s sexuality (in terms of his and her sexual orientation/ preferences and gender). This point is one of the crucial arguments made against “gender” and the law on EREOWM that are both ideological and legal threats for family, Christian beliefs, nation, society and future.

I find extremely important to elaborate also on the reasons why the notion of gender is so scary for those who were opposed to this law. On this level of analysis, I point out one particularly explicit reason for it. The article 3 of the law is constantly mentioned in the articles which defines the concept of gender within the law:

“Gender is the acquired, socially fixed behavior of people of different sexes. It is the social aspect of relations between men and women which is reflected in all

areas of public life, including politics, economy, rights, ideology, culture, education, science and healthcare.” (Article 3, Law on EREOWM, 2013).

The idea of “acquired” is the main source of “gender hysteria” (Harutyunyan, 2016:17) and/or “gender panic” (Irvine: 2008) since it means being able to choose one’s own gender which brings to “unseemly, sometimes hysterical resistance to diversity” (Nagel, 1998:258). And, since there are assumptions on choosing one’s preferences in “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman, 1987), it means that there is no fixity in the gender order (Risman: 2009) which can become an absolute disaster for the society. Therefore, the law must be rejected or changed according to the head and deputy head of the main anti-gender organization in Armenia.

This law serves not exactly the women’s rights but mostly protects the rights of all those persons that have an acquired sex: LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) people. (Extract from the press conference with head and deputy head of PAPC, March 28, 2015)

This quote highlights at least one important aspect of anti-gender attitudes. Even though there are constant references to sexuality, and occasionally to “gender identity”, there is no direct discussion of sexuality itself. Both sexuality and gender identity are mixed and blurred within homosexuality. Some non-direct hint on sexuality [which is referred to established gender roles] has been articulated in the discussion of family and the loss of its autonomous decision-making possibility [or a moral right] as a disastrous result of implementation of the law.

Homosexuality and transgenderism (in the same realm) are intertwined with both perversion and vicious phenomena (Figure 1) unrelated to Armenian culture, Armenian values and Armenian nation in its core. Some of “the protectors of national values” mention the following:

“Every citizen, every sane and reasonable Armenian person should fight against these vicious phenomena.” (Extract from an interview with the head of “The Frontline of Protection of National Values”, December 13, 2014)

The quote above shows also how in terms of belonging to the Armenian nation make every single person a sort of a soldier and militant for promotion of national values which was discussed in the context of docility in the first chapter of this thesis.

Further, as Figure 1 shows, in the context of danger, gender is linked also with feminism and women’s rights.

“From those organizations, one, called “Women’s Resource Center” NGO²³, under the name of implementing women’s rights protection and fight against domestic violence, carries out propaganda of perversion, spreads pornographic and perverse literature [brochures on sexual and reproductive health among adolescents] all over the country with a few more supporters.” (Extract from highlights of an anti-gender conference, November 12, 2014)

²³ Women’s Resource Center, is a feminist non-governmental organization in Armenia, based in Yerevan, providing services to women (in broad definition of the word) in many different areas, such as social work, psychological and legal free of charge services to domestic and sexual violence survivors, sexual and reproductive health training, gender policy related recommendations and else. The organization is one of the main targets of the anti-gender movement in Armenia. <http://womenofarmenia.org/> (Accessed May 9, 2018)

In these articles it is discussed that feminist ideology and those who are following the latter, are threatful, for the autonomy of heterosexual family based on patriarchal power and established/traditional gender roles. Here, again, what is shown, is that the groups that are considered as “vulnerable populations” (Butler at al., 2016:5), namely feminists in this case, are being resisted and rejected by the anti-gender movement.

The figure below, which is based on the texts I have analyzed, presents the logic in which feminism and “gender” are connected through women’s rights and perversion in Iravunk:

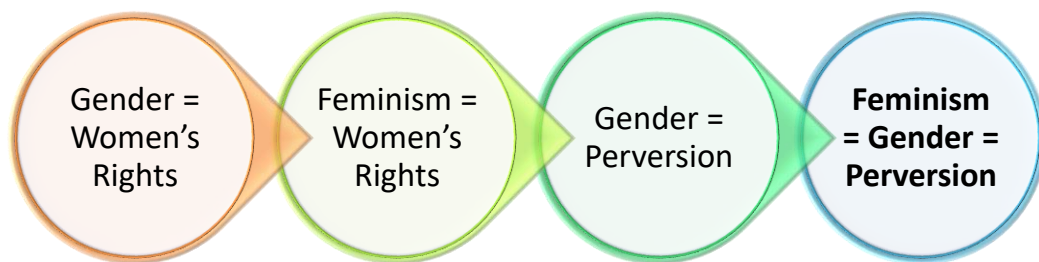


Figure 5. The Relation between Feminism, “Gender” and Perversion

Feminism, along with homosexuality, is a perversion as well, specifically because of a [fair enough] argument that international agencies and some of women’s NGOs organizing public events and workshops in favor of women’s rights while using the word “gender”. Some of the members of this anti-gender mobilization - “urgent anti-gender propaganda”, as they call it - blame local NGOs for presenting “gender” as only

women's [rights] issues and, therefore, distracting the society from the real meaning of "gender".

The fifth concept, "homofascism", is also used by anti-gender mobilization and describes the traces of enforcement of the law and homosexuality upon the government of Armenia, Armenian society and culture. This concept is used to emphasize the threat of the inclusion of the gender component in school curricula. There is a significant tension in the use of fascism that gives a negative context to the law on EREOWM. On the one hand, "gender" is presented as threatful as fascism, which is imposed from unknown foreign places to vanish the Armenian nation with its century-old values. But on the other hand, the anti-gender claims of brutally resisting the propaganda are described as freedom of speech. Moreover, there was a conference, series of workshops and a press conference organized by the anti-gender organizations called "The Manifestations of Homofascism in Armenian Schools" where they discussed the project of one of NGOs working on incorporation of gender component in the course "Social Sciences" in high schools (Iravunk.com, 2014; SWV, 2011).

Interestingly the discourse of fascism in Armenian context has a different background as well. Even though history shows that Armenians fought and had significant contributions in the fight against fascism in the WWII and specifically in the Great Patriotic War from 1941 to 1945, the fascist ideology is more connected with the Armenian Genocide in 1915 in Turkey based on the ethnic cleansing of Armenians. Moreover, in some of the discussion of anti-gender movement in Armenia, one of the arguments against anti-gender and nationalist groups is the confrontation with the fact that, after already more than 100 years, Armenians are ready to clean the nation from those who are not

considered to be Armenian. Some features of fascism can be found also in Armenians' deep and sincere believe that their nation is one of the Arians.

All these meanings create a system of another meaning called "Western value" which is perpetuated in most of the articles. I especially tried to understand if there is a specific context that is given to the West, also because one of my goals is to understand where specifically this danger is coming from.

"...indirectly impose those "European values", such as gender equality and protection of LGBT people's rights." (Extract from highlights of an anti-gender conference, November 12, 2014)

"All this began after accepting different types of behavioral codes [laws and other documents, including the law on EREOWM] from outside." (Extract from the speech of the editor-in-chief of Iravunk, December 19, 2014)

Fortunately, or unfortunately, in this context of western values, I found one interesting phenomenon of pseudo-anti-coloniality (also discussed in the literature review in chapter 1): this "gender danger", as well as the meanings surrounding the concept (Figure 1.) are coming from West, specifically from United States and European Countries that must be fought. Russian side is not that threatening and there are positive references to the ban of so called "gay propaganda" in Russia by the head of the organization called "All-Russian Parental Resistance NGO".

"In Russia, there is an adopted law, according to which gay propaganda among children is prohibited, and guided by this law, it is prohibited to propagate and

promote homosexuality in our country. As a result, they [homosexual people] are suing and are being denied. Unlike Armenia, we do not have such laws that will allow them their activities.” (Extract from an interview with the head of “All-Russian Parental Resistance” NGO, Iravunk, June 3, 2015)

As these two quotes above show, there is an evident pro-Russian discourse in sense that Iravunk shows how good it is in Russia in terms of the laws of restricting and limiting the lives of LGBTQI+ people. Basically, what is happening is that the head of the All-Russian Parental Resistance confronts the journalist by showing how is she surprised that Armenians let their government to adopt such laws. At the same time, there is an evident co-operation between the journalist and herself which is reflected in the formulation of the questions: “How Russia implements the anti-gender propaganda brought up from West?”, “So, basically, there are similarities between Russia and Armenia in these terms?”.

Besides the “West vs. Russia” discourse, there is also an emphasized populism, mixed with nostalgia about the past and purity of the nation (Herzfeld, 1997:2005) all around the data when talking about the people and saving it from those Western values.

“Many international non-governmental organizations funded and operated by western international financial institutions and some state-owned [foreign] funds operating under the name of human rights and democracy in Armenia whose activities undermine the spiritual foundation of the Armenian people.” (Extract from a speech at an anti-perversion conference, November 12, 2014)

Populism in this context is not only reflected in talking from the name of the Armenian people and representing their view but that those who talk about the Armenian people are taking the responsibility of representing the latter. What is interesting, especially in comparison with other regions, such as Central Europe, Hungary and Poland namely, the Armenian case in this anti-west context has its uniqueness. As it is also presented in the first chapter of my work, particularly, regarding the claims of being under threat of the West, if in Hungarian and Polish contexts, for instance, the claims of being under the pressure of Brussels and the EU (Kovats, 2017) can be considered irrelevant (because of the membership to EU), for Armenia these concerns in general can be quite to the point since Armenia still works on its democratization to be part of the EU as well. What is also important to mention here is that in Armenian context, being in between the countries such as Turkey and Azerbaijan, with no diplomatic relations and open borders with them makes Russia a greater strategic partner in cooperation on peaceful/or non-peaceful processes regarding the conflicting areas in the region.

Populism is also reflected in PAP'C's and their allies' (both organizations' and individuals') panic manifested by targeting women's and LGBTQI+ organizations and excluding them from belonging to the Armenian nation because of "gender". All those that are connected to "gender" (are homosexuals, transgenders, feminists or advocates and supporters of gender equality) are a direct threat to the nation that could survive only by taking the path of homogeneity and heterosexuality. Also, those mentioned above are immediately excluded from the right of being called Armenian.

As I have shown in this section, there are several major meanings that "gender" is given in the context of danger. All the meanings and their alternatives are presented as

threatful. But the story does not stop here, that is because in the next section I will try to show how the terminology around “gender” is co-opted and also explain how the danger is spread through “gender vocabulary”.

3.3. Negative Connotations: Co-Optation of Terminology and Spreading the Idea of Danger

In order to understand what are the meanings that anti-gender newspaper is making (or trying to make) through their articles/texts, the quantitative count of the word usage is not enough. For that reason, I have tried to find what are the specific variations that are creating meanings behind the notion of gender in relation to the law on EREOWM in this particular newspaper. In this section I will show what kind of a terminology is used by the newspaper in their texts and what are the concepts that are co-opted and used in negative connotations. Moreover, I will try to understand and show how the idea of “gender as danger” and its negativity are spread through a flipped [or distorted] terminology.

As I have analyzed in the first chapter, the gender discourse in Armenian context has a quite significant history based mostly on Armenian women’s movement, their writings, unique political careers. Further analysis shows that the actual use of the notion of “gender” is relatively new for the Armenian society in sense that even though the civil society organizations were actively using the word in their projects and documentation, the actual incorporation of the latter in state official documentation happened only at the beginning of 2000s (as described in chapter 1). With this in mind, I approach the

analysis of the variations of the use of “gender vocabulary”, as I call it, and its negative connotations.

My analysis of predominantly negative connotations of “gender” shows that the terminology used by Iravunk to describe the notion and the law as a danger, is entirely borrowed or co-opted, to some extent, from the context of promotion of gender equality, women’s rights, LGBTQI+ rights, feminism, gender policy and so on. These and other concepts are used against those who are the active promoters of the law. At the same time, while co-opted, some words are also made up with an evident purpose to humiliate those who consider themselves members of the groups mentioned above.

There is a constant use of the concept of “gender equality”, and sometimes “gender inequality” and “gender [-based] discrimination”. What is interesting regarding this usage is that in relation to the law these concepts are emphasized as the basics for the upcoming danger. Gender equality, particularly, is being referred to so-called “European values” that have direct relations with the rights of LGBTQI+ people. This latter circumstance is interpreted as absolutely alien to the Armenian society and culture, as I have also shown in the previous section.

“NGOs protecting different types of corrupt practices and pollutions/diseases were unable to breed broader gay gangs, create an American sworn fan revolutionary army, and they failed to get an effective political tool from totalitarian sects. Simply, the Armenian people are “wrong people” and they do not want to be tolerant or, more precisely, ‘tolerant’ to different sects and

genderasts.” (Extract from the article of the editor-in-chief of Iravunk, December 10, 2014)

With alike negative meanings, “gender-based violence” is used specially to emphasize that it is a foreign, particularly American (in this context) mechanism and “technology” of “distributed war” (meaning instead of an actual war, “gender pressures” such as laws on gender equality, are used to divide the country and the society).

“Gender law”, together with “law on Gender” and “Gender-Mender Law”, are the other variations through which negativity and threat are spread. It is important to emphasize here that “Gender law” is constantly used in reference to legitimization of “homosexuality and perversion”.

For the most part, any mention of the law indicates its threatful nature and consequences within the narrative of danger and “Genderstan”, which I have discussed in the beginning of this analysis. The perversion legend is also reflected in the variations such as “Feminism-Genderism” and “Gender Perversion”. The latter version is used both as an act or a practice (“degeneration” – “այլասերում”, “aylaserum”), and a phenomenon, an existing fact or a result (“perversion” – “այլասերվածություն”, “aylaservatsutyun”).

The concept of degeneration is also used to describe so-called “gender ideology”, meaning the promotion of gender equality and other related perversions. Namely, “Gender degenerative ideology” variation is used to point out both naivety and evil of feminists, homosexuals, and other supporters of the law. The ideological construction is also discussed in several other regional and country contexts such as Central and

Eastern Europe: Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and other countries. Particularly, most of the policies and studies related to “gender” are considered as “gender ideology” which must be taken down by the government, the [local] church, the society and so forth (Graff, 2014; Kovats, 2017; Peto: 2015)

The mixing of “feminism” and “gender” with homosexuality also occurs when describing the concept and the law as means for “Gender lobbying”, “Gender Propaganda”, “Homosexuality Propaganda”. The latter three versions sometimes are used interchangeably and reflect the same meaning of propagating perversion and, therefore, threat. Both propaganda and lobbying are discussed in relation to the law that opens more possibilities for other legal documents such as the law on Domestic Violence, Anti-Discrimination law and Istanbul Convention to be adopted and signed by the Armenian Government. This is another attempt to put a dangerous connotation on the concept of domestic violence as well. It is especially impressive when a respected church leader talks about that:

“I have had the opportunity to say that I see similarities between the laws on "Gender equality" and "Domestic Violence". In both cases, the emphasis is placed on the rights of women, thus distorting the person. Again, I say this bill is presented in the light of women's rights and nobody says why it is so. For example, if you ask what the bill was on the streets, people would tell that it is about men beating women. And this is the most worrying.” (Extract from interview with a head of church, November 21, 2017)

It is important to emphasize here, and as the quote above shows, that I found direct connections between the laws on EREOWM and Domestic Violence, Anti-Discrimination law, and Istanbul Convention (European Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence). The law on Prevention of Domestic Violence is regarded as “a mother law” for all other sorts of perverse laws. These laws in this context are big threats and prerequisites for legitimization of the system of “Juvenile Justice”.

“Under the pretext of struggling against domestic violence they are trying to adopt the mechanisms of juvenile justice to take away children from their parents, who can later be adopted by homosexual families [abroad] and become a target for sexual exploitation.” (Extract from resolution of Alliance “For the Sake of Family” published in Iravunk.com, December 12, 2014)

In this anti-gender context Juvenile justice is described as a system that is prevailing in European countries (which, according to them, those countries also fight against), based on which children are taken away from their families for many different reasons (Graff, 2014; Nikoghosyan, 2015).

Another important aspect that I highlight in this analysis is that Iravunk is practically famous for its anti-sectarian propaganda, which also explains their attempts to highlight the law on gender equality (and other related documents) as something similar to religious sectarianism and establish a tale of “gender and sectarian censorship” which is imposed on media. By this censorship they mean that they are not able to write about

perversions. In that sense, it is important to mention the attitude of the chief editor of Iravunk.

“Those who were unreasonable, have signed under these codes of conduct and now have no right and opportunity to speak out against such harmful phenomena as sectarianism, gender propaganda, and encroachment on the family's sovereignty.” (Extract from the speech of the editor-in-chief of Iravunk, December 19, 2014)

The evidence of this point is that at several occasions “gender” and sects are combined as targets for “anti-gender resistance”. As I found in this analysis, this “anti” attitude is also spread through the formulations of the questions in their interviews.

“‘Iravunk’ asked the politician how can we fight against sectarian organizations and homosexuals that entered from West and are actively working here? ‘Some laws should be adopted that will prohibit the spread of homosexuality and sectarianism. We must keep our moral image and not to get into adultery’, he answered.” (Extract from interview with a politician, July 25, 2014)

What I would like to point out in this and in several other quotes presented in the further analysis is the way the word “we” is used as a basis of exclusion of some people from the nation. The law itself in several contexts is presented as a “gender attack” on Armenian values and family, which, again, must be fought within the context of “anti-gender propaganda”.

“We must identify and disseminate ideological struggle against all organizations and individuals aiming to implement homosexuality propaganda in Armenia with a gender-degenerative ideology.” (Extract from resolution of Alliance “For the Sake of Family” published in Iravunk, December 12, 2014)

Although the resistance to “gender” is separately discussed further in this chapter, as this quote emphasizes, there must be direct implications of counter propaganda specifically targeting the notion of gender and the law on EREOWM. The attacks mentioned above are also presented as means for “gender oppression” towards the free will of society (“pro-gender” side excluded) to raise their concerns and the freedom of speech.

“Naturally, our weapon is to use such democratic ideas as freedom of expression, which, first of all, will create a public opinion.” (Extract from interview with a member of Alliance “For the Sake of Family, December 19, 2014)

Overall, the co-optation point continues to be evident in further analysis as well, mostly in the negative [or opposite] usage of those terms. Thus, the concept of “gender identity” is used several times to emphasize that the law on EREOWM is a mechanism for further legitimization of gay marriage and juvenile justice system; concepts that are, as I have shown in the earlier analysis, used as synonyms for perversion. This version is also used as “diversity of gender identity” showing the evident anti-multiculturalism with an emphasis on diversity which may create more panic and hatred among the audience specifically within the associations with the “Diversity March” described above (Pressures on Activists, 2013).

As for the gender equality law as European and progressive mechanism, it is also understood and presented sarcastically as “gender innovation” (especially in regard with the Westernization discussed in Chapter 1). The latter is being promoted not only by those mentioned oppressions on freedom of speech but also by “gender lies” about the real meaning of “gender” and by “gender games” (meaning the presumed lies about “gender” and that everything around “gender” is a game) that are played while claiming the re-integration of the word “gender” in the title of the law.

“The concept of "gender" is in all dictionaries, it is a manifestation of the social perception of gender, not the equality of men and women. The Armenian Apostolic Church also expressed its viewpoint. Why do we come back again to something that is so badly discussed in society?” (Extract from the speech of a member of Parliament, June 15, 2015)

Also, as I can show from this quote from the speech of a politician in the former parliament of Armenia, there is a rigidness also in questioning something that appears to be so negatively accepted in the society. These claims for discussion at some point have been shut down at the parliament and the newspaper called it “Gender kaput” (Iravunk.com, 2014), describing the words of one of the members of parliament about the unnecessary use of the word “gender”. This point has a particular significance, in sense that, earlier in the analysis “gender” and “gender propaganda” were referred to homofascism”.

As I have shown in this section there are many variations in which the word “gender” is being used in this newspaper through different genres of news production, such as

interviews, political and conference speech, editorials pieces, and so forth. Having shown that these variations create and deepen the negative connotations of the word, I will now turn to the next section where I will explain in detail who and what are exactly under the danger of “gender”.

3.4. Who and What are Under Danger?

With this analysis I also aimed at understanding who and what particularly are under danger. “Gender” as danger, in direct sense, is being referred to family. The nationalized Armenian family is constantly presented as the major and the most important unit of the Armenian society that is being threatened by foreign (Western, including European and US) values. For instance, the chief editor of Iravunk is eager to point out the danger to family.

“Cutting the chaise, the goal is to approximate to zero the chances of protection of institution of family.” (Extract from the article of the editor-in-chief of Iravunk, December 10, 2014)

In most of the cases, biological and heterosexual families are emphasized although Armenia has a national/state project of foster care for children with no parental care²⁴. Aside from presenting this idea of children being isolated from their parents, the law is being used especially for the argument that children are going to be adopted by homosexual couples.

²⁴ Armenia Undergoes Huge Reforms in Child Protection Sphere: <http://www.mlsa.am/?p=9596>

“...legalize homosexual marriages, taking children away from families and transferring them to so-called shelters, after which these children can become targets for sexual exploitation, and be adopted by homosexual families.” (Extract from highlights of a workshop on incest and pedophilia in EU, March 31, 2015)

As it is becoming evident, children are in extreme danger according to the anti-gender movement representatives. It is assumed that they appear to be under violence and perversion, and under propaganda of direct and indirect suicides even despite their will (Iravunk.com, 2014). “Gender”, as I have shown in the earlier section is linked to pedophilia and is emotionally and affectively referred to children. Discourse of children in Armenian context has both sacred and instrumental characteristics: if there are children involved nothing else matters, they must be protected, clothed and fed. In this specific relation homosexual, transgender and all other people who are described as “gender lobbyists and propagandists” are also a direct threat to family, society, nation through the perverse influence on children.

“Gender” and the law on EREOWM are constructed as “legalization of homosexual marriages” that are, as I have analyzed in the first section, entirely threatful for Armenia and invented for hidden purposes of destroying the national and spiritual value system. In this realm, children are also under direct attack of these hidden meanings and policies. Especially in this context, interestingly, parents’ sanity is also under attack:

“Think for a moment of the sorrow of parents who will see Conchita’s picture in their child’s bedroom. This is a special policy and it is clear where it is coming from.” (Extract from an interview with a politician, May 16, 2014)

In this case parents' discourse is intertwined with those of children and shame. In the Armenian cultural context, the children's duty is to be "deserving" children of their parents which means being heterosexual and being able to provide their parents when they get older. In this anti-gender context, when the male is expected to be the breadwinner and the female must be the child bearer, it is becoming something like a social contract that has also a component of unquestionable sexual contract (Pateman, 1988).

For the most part men are the fundamental figures of the Armenian family in terms of protection in its wider understanding.

"After all, men in Armenia are quite manly and are used to protect their faith, national traditions, families and homeland." (Extract from an interview with the head of "All-Russian Parental Resistance" NGO, June 3, 2015)

Family, as one of the core units that is under danger of "gender", includes also [men's] normative masculinity and manliness (Nagel, 1998:246). Men, in this case become the most prominent figure of salvation of the people (Mosse, 1985; Christian, 2016). Also, men's mission is opposed to women: women are presented in a more regressive manner with little abilities to reason and understand the real danger.

"Women's brains are infringed and perverted with that garbage called "violation of rights", and most women from bases and protectors will transform into destroyers of family." (Extract from the article of the editor-in-chief of Iravunk, December 10, 2014)

This kind of a split of women and men into different and opposing camps reflects also the overall attitudes about women's capacities in Armenian society. For instance, most of the Armenian population believes that men are better leaders than women, men must do any kind of job in order to provide the family, and men have all the capacities to be prioritized in case of job scarcity (GBS, 2015). In Anne McClintock's words it also reflects the idea of the gendered time of the nation. By gendered nation time she meant this exact split between men and women in the nation as progressive (men) and regressive (women) figures (McClintock, 1993). Moreover, in these men-women relations women, are subjugated and men are presented as the main impersonation of the nation, as classic manifestation of nationalism, which reflect the notion of patriarchy in Heidi Hartman's definition "united in their shared dominance over women" (Hartmann, 1981; Waetjen, 2001).

As the family is going to be destroyed, so the nation and the country. Thus, the state is presented mostly in the context of nation-state:

"That is why all these "gender games" are hitting national ideas first. It can bring nothing but ruining families, and, therefore, the country. I am sure." (Extract from an interview with the head of "All-Russian Parental Resistance" NGO, June 3, 2015)

As I have shown in Chapter 1, when analyzing the literature on anti-genderism, family's presentation is indeed important for the nation's "proper" reproduction, especially in a heteronormative family, the idea of which is opposed to homosexuality and progressive

feminist ideas. In addition, “gender” and the assumptions on its different meanings are used to confront “genderism”, “gender lobbyism” and “gender propaganda”.

An important aspect of negativity has been articulated in the creation of enemies as well. The nation-state is under threat of “gender” because Armenian feminists are cooperating with Turkish feminists, so they are “double/twice enemies”. This is, perhaps, one of the easiest aspect to tackle in this context because of the historical fights and conflicts between Armenia and Turkey.

“LGBT community of Armenia cooperates with LGBT community in Turkey. Moreover, last year LGBT community called for forgiveness towards Turks, to forget the Genocide.” (Extract from press conference with the head of PAPC, June 13, 2015)

It is important to mention here, especially in terms of promoting nationalist aspirations. that the quote presented above appeared under two ideologically similar but discursively different titles: “LGBT community of Armenia cooperates with LGBT community in Turkey”, appeared on June 13 of 2015, and version “Faggots of Armenia cooperate with Turk faggots”, appeared June 16 of 2015.

Moreover, there is also an emphasis on national, ethnic and geographical identity:

“...the fact that it spread even in the Caucasus, among most traditional layers, is just astonishing. This is evil, organized by some forces, this is just an explosion from within. I think people do not understand what they are talking about, so that

they fight against such phenomena.” (Extract from an interview with the head of “All-Russian Parental Resistance” NGO, June 3, 2015)

Here, again, the idea of “gender” being imported and incorporated from outside is perpetuated without any reasonable explanation. Importantly, this quote above shows again the split between pro-Russian and anti-European/western discourses through presentation of the Armenian situation and, why not, identity, alike to the one in Russia rather than in Europe. Basically, the loss of identity in the Armenian context is intertwined with its history of being conquered and divided into parts and being spread around as diaspora. In this case, as it was in case of the definition of the law on EREOWM, the idea of having fluid rather than fixed identities is problematic for the nation-state and its “proper future” (Calhoun, 1997). Accordingly, the nation is presented through the nation-state and national identity. More importance is given to especially Armenian national and spiritual values:

“The Frontline of Protection of National Values’ fights against many of those vicious phenomena, specifically sects and supporters of “gender law.” (Extract from the speech of the head of “The Frontline of Protection of National Values” at a conference on protection of national and spiritual values, December 13, 2014)

Basically, there are organizations created that are aimed at defending the Armenian national and spiritual value system since “gender” is a force and a threat from outside. The loss of national identity is tied with biologically assigned gender identity and strictly normalized heterosexuality, and the latter is discussed in the realm of gender roles and

identity as well. The main mechanism for this forced loss of ethnic or national identity is the law on EREOWM.

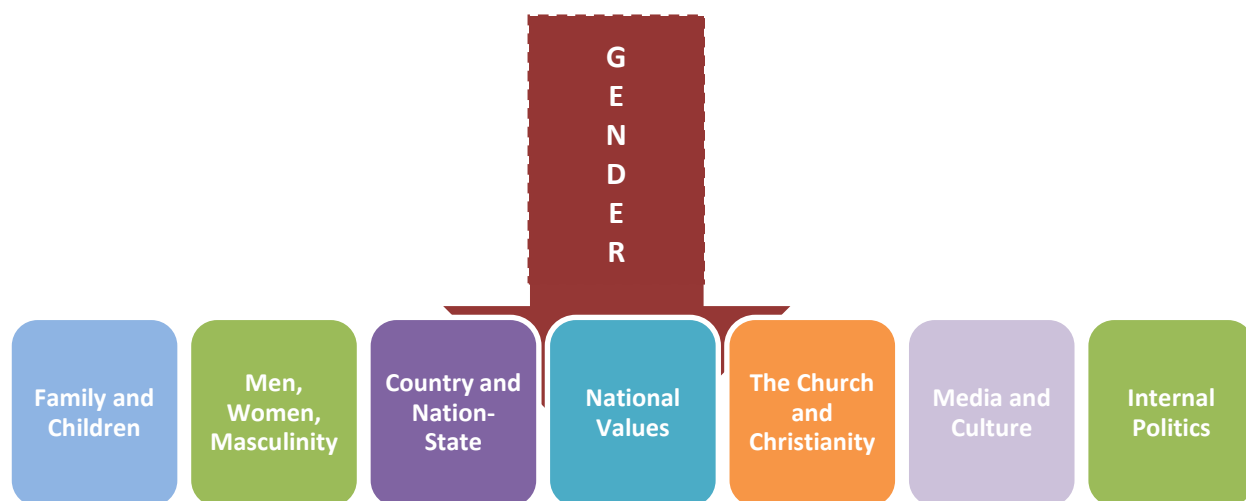


Figure 6. Understanding who and what are under danger

As further analysis has shown, the country, the nation and the people are intertwined with Christian religion.

“I, simply, do not understand how Armenia, as an ancient Christian country, that believes that homosexuality is a deadly sin, and it is written in the Bible, can endure it.” (Extract from an interview with the head of “All-Russian Parental Resistance” NGO, June 3, 2015)

“Western-based sects are functioning in Armenia, with the goal of widespread proselytism²⁵ and the neutralization of the role of the Armenian Apostolic Church

²⁵ “Proselyte” is a person who has converted from one opinion, religion, or party to another. Late Middle English: via late Latin from Greek prosēluthos ‘stranger, convert’, from prosēluth-, past stem of

in the life of the Armenian people.” (Extract from highlights of an anti-gender conference, November 12, 2014)

The Christian identity of Armenian nation is a historical fact, according to which Armenians were first to adopt Christianity in 301 A.C. The devils in this non-Christian “genderism”, spiced with connections to sectarianism discussed in the previous section, are threatening the church as well. Interestingly, Christian West is also dangerous for specifically the Armenian Church which also has excluding connotations. The latter circumstance can also be linked to the fact that apostolic church in Armenia regards itself as unique and different from Catholic one which, at the same time, does not hinder their references to the Pope and Vatican papers mentioning gender and feminism (Kane, 2018; Kovats, 2017).

Another unit that is under attack of “gender” is the internal politics of the country. A Russian political expert’s words, again, are somehow an evidence of the biased anti-Europeanness.

“The EEU has never set itself a task to interfere in the domestic affairs of the states, if any, then they refer only to the review of customs services in the context of creating a free market. Meanwhile, we see examples of countries (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova) that have signed an agreement with the EU. The signing of the agreement is negatively linked to the domestic political changes in those countries... Simply, I do not understand why the European Union is so principal,

proserkhesthai ‘approach’. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/proselyte> (Last Accessed May 12, 2018)

for example, on legalization of gay marriages.” (Interview with a Russian political expert from, July 28, 2017)

In this quote on discussion of the influence on the internal politics of Armenia, once again, the Europe/West vs Russia discourse is shown especially in the context of the membership to EEU with positive outcomes. Also, countries mentioned by this Russian expert, Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, are obviously those that have somehow distanced themselves from Russian influence and intervention into domestic [geo]politics. This quote is also important in sense that it is creating even more division and create something like imperial protagonist and antagonist play. So, basically, there is again an evidence of pseudo-anti-colonialism as discussed earlier.

As it is evident from the quotes above this threat is not coming from west only but also being played out through the non-governmental organizations in the country. Besides, the internal politics includes also education, both secondary and higher education systems. During an anti-gender conference organized by PAPC and nationalist organizations it was discussed that “workshops and studies are implemented in Armenian State higher education institutions that have only one purpose: indirectly impose those “European values”, such as gender equality and protection of LGBT people’s rights, onto the Armenian society and citizens of Armenia that are alien and unacceptable to our family and sacred value system.” (Iravunk.com, 2014). The newspaper itself once again is condemning the fact that anything about “gender” can appear in the sphere of education, and especially higher education. This perversion of higher education system is again happening through the outside support. Another important point that this quote highlights is the evidence of showing “gender” (and all

gender-related processes and phenomena) as having nothing in common with Armenian history and society.

Moreover, the NGOs working in the spheres of women's and LGBTQI+ rights are becoming threats for other media and culture through reinforcement of different laws and conventions that are direct restriction for freedom of expression.

“We condemn the persistent persecution of the above-mentioned organizations against journalists, cultural figures, media, and politicians who aim to eliminate the right to freedom of speech, press and expression in Armenia.” (Extract from highlights of an anti-gender conference, November 13, 2014)

Here, again the discussion leads into direction of Western financial support that hides geopolitical intentions behind. Some of the projects on gender issues that are mostly financed by foreign, specifically European and American, funds and implemented by local NGOs are targeting also the issue of gender-sensitivity of media in the country.

Clearly, the hate speech as well is presented as freedom of speech and chief editor of Iravunk manipulates with it in a very interesting manner:

“...when mass media is afraid calling sects and homosexuals what they are, when they are afraid to openly discuss that any encroachment against family is a meanness and a genocide”. (Extract from the article of the editor-in-chief of Iravunk, December 10, 2014)

In this context, in order to protect themselves from these threatful NGOs that are reportedly trying to limit the freedoms of Iravunk, the newspaper shows how their right

to freedom of speech is being oppressed which, once again supports my argument about flipped and co-opted vocabulary, since freedom of speech initially could be considered fundamental for especially LGBTQI+ people to (re)claim their human rights.

In this section I tried to show who and what are under the danger of “gender” according to Iravunk. As it became clear there are several crucial figures of society, such as family, men, children, and church that are under this danger. Moreover, according to Iravunk and the materials they are published in the newspaper there are significant and important societal components that are under danger too mostly because of the western interventions, NGOs and activists co-operating with those organizations. In the next and final section, I will try to show how Iravunk sees the ways of fighting the danger of “gender” in different directions.

3.5. Anti-Gender Strategies to Fight the Danger

One of the final goals of this analysis was to understand what are the strategies of the anti-gender movement members to fight “gender danger”? Eventually, it appears, that they not only have strategies to fight it, but they also have an action plan on how to combat and protect everything that was described in previous sections. Thus, several nationalist NGOs, Church representatives, and individuals formed an alliance called “For the Sake of Family” (The Alliance) to protect the Armenian national and spiritual values, again, based on a strict exclusionary use of “we”.

“We, sisters and brothers, children and grandchildren, fathers and mothers, have united our national identity to prevent "gender" attacks by local and international organizations and individuals against our families and the spiritual-national value system.” (Extract from the Convention of the Alliance published in Iravunk, December 12, 2014)

This quote particularly shows how those that are being attacked by “gender” must be mobilized to protect these national attributes. In a similar vein, another quote presented below shows the ultimate urgency of that mobilization for the sake of these values and the value system.

“We have united FOR THE SAKE OF restoring and preserving the Armenian national image, family, national value system, FOR THE SAKE OF the right of our children to be raised in traditional families.” (Caps are as in the original) (Extract from the Convention of the Alliance published in Iravunk, December 12, 2014)

In this particular quote an emphasized use of “we” is referred to both the Armenian nation (“pro-genders” excluded) and the alliance members themselves as the core of the fighters against “gender”.

The strategies, as I have also shown throughout my analysis, are mostly rhetorical with predominantly populist connotations. The action plan is established or developed in a more outcome-driven direction. There are two major sections of the Plan: 1) Legal or legislative area, and 2) the area of Propaganda. The legal area includes further works on changes in the law on EREOWM, and several new legislative initiatives to propose

the Government and National Assembly of Armenia. The propaganda area is based more on calls and plans for united actions on local and international levels. Below I present some of those actions that I consider directly relevant to and significant for my analysis.

In the legal area, once again, family, children and other actors are presented as under danger, and the propositions are directed towards their protection. Most of the ideas are repeated but they are presented in specific actions.

“To propose the Government and the national Assembly of Armenia a new legislative initiative banning homosexual propaganda among children.” (Ibid)

Discourses such as “healthy” and “harmonic” are also prevalent in these strategies. In the quote below the legal changes and initiatives are referred to the limitation of the information for the children, which to some extent, if not entirely, contradicts to the claims of Iravunk on freedom of speech and expression.

“To adopt a law on ‘Protection of children, their health, their holistic and harmonic development from threatful information’.” (Ibid)

This “threatful information” concerns not only the “gender” itself, but anything that can be related to it, including the sexual and reproductive health that feminist NGOs are tackling in their works. In some of the specific cases there are narratives that are built around laws and future developments that need urgent reaction.

“To prevent the adoption of the law on “Domestic Violence” which is the mother law of juvenile justice and the real purpose of which is the distortion of traditional

foundations of family, increase of number of divorces, transfer of children to shelters, their sexual exploitation and adoption of these children by homosexual families.” (Ibid)

“To prevent the legislative initiative of the draft law on "Anti-Discrimination", as this law also enshrines legislative provisions for the different persons with different sexual orientation and gender identity in all social areas.” (Ibid)

Both quotes that are extracts from the strategic action plan of the Alliance show the constant work they plan to do in order to prevent the adoption of laws on domestic violence and anti-discrimination. Back then it was a plan, but in November 2017 during a public hearing of the law on domestic violence, organized by the former government of Armenia, the same people crashed the meeting with aggressive exclamations that this law must be prevented as the cores of perversions and fall of the Armenian family (Lazaryan, 2017; 1in.am LIVE, 2017).

On the other hand, there are also positive (depending on the context) actions that are being proposed. In order to prevent these children’s adoption by homosexual families and to protect children the Alliance has a suggestion regarding families with large families with many children.

“To develop a package of changes in the law for large families with many children for their full state and social support.” (Ibid)

What I mean by positive in this context is that the suggestion to provide with better services the families with many children is a positive and acceptable step. Nevertheless,

when it comes to investigating why it is suggested and what are the reasons the Alliance is so concerned about these families it appears that the background is the prevention of adoption of Armenian children by homosexual couples.

The discussion then turns to abortions and family planning. Despite the fact of existing abortion law, the Alliance suggests its own version of banning the abortion on constitutional level.

“To develop and legislatively fix the law on “Abortion ban”; also fix this reality in the Constitution.” (Ibid)

This quote about banning abortions that I presented above has a particular importance for the Armenian context. For the last couple of years Armenia has been on top of the list in abortions implemented based on “son preference” or prenatal sex-selection (Voskanyan and Hovhannisyan, 2016; Shahnazaryan and Hovhannisyan, 2016; Shahnazaryan and Hovhannisyan, 2017, UNFPA, 2012). In 2016, the ministry of Health presented several changes in the law on Abortions and suggested to include an article in the latter to forbid the abortions at all. Fortunately, after many discussions with NGOs (also initiated by international organizations) it has been cancelled and only one article prohibiting specifically the “sex selection” has been added (which has other problems in itself that are not directly relevant to my research).

Overall, the reproduction of the nation as an army and the women’s role in these processes (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1989) are obvious facts for Armenia, especially regarding the conflict around Nagorno-Karabakh” the country and the nation need soldiers. These developments around the discussion of abortion are also tied with the

deeply nationalist project of the former government called “Nation-Army” that basically granted strict gender roles to the members of society²⁶. Unsurprisingly, in this set of roles women are considered as “son suppliers for the army”.

Family planning is also somehow getting importance but in a way that is not familiar to the western contexts. For instance, family planning in this context is seen as a strategy to teach, socialize children to and strengthen their dedication to the national and spiritual values through different forms of non-formal education.

“To promote necessary spiritual values and knowledge for the formation and strengthening of families through seminars, lectures, publications and other types of public activities.” (Ibid)

Apart from that, the field of formal education is also important to reform towards more traditional and religious curricula.

“To promote real reforms in educational system since the quality and goals of today’s education are not directed to teaching youth the specifics of Armenian history, culture, national-spiritual values and other foundational components, in order to establish precise ideas, to raise them in patriotic manner, and to develop whole and true worldview of pupils and students.” (Ibid)

Something that has been partially accomplished refers to the educational system and curricula. In the last few years schools have started to teach the history of Armenian church as a mandatory course. In this case there is a strict worldview and life regime

²⁶ “Nation-Army-2017” Conference, Yerevan, Armenia <http://www.mil.am/en/news/4723>

that must be promoted especially among young people. This last point, as it appears to me, is very much related to the actions promoted by the Nazi-German government in the beginning of 20th century with particular emphasis on transfer of acceptable knowledge and development of particular worldview in the schools, promoting mental strength through sports for young people, and so forth (Mosse, 1985).

More actions are proposed also on organizational and institutional levels. These actions have quite worrying formulations, at some point reminding the recent events in Chechnya, for example, such as murders of and concentration camps for homosexual people (Rainsford, 2017 for BBC; Beard, 2017 for The Guardian; “Chechnya opens world's first concentration camp for homosexual men since Hitler”, 2017).

“To reveal and fight ideologically against all those organizations and persons who tend to implement homosexual propaganda with degenerative and pervasive gender ideology.” (Ibid)

This quote, again, shows the absolute rejection of the people from the society and the Armenian nation, which is presented in quite aggressively radical manner, in a sense that a group of people is rejecting another group of people from the notion of “proper nation”.

There are also demands for more freedom for mass media to promote patriotism among society.

“To demand mass media to promote spiritual upbringing, to hold and spread the Armenian culture and spiritual and national value system.” (Ibid)

Basically, what is happening in this quote is that the Alliance, also because Iravunk is a great supplier of space for their publicity, is suggesting mass media to regain their function or role of knowledge production and direct it towards teaching and reproducing the national culture and spiritual values (as, perhaps, during Soviet times).

As for the area of propaganda, the actions remain more rhetorical based on hate speech and calls upon united efforts towards organizations and individuals somehow concerned with gender issues.

“To cooperate with international organizations dealing with the preservation and protection of family and national values.” (Ibid)

Rhetorical emphasis is also put on the preservation of the family and traditional ideas and values. On the level of propaganda, there is a shift from local actions to more international mobilization. The mobilization includes organizations and individuals not only from Russia but also from Europe that are involved in the active fight against “gender propaganda” as well.

Finally, there are calls for actions towards people who can be considered as threatful and dangerous in different dimensions.

“National reprimand and neglect should be manifested towards the principles of gender propaganda and gender equality, homosexual "marriages", child abuse, family planning, juvenile justice, mass media propagating domestic violence, persons and organizations disseminating and protecting perversion in Armenia,

defenders protecting international norms that are alien and unacceptable to Armenians.” (Ibid)

The quote that I present above is to some extent summarizes the topics that I covered in this section, namely the prevention of so called gender propaganda, fight against legalization of homosexual marriages, prevention of child abuse in sense the abuse is teaching them to be tolerant and respectful towards diversity, and, of course, fight against the organizations advocating for gender equality and feminism.

The strategies and actions, and the plan in general, that I presented in this final section of my analysis show both seriousness and nonsense of the ideas to fight against “gender”. In any case these actions are not only written down but also being implemented daily that are not only creating constraints in people’s work but also becoming threatful for their personal lives and interactions²⁷.

3.6. Summary of Findings

“Gender” in Iravunk online newspaper is systematically presented with negative connotations, in fact, it is a danger and a threat for the Armenian nation and family. The

²⁷ One of the cases of this kind of personal and professional attack on a person is Lara Aharonian’s case who is an Armenian activist repatriated to Armenia from Canada more than 10 years ago. She and her colleague Gohar Shahnazaryan established NGO called Women’s Resource Center Armenia (WRCA), that was mentioned in one of the quotes as well. WRCA, as a feminist organization is one of the main targets of the anti-gender movement in Armenia. Lara Aharonian, as an activist and a human rights defender known as raising many issues regarding gender and overall politics in Armenia, also a mother of four (that could perfectly fit he into the “proper” Armenian cultural expectations) was and is constantly receiving death threats and harassing emails and texts on social media. Recently she found out that one of the members of the anti-gender movement printed out her photo and is going to high-schools to warn the directors and teachers that she is a threat and a foreign agent, and all her attempts to meet and talk to teachers and students must be rejected by the schools. This was based on a project on Sexual and Reproductive Health Education project that WRCA is implementing and I, myself, am involved in that project. The full consent to introduce the short story and the situation was given by Lara Aharonian.

notion of gender has also different meanings: from homosexuality, pedophilia, and fascism, to women's rights and feminism (mixed discourses of "post-blur" times as Appadurai mentions in his article, 1991). "Gender" is presented as predominantly a Western value that is a special foreign plan for undermining other non-Western national identities, including the Armenian.

As it became evident most of the terminology that is used against the supporters of the law on EREOWM, is co-opted from gender equality and gender policy context. This anti-gender newspaper perpetuates the fear from "unknown" or "unclear", in this case the notion of gender and its meanings by creating negative associations with that particular vocabulary and by falsifying the information about the notion of gender and LGBTQI+ rights, and those who are occupied in these fields.

Thus, what is shown with this fear and flipped vocabulary is that some significant societal units and cultural values, such as family, children, masculinity/manliness, church, and the nation with its traditional culture are under threat/danger of "gender". Those who are under danger are called upon to fight this vicious phenomenon and against those who are supporting and promoting pervasive laws, gender equality and feminism. For that reason, this newspaper highlighted and published a strategic plan of actions developed by an Alliance for saving the Armenian national and spiritual values. Overall, the notion of gender and those who use the "gender vocabulary" are under systematic attacks of both anti-gender movement and Iravunk in particular.

Conclusion

Throughout this research I have shown how the notion of gender is being used in the anti-gender context in an anti-gender and anti-feminist newspaper in Armenia. Following the 2013 adoption of the law on Gender Equality an anti-gender backlash has started in Armenia that throughout years established itself as a movement. What I did in this research was trying to understand how a particular newspaper in Armenia has contributed both in the processes of meaning-making around “gender” and expanding the boundaries of anti-gender movement in Armenia.

While in the analytical part I have had focus on Armenian context only it did not stop me from the reflection on the situation there from the perspective of the literature on anti-genderism in Western and Central Europe as core geographical areas of studies on anti-genderism. My reflections were not only directed from theory to practice but also in vice versa direction: I did not mean to only contribute to the global anti-gender movement literature and studies but also to understand and find the traces of the Armenian unique experiences of anti-genderism. It was not, of course, easy to find out unique attributes in the Armenian context also because of the nature of anti-gender movements that are being triggered having political purposes of scapegoating in their core.

Having the main research question in mind and constructing the entire thesis in accordance to the latter I have answered to questions that I have posed at the very beginning of the journey: what are the meanings that Iravunk is making around the notion of gender in relation to the law on equal rights and equal opportunities of women

and men in Armenia? How the negative connotations find their place in this entire process? How the “gender vocabulary” is being flipped into something alien to the Armenian culture? And What are the strategies to resist the danger of “gender” in Armenia?

As several outcomes presented in chapter 3 show “gender” in Iravunk newspaper and in the anti-gender context is tied with the definition of the notion and with the law mentioned above and is presented mainly as danger. Here is where my first argument was approved stating that “gender” was mainly presented in negative light and with negative connotations. These danger and negativity are spread around in the newspaper through the exact flipped “gender vocabulary” that is being used by “pro-gender” representatives in their everyday activities such as gender equality, gender-based discrimination, and so on. The discourse of danger involves also other discourses such as feminism, pedophilia, homofascism, western value.

Apart from negativity there are several core units and attributes of society such as nation, family and church that are under direct threat of “gender”. Moreover, the nation and its masculine representation are apparently also under danger because of the definition of “gender” in the law stating that the latter is more a social attribute that can be changed. “Gender” is also dangerous for the internal politics of the country in terms of foreign, and mostly western, forces trying to interfere in and affect the country’s political decisions. Finally, there are coalitions (alliance, in this case) built by the anti-gender movement representatives that call upon the Armenian people to mobilize in the promotion of anti-gender resistance in legal and rhetorical directions.

The scope of this study has been limited in that it is only a case study of a newspaper that openly fights against “gender” in Armenia. In contrast, it gives an understanding of how the newspaper itself manipulates the use of notions and how it uses its function of meaning-making and knowledge production. Despite the limits, it is worth mentioning that this research is unique in sense that it involves a systematic analysis of the notion gender in the Armenian context.

In terms of contribution, with this study I have aimed to add to the scholarship of anti-gender movements in Armenia and other countries particularly in analyzing the representation of the notion of gender in news media. Moreover, I have aimed at contributing to the study of nationalism in anti-genderism by tackling the nationalism in the Armenian context because it highlights both similarities and differences in somewhat similar and somewhat different geographical and political contexts, histories and experiences with post-socialist part of Europe. Though I have not been able to do so, in the future research it would be interesting to examine how the meanings explored in this research are reflected in the social cognitions of the Armenian society. This could contribute to the studies of perceptions and gender attitudes of the Armenian society in both quantitative and qualitative aspects. Another important area of study after this research could be in terms of body and impersonation of “gender” which I have already mentioned in the research as well. Finally, as my analysis has shown, especially because of the specific political purposes of anti-gender movements, it is quite difficult to find local specificities of anti-genderism which is another important area which is worth to be explored.

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