



January 2018

The Case Of The Missing Girl: Exploring Sex-Selective Abortion Through Ethnodrama

Hamzat Amoussa Koriko

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THE CASE OF THE MISSING GIRL: EXPLORING SEX-SELECTIVE
ABORTION THROUGH ETHNODRAMA

by

Hamzat Amoussa Koriko

Bachelor of Arts, North Dakota State University, 2010

Master of Arts, University of North Dakota, 2012

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Grand Forks, North Dakota

August

2018

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This dissertation, submitted by Hamzat Koriko in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

Name of Chairperson

Name of Committee member

This dissertation is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all the requirements of the School of Graduate Studies at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.

Grant McGimpsey
Dean of the School of Graduate Studies

Date

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Department Educational Foundations and Research

Degree Doctor of Philosophy

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Hamzat Koriko

05/15/2018

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the members of my Advisory Committee for their guidance and support during my doctorate journey at the University of North Dakota. I also would like to thank all my friends who granted me access to information I needed to complete this dissertation. I am particularly grateful to

Kristine Serobyán who helped with the translation from Armenian into English.

ABSTRACT

The study uses Ethnodrama to address sex-selective abortion in Armenia. Ethnodrama uses an ethnographic method of data collection, then presents the findings as a dramatic script or performance. The urgency and the sensitivity of the topic informed the choice of using Ethnodrama over conventional research methodologies. The study gathered data from three primary sources: government databases, international organizations working with non-governmental organizations, and ethnographic fieldwork. The fieldwork consisted of taking notes on daily observations during classroom activities, a personal journal on conversations and interaction with community members, stories from community members, informal questions and answers sessions, and a small ethnographic survey. The information gathered from these three sources are used to write a play with composite characters. Drama as the presentation of research findings is a way to insulate participants' privacy and anonymity, as well as to embody the results and reach the audience at a more than just a dispassionate cognitive level.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of gender relations differ from one culture to another. In nearly all cultures, women and men must confront societal practices that undermine their ability to access opportunities such as education or good paying employment and right living conditions. In “developing” countries such as Armenia, Brenner (2003) noted that the “Economic insecurity and impoverishment, exposure to toxins, degradation of water, high infant and maternal mortality rates, forced migration, increased hours spent in paid and unpaid work are only some of the indicators of women's burdens worldwide” (p. 25). Because gender issues are woven into cultural practices through gender roles and gender performances, there are often disagreements in the “set of beliefs that problematizes gender inequality” (Devault, 1999, p. 27). Yaa Asantewaa Reed (2001) noted that “we are all trapped in a patriarchal system, but it is the way in which we deal with those gender issues that makes us different” (p. 169). Early attempts to problematize women’s issues has led to westernization of woman affairs, based on the needs and aspirations of Western white middle-class women.

Voices have been raised against the construction of the universal woman’s condition based on Western beliefs in favor of culture-specific feminisms. Holledge & Tompkins (2000) noted that one specific form of feminisms, “is not necessarily transferable to other cultures, [because] most other cultures have ways of categorising according to sex” (p. 5). Some have criticized the tyranny of the White middle-class women who, according to Aston & Harris (2006) and referring to bell hooks, “had failed to attend to matters of race and class privilege” (p.7). For bell hooks (2000), “from the onset, reformist white women with class privilege were

well aware that the power and freedom they wanted was the freedom they perceived men of their class enjoying” (p. 103). Issues of slavery and colonization were of no concern for this feminism. Citing Fennell and Arnot (2009), Chilisa & Ntseane (2010) wrote that “the main argument, from the vantage of non-Western feminists, is that hegemonic Western gender theory and gender research ‘recreate its own knowledge in distant geographies in its own image’” (p. 617). Feminisms all over the world may share the same concerns and urgency in addressing questions about how to make women and girls’ lives better in a patriarchal structure, but they differ in the ways they address the issues based on culture and resources available.

Transnational feminisms believe that Feminism as the movement that problematizes women’s issues does not require a unique way of addressing these questions to be a universal movement. Appiah (1992) noted that the universalism, as a social phenomenon, must be understood from a pluralistic perspective, not as “Eurocentric hegemony posing as universalism” (p. 58). The relevance of feminist discourse analysis as a methodology will gain universal credibility when it begins to live up to its goal as scientific praxis, which attempts to address issues of the place of women within the women’s cultural vantage points. Hogan (2000) notes that “Respect for different culture is not an antithesis of universalism, but a consequence of universalism” (p. xviii). According to Chilisa & Ntseane (2010), a brand of Western feminisms, “has tended to reduce women and girls’ experiences to the categories of ‘victim’ and ‘other’” (p. 617). Some feminists note that Western feminisms through global and international organizations like the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been trying to set the agenda of what a feminist discourse. Feminist discourse is defined as “a political perspective on gender, concerned with demystifying the interrelationships of gender, power and ideology in discourse” (Lazar, 2007, p. 144). But the concerned feminists fear the idea that this feminist

discourse should be from the capitalistic point of view, because for these international corporations, economic power may be the answer to women's issues.

Questions are being raised as to whether Western feminism paradigms and methodologies promoted by capitalistic and neoliberal views are improving or worsening women's lives in "developing" countries. Neoliberals believe in free markets and economic growth to achieve human progress and development. For feminist scholars like Esi Dogbe and Johanna Brenner, the approaches based just on economic power are exacerbating women's poor conditions in rural areas of "developing" countries. Indeed, Dogbe (2002) observed that "In Africa, structural adjustment programmes" founded by the WB and the IMF, "oppressive cultural practices and widening socio-economic inequities, have had a far-reaching negative impact on the lives of women" (p. 85). The reason for this dysfunction is the failure of the Eurocentric capitalistic feminist ideologies to recognize that non-Western women are not voiceless, powerless, and do not need modernity and emancipation as defined within Western realities. The failure of the neoliberal approach spearheaded by The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund has led to a worsening of women's situations. Brenner (2003) noted that, "Their failure to deliver on the promised benefits of 'free-market' policies has spurred the growth of religious fundamentalist political movements that target feminism and challenge governmental power" (p.26). Often, the result of that failure is a situation in which "National governments respond to these movements with both political repression and accommodation, primarily at women's expense -- for example, ceding local civil authority to religious courts and leaders" Brenner (2003, p. 26) added.

On Gender in the Republic of Armenia

An Overview of Gender Relations in Armenia

Western feminist views in Armenia, a “developing” country in the South Caucasus region, have similarly been challenged by that country’s women. Much like in Africa, Armenian feminists have questioned the viability and appropriateness of the Western feminist’s approaches that are being implemented in their country. As the first Christian nation in the world, some high-profile Armenians see the implementation of the gender equality as an attempt to turn their country into a pagan country and undermine their Christian identity. For instance, one of the most outspoken clergy members on Armenian television, Hayr Komitas, stated that he was against (still is) the gender equality law, proclaiming that, “This decision is immoral; it is not only against the will of God but also nature” (Armenianweekly, 2016). Other Armenian feminists, who work with international organizations that are backing the Western feminist’s views through the Armenian culture, find themselves in precarious situations where they struggle to uphold their Armenian culture and yet, implement the neoliberal feminist’s approach. The gender situation in Armenia can be summarized by this statement from Brenner (2003) who stated that, “organizations that have emerged to defend women of the working class and the rural and urban poor find themselves caught in a contradictory field of power relations defined by three contesting forces: national states, religious fundamentalist movements, and the global centers managing the neo-liberal agenda (p.25).

The gender relations in Armenia are complex and unique to a certain degree at educational levels. There are more women with college degrees than men. The UNICEF census (retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/armenia_statistics.html#117), shows that, in 2012, the net attendance ratio was 66.9 for male and 75.8 for females. The absence of boys in

school is not getting better. It is obvious to the point that, the Let Girls Learn (now known as Girls Education and Empowerment Fund) project initiated by Michelle Obama did not make sense when it was first introduced into Armenia through the Peace Corps in 2015. If Armenia has such a high rate of educated women, why is it that they are still living in a male dominated country?

The Soviet era Armenia. The concept of gender equality and equal opportunity and access to the job had been upheld until the creation of independent Armenia in 1991, according to some anecdotes. During that time, women had the same opportunities as the men, according to one Armenian worker from the Peace Corps Office in Yerevan. Teachers from Shinuhayr Secondary School, where I teach English as Peace Corps Volunteers, tell anecdotes about how, during the Soviet era, there were more well-paying jobs than there were people living in Armenia, and that, it was a crime not to work. For instance, the Biology teacher told me that, when a police officer ran into a young person, walking around during working hours, the police must stop and question the person on why she was not at work. But this situation came at a considerable cost for religious groups like Armenians. People were discouraged to spend time on the religious matter, and in the case of Armenia, some Churches were transformed into a parking lot or places where local stored the agricultural goods, like the case of the Tatev Monastery, according to Sabrina Papazian (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rbBuNcVQx8&t=485s>). The Soviet Union leadership gave a very limited power to churches. And in 1929, the Soviet Union enacted a law regulating religious activities with a provision that,

required religious associations to register and defined the criteria that be used to determine the status of a religious organization. Thus, religious organizations were given

little or no legal status, which means the following: some of them were allowed to exist (thought their activity was limited), while the majority were called illegal

(Retrieved from SHS Web of Conferences, 28, 2016)

As the first Christian nation in the world, these restrictions on the religious freedom did not please the Armenian Church authorities. Therefore, as Corley (2008) noted, “Following the difficult years of the 1930s, the Armenian Church—headed by the acting Catholicos Kevork Chorecchyan—was able to use the outbreak of the war with Nazi Germany on 22 June 1941 to regain its position as a vital part of Armenia society” (p. 90). And soon after 1990, when Armenia got its independence, they made a priority to reclaim their religious values thus returned to its Christian and patriarchal beliefs. The revival of religious part of the culture has impacted the gender relation and the place of men and women in the society. In their report, World Bank researchers noted that “Although a larger share of young women relative to young men is enrolled in tertiary education, women and men specialize in different subject and fields of study” (World Bank, 2016). During the Soviet era, it was noted that the literacy rate of Armenians was 100% for both girls and boys (<http://www.tacentral.com/education.asp>). This gender-based tradition that defines modern Armenia, one may argue, started after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which saw a quick return to the patriarchal society based on ancient Armenian traditions and Christian ways of life.

Gender and military service. Gender relations are also heavily influenced by the ongoing war with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenian Genocide between April 24 of 1915 and 1923, during which a disputed number of 1.5 million Armenians died at the hands of the Ottoman Empire. Most of the Armenian Diaspora is the direct result of the Armenian Genocide (also known as the Armenian Holocaust). Turkey has denied any

wrongdoing and refused to acknowledge what happened as “genocide.” With a regional area of 29,743 square kilometers (11,484 sq. mi) and a population of about 3 million, the Republic of Armenia is not politically on good terms with its neighbors, especially Turkey and Azerbaijan. Armenians speak “Hayeren” (Armenian) and are 98% homogeneous (98.1% Armenian, 1.1% Yezidi, and 0.7% other. The state religion is Armenian Apostolic and represents 92.6% of the population (Retrieved from CIA website, Factbook 2011). Armenians see themselves as continuously at war with Turkey through Azerbaijan. Because of the feeling of a constant threat from neighboring countries, the Armenian government has instituted a two-year mandatory army service, for boys only, to boost its military. The fact that boys can enroll in the army and defend their country against enemies means the safety and the survival of Armenia rely on men. Therefore, the ability of Armenian families to have boys is seen as a duty and an honor. Atanesyan (2014) noted that,

Armenian women did their best for the protection of the country and of the nation, while their commitment to serving in Army is still undermined by stereotypes and public perceptions, which depict military service person as predominantly male, and especially high ranking military officers are widely considered as male representatives (p. 3).

Even though there are no official laws and provisions that forbid girls from applying and getting into the military service, there some social attitudes that discourage girls consider getting involved with the military. The gender-biased parenting encourages girls to be beautiful and hand around the kitchen while boys can play video games or play with toy guns. One day, I heard my host-mother (host mother is mother in family that hosts a Peace Corps volunteers during the service) asking her grandson:

-Who are you going to kill?

-The Turks!

-Who else are you going to kill?

-The Azeris!

Even if this is not typical of all families in Armenia, there is a pattern in the upbringing that prepares young Armenians to dislike Turks and Azeris: Muslims. During my pre-service training as a Peace Corps volunteer in Artashat, a 15-years-old 10th grader told me that I would “never succeed in Armenia because I have Muslim heritage” (Snippet from a conversation, 2015). She even promised she would tell anybody because I was a good teacher and all students liked me.

The ability of the boys to serve in the army and to defend their homeland seems to put a higher social value on boys, who are treated like a prince and can be a child, while girls must be told all the time to be a good girl or to behave. I experienced these gender-based parenting differences every day for the last two years I have been living in Armenia. In a conversation with one of the participants, to the question: If you were to have only one child, and you are given a choice to choose the sex of the child, what would it be? She said she would prefer a boy. When I asked why she would want a boy over a girl, she simply said that, currently, Armenia needs more men to protect the country. And I asked her whether she would have substituted herself with a boy at birth, she said yes. The participant is a 23 years-old woman, from Shinuhayr, the village I work in, and she has a Master’s in Linguistics with a focus on English. She even told me a story about how villagers praised her intelligence by saying she is worth a thousand boys. Despite her reputation of a kind, intelligent, smart and beautiful girl, she still believes a boy is more “important” than a girl in the family. As for why girls do not go to war, she said, it is a man’s thing to fight and protect the family.

The overall condition for women in Armenia has caught the attention of the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, Nils Muiznieks. In his 2014 report on human rights in Armenia, he noted that "Thousands of women are victims of violence every year in Armenia. The phenomenon remains largely unreported because of a poor response from State institutions and a cultural, societal and family environment which tends to justify and accept violence against women." (<http://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/>). Many voices have been raised regarding the preference of boys over girls for a variety of reasons, but the one reason that comes up frequently is the military. Most people I have spoken with said they prefer boys because boys can go to war and protect them. Some of my informal conversations through classroom activities suggest that many girls would have preferred to be born boys because they would be able to go to war and protect their family and their country. The ability to serve in the army and to be able to protect one's family put a higher social value on boys.

Girls versus boys. The social preference for boys in Armenia plays a central role in the main focus of this dissertation. Armenia ranks third in selective abortion behind its neighbor Azerbaijan and China. There are many scholarly articles written on the issue of selective abortion around the world. Hesketh and Xing (2016) affirmed that "in the absence of manipulation, the sex ratio at birth is remarkably consistent across human populations, with 105-107 male births for every 100 female births" (p. 13271). From 1962 to 1980, Coale (1991) asserted that "for aggregate birth from 1962 to 1980 in 24 countries in Europe, the ratio of the number of male to female births ranged from 1.050 to 1.070" (p. 517). This ratio "is widely used as the baseline for calculating deviations in the sex ratio" (Hesketh and Xing, 2016, p. 13271). In Armenia, World Bank reported that "there are more boy births than girl births, with 113 boys

born for every 100 girls” (World Bank Report on Armenia, 201), which is above the accepted benchmark incidence of 106.

Sex-selective abortion is a sensitive issue in Armenia. According to a participant, “people have been seen as an enemy of the state or unpatriotic for trying to criticize what is seen as national security issues at a time where the country is at war and need men to fight” (Excerpt from an informal conversation, 2016). So, while men whose “life expectancy lags that of women” (WB Report, 2016) are needed to fight, the fact that women are also needed to bear the boy-soldiers is often overlooked. It is common to hear some Armenian men and boys use the phrase “she is just a girl” when talking about girls. One will think that boys and girls should be equally treated and needed not only to achieve the sex balance but also to ensure the survival of the country. As one woman pointed out during the EU 2017 conference organized by the ICHD, “If we keep killing girls, one day there will be no girls to bear your baby-soldier.” Because for many, boys are more important than girls for many reasons: boys are good investments with quick returns as boys are expected to stay with their family and take care of their parents as breadwinners, caregiver, and carrier of the family name. “One must have a son so that he takes care of his parents in their old age. As for a daughter, she marries into another family and takes care of the elderly people there” (ICHD, 2017, p. 33.) The idea that boys are the only caregiver is what people still think, but the reality on the ground shows that, more and more, the responsibility of taking care of the parents is becoming a shared-responsibility among children, boys or girls, even though traditional norms requires men to take on that burden.

My coworker, a married woman, spends more time with her parents than she ever spent with her in-laws. She does not even live with her family-in-law. Some say this is the exception. Indeed, girls are traditionally expected to leave their parents and go live with her husband’s

family after marriage, leaving boys with their parents. And when this happens, the married woman barely has physical contact with her parents. So, why have a baby-girl when you know she will leave one day, some wonder? Therefore, many families view girls as a waste of investment with no return and they cannot even carry on the family name through their children, as one participant noted, “It is a great tragedy for the men that their lineage is not continued if they have a daughter” (ICHHD, 2017, p. 33). Therefore, for women, to have peace of mind and to avoid being blamed for something they cannot control, they want to have at least a boy, to please their family-in-law, and sometimes, their parents. But “to [a] woman, it makes no difference whether she has a son or a daughter as the most important for her is to become a mother” (ICHHD Report, 2017). Sometimes, men just don’t want to live through the emotional trauma of seeing their lovely children, especially daughters, leave them. A member of a mixed focus group notes that men are more affected by marrying off their daughter and this is the reason why they would not want a daughter.

During the past three to five years, the problem has started getting traction in and outside of Armenia. The literature comes primarily in the form of reports financed by international organizations such as the World Bank, UNICEF, and the European Union. There are also some Armenian-based NGOs such as Society Without Violence, Astghatsolk, Save the Children, Armavir Development Center, Martuni Women’s Community Council, and PINK Armenia sounding alarms against the practice. They are mainly youth gathering together to protest and organize rallies largely in the capital Yerevan. Many of the organizations have argued for policy changes that would interrupt the practice of sex-selective abortion. The Council of Europe suggested to the Armenian government “to introduce legislation to prohibiting sex selection in the context of both assisted reproductive technologies and legal abortion, except when it is

justified to avoid a serious hereditary disease” (Council of Europe, 2011). The Council of Europe also invited Armenia, along with Azerbaijan and Georgia, to collect reliable data about the phenomenon and to take serious steps to find out the causes behind sex-selective abortions (Council of Europe, 2011). Some of the results of the engagement of the Council of Europe in Armenia are the work being done by local institutions and non-profit organizations such as the International Center for Human Development.

These organizations working with the European Union for the most parts present their results along with recommendations to the governing body of Armenia. The government then decides how to implement the recommendations with the help of the international and local organizations. For instance, as an outcome of the suggestions, the government of Armenia has enacted and revised laws regulating abortion in Armenia. According to Armenian abortion policy which abides by all the seven points mentioned in World Abortion Policies (2011), the Armenian government has reduced the abortion up to the twelfth weeks of pregnancy (UNFPA, 2013, p.20.) The right to perform an abortion is given only to licensed physicians in hospitals or other officially recognized medical centers (International Parenthood Federation, 2009). *The Economist* (CRRC, 2013) has ranked Armenia second on a list of countries of high abortion rates among countries worldwide. The European Union condemned the phenomenon of sex- selection through abortion in Armenia and suggested assistance to fight against it, as the phenomenon may lead to terrible consequences such as population imbalances, rise of criminality, human rights violations and others (Council of Europe, 2011).

Why Is It Problematic to Have a Sizable Gender Imbalance?

Gender imbalance can have a significant impact on the demography and the economy of the country. For instance, Van Balen (2005) pointed that, in some parts of Indian, there are

villages “where almost no daughters were born” (p. 229) as the result of the practice of sex-selective abortion. If these villages keep having no girls, one day there will be no girls to bear their boys due to the shortage of brides. Some have argued that, the shortage of brides may lead to violence confrontation among men who are looking for mates. One of the participants noted, “If the number of girls is small, we won’t have future mothers” (ICHD, 2017). At the economic levels, these girls could contribute to the workforce of their community and help grow the economy. The World Bank pointed out that, the sex imbalance “is expected to exacerbate the slowdown in population growth, potentially by around 3% over the next 50 years” (WB, report, 2016). Why is this important and worrisome for a country with a small population living within its borders? The practice of sex-selective abortion that target girls may lead to the absence or the small number of women of childbearing age. With fewer mates to carry on their family name, Armenian men can also be encouraged to migrate out of the country, emigration that is already high due to the high unemployment rate in Armenia. In 2011, BBC stated that “according to human rights groups and opposition parties [...] every year almost 100,000 people leave - most of the men, who go to neighboring Russia to work in the construction industry there” (McGinness, 2011, retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-14386472>). The government officials deny these figures. But the reality on the ground seems to support the notion of Armenian men moving to Russia, sometimes for seasonal work.

What I Noticed

Through daily observations in my village and the places I visited over the last two years I noticed that, despite sex-selective abortion that targets girls, there are (physically) more women than men in many villages. The high number of women living in towns as compared to the number of men is because most young men must leave for mandatory two-year army service. But

the main reason could be due to the migration of the young men who after their return from their army service are often left without any jobs. Therefore, they choose to go out of the country, or move to the capital city Yerevan, where 1/3 of the Armenia population lives. The Washington Post (2017) even titled one its article “In Armenia, Town without Men as Migrant Laborers Leave To Find Work.” The article talks about the impact of the migration for the future of Armenia. But for the Church, the migration is not such a bad thing because as the article in WSP notes “If these great men would not go and work in Russia, we would not have this church as they built it.” These are comments made by Father Simon Kahana Ter-Mkrtchyan from Lichk, a village in Armenia. At first sight, one may think that there are more women in Armenia than men, which can contradict the fact that there are more men than women in Armenia. When it is true that there are villages full of women, the men do exist, but they just happened to be ‘working’ out of the country.

When asked about the consequences of gender imbalance in a focus group, one participant suggested that “Homosexuality may spread. Or women will have more than one husband” (Mixed focus group, Yerevan, ICHD, 2017, p. 42). Others asserted that the population will decrease and that “There will be more wars/battles as women are the symbol of peace, and men are combative.” Researchers at the International Center for Human Development acknowledged that participants “do not associate the deviation in the sex ratio at birth with the abnormally low ration of female birth, but rather with the ‘surplus of boys’” (ICHD, 2017, p. 42). The participants are aware of the high number of boys, and don’t see any problem with that. A member of the focus group for doctors asks: “If no boys are born, who will protect our borders?” The question seems a bit surprising coming from a doctor who is educated and is supposed to work to prevent the sex-selection through abortion that targets girl. He seems more

preoccupied with the security of the country than the issues at hand. Maybe for this doctor, sex-selective abortion may not be a problem. A participant from a focus group of men suggested that “it’s good to have many boys for our country’s army.” Another one from the same group speculated that “if the number of girls is small, men will have to bring foreign women from abroad and marry them.” (ICHD, 2017, p. 43).

The migration landscape in Armenia may indicate that, when men choose to marry foreign women, the idea is to join these women abroad not to stay in Armenia and make more boys for the army as suggested by the participants in the focus group of men cited above. Ironically, it is not only men leaving Armenia, but a small number of girls that are around are also leaving the country. Some of the girls that I know went to China where they work as English teachers. Others marry foreigners and move out the country. In her article titled *To Greener Shores: A Detailed Report on Emigration from Armenia*, Barsoumian (2013) exposes some of the emotional hardship some Armenian families must go through in the name of family security and survival. Barsoumian told the story of Lilit’s daughter who was married within 15 days of meeting a foreign person. The mother of the newlywed girl acknowledged that “She was a sacrifice for our salvation,” and that “This is common in Armenia. Many people marry off their daughters to men from abroad so that they can get out and help in some way, whether financially, or if the parents are old, perhaps get them out as well” (Barsoumian, 2013).

Armenia and Faith

Armenians pride themselves on being the first Christian nation on earth, and the Church has an influential place in society and policy. Yet, despite the urging of international groups, the Clergy has not made any substantial public comment in favor or against prenatal sex-selective abortion as some would expect. They have not done so for political purposes, some say. But in

their report, Gohar Shahnazaryan, and Siran Hovhannisyan (2017) noted, quoting Father Galstyan, that “Depriving a human being of life is basically considered as an irrevocable sin, and criminal behaviour not only from secular, but also spiritual viewpoint” (p. 36). Father Galstyan is from the mindset that, “Human Life is Sacred from the Moment of Conception” and is the Ordinariate of the Armenian Catholic Church in Armenia, Georgia, Russia and Eastern Europe.

More and more, there are signs, which show that the Armenian Apostolic Church has started to get involved in the discourse around gender issues. For example, at the annual selective abortions meeting in Yerevan, in April 2017, organized by ICHD, an Apostolic Church priest made the opening statement condemning killing, in general. Rafik Santrosian in his article “Sex vs. gender through linguistic expression in Armenia”, cited Bishop Galstanyan, Director of the Conceptual Affairs Office of Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin who called sex-selective abortion “A problem of calamitous consequences.” Santronian also pointed out that Galstanyan stated that “the Armenian Church is the absolute supporter of the equality between men and women,” but the Bishop was quick to criticize the law on gender equality in the Republic of Armenia and its use of the term “gender.” Bishop Galstanyan stated that “gender is a dangerous landmine placed in our value system” and proposed that the discourse around sex-selective abortion be framed as “Unborn Mothers of Armenia” (Retrieved from <https://www.evnreport.com/arts-and-culture/sex-vs-gender-through-linguistic-expression-in-armenian>).

Armenians take great pride in being the first Christian on earth since 301 A.D when they adopted Christianity as the national religion. Payaslyan (2006) stated that “since its emergence in the fourth century, the Armenian Church has played a central role in the Armenian community life, and Christianity has remained deeply intertwined with national institutions and identity” (p. 149). Since their adoption of Christianity, Armenian have been subject to persecutions on the

part of their neighbors. Referring to G. Marcar Gregory's preface of the English translation of *The Church of Armenia* by Archbishop Maghakia Ormanian, Payaslian noted that, "The Church of Armenia has been crushed for centuries between the upper and the nether milestones of political rivalry and conquest, and during these long ages of 'religious liberty' has had to be secured by sheer independence of character and the shedding of much blood" (p. 149). Because of the history of oppression and persecution, Armenians have developed a nationalistic view based on religion that worries even some church leader. Rev. Fr. Daniel Findikyan (2017) who wrote: "The ethnocentric tone that reverberates through so much preaching and teaching that we hear today in Armenian Churches conflicts sharply with the limpid, apostolic Orthodox Christian vision that is revealed in the Armenian Church's liturgical texts and in the writings of her most authoritative and saintly teachers." (P. 4).

This chapter explored the state of gender relations and the complexity of women's problems in "developing" countries such as Armenia. Because gender relations are almost impossible to isolate from the cultural practices, any attempt to implement changes around women's issues is often met with resistance from the locals. Even though, there are agreements on the fact that, in nearly all cultures, women must deal with traditional practices that undermine their ability to access right living conditions as their male counterparts do, early efforts to problematize the issues have led to westernization of women's concerns. The discontent amongst those who fear the Eurocentrism hegemony and neoliberalism posing as the universal remedy to approaching gender issues led to the creation of the transnational feminisms. In Armenia, one of the pressing issues women are facing is sex-selective abortion. Since Armenians see themselves as the first Christian nation on earth and a country that is continuously at war with its neighbors, the discourse around the preference of boys over girls becomes national security issues.

Therefore, any attempts to study sex-selective abortion in Armenia should take those aspects into consideration using ethnographic fieldwork methodology.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

In this chapter, I am going to talk about the process of collecting data and explain the methodologies used to gather the data and analyze them. The study uses Ethnodrama to address sex-selective abortion in Armenia. Ethnodrama uses an ethnographic method of data collection, then presents the findings as a dramatic script or performance. The study gathered data from three primary sources: government databases, international organizations working with non-governmental organizations, and ethnographic fieldwork. The fieldwork consisted of taking notes on daily observations during classroom activities, a personal journal on conversations and interaction with community members, stories from community members, informal discussions, and answers sessions, and a small ethnographic survey.

The observation consisted in being part of the community gathering such as birthday parties, funerals, sendoff parties for young men leaving for their military services, official meetings in the community, observing students interact among themselves during lessons in the classroom, and outside the classroom. During the observation, I used the Memo application on my Samsung S6 Edge to take note. It was beneficial to use that application on my phone because it would have been very awkward to make these notes using a pencil and a notebook. In the classrooms, it was more appropriate to use a sketchbook because, as an instructor, it was part of my teaching duty to write reports and evaluations on every class session. I often used that time to quickly write down moments that were relevant to gender interactions among students. For

instance, girls always willing to help boys during routine assessments and exams by giving them the answers to the questions. I noticed that girls barely ask boys for answers. One has a sense that girls are there to ‘serve’ the boys. The school was a high school in Shinuhayr.

The research also gathered data through in-depth interview and an online survey. The interview questions and the questionnaire were based on the themes that were recurrent during the participant observations and in random conversations. For example, the ‘military’ theme runs through most of the conversations. The way teachers treat boys and let them get away with ‘bad’ behavior in the classrooms suggest that, as my counterpart pointed it out, “education is not important for them [the boys] now. They only think about their military service” (Conversation with CP, 2016). The study surveyed and interviewed a total of 119 participants, but 72 participants’ responses were taken into consideration. Some participants did not complete all the survey question online, through Google Survey application. 80% of the participants identified as female and the 20% as male. The age of the participants ranges from 18 to 55 years-old. They were mostly university students, teachers, members of Non-profit organizations. The interviews lasted about 30 to 35 minutes and were conducted in places chosen by the interviewees. Interviews were transcribed, and some translated into English with the help of an Armenian informant and translator. The translator was paid with \$500 grant offered by UND.

Most of the interviews were face to face. It is believed in Armenia that, if someone wants to share something with you, he or she will invite you to his or her home for a coffee. The survey and the interviews had the same questions that were sent to IRB-UND for review and approval. after reviewing my proposal, the Institutional Review Board decided that my project did not need a full institutional review. The questionnaire is as followed:

1. Are you aware of sex selective abortion in Armenia? What do you think about sex selective abortion in Armenia?

Դուք տեղյա՞կ եք սեռով պայմանավորված արքորսներից Հայաստանում: Ի՞նչ եք կարծում այդ մասին:

2. Why do you think people decide to do selective abortion in Armenia?

Որն է ձեր կարծիքը արքորսի ընտրության մասին:

Ի՞նչ եք կարծում Հայաստանում մարդիկ ինչու են սեռով պայմանավորված արքորսների որոշում կայացնում:

3. If you were to have ONLY ONE child, would it be boy or girl? Why?

Եթե դուք ընտրեք ձեր երեխայի սեռը, որի՞ն կտաք նախապատվությունը՝ տղային ,թե աղջկան :Ինչու?

4. What do you think can be done to prevent selective abortion in Armenia?

Որն է ձեր կարծիքը սեռով պայմանավորված արքորսի մասին : Ձեր կարծիքով ի՞նչ պիտի անել կանխելու սեռով պայմանավորված արքորսները Հայաստանում:

5. Would you ask parents not to end pregnancies because it is girl? If yes, what is ONE thing you can say to convince them not to do so?

Դուք կխնդրեի՞ք Ձեր ծնողներին չընդհատել հղիությունը աղջիկ լինելու պատճառով: Եթե այո, սպա ի՞նչ կասեիք նրանց համոզելու համար:

There were also follow-up questions depending on how comfortable the participant felt during the interview. The information gathered from these three sources are used to write a play with composite characters. Drama as the presentation of research findings is a way to insulate

participants' privacy and anonymity, as well as to embody the results and reach the audience at a more than just a dispassionate cognitive level.

Ethnographic Fieldwork

I arrived in Armenia on August 24th of 2015 as Peace Corps Volunteer in the field of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). Upon arrival, Peace Corps places volunteers with host families for three months. During these three months, volunteers are expected to learn about basics, yet significant aspects of the host country's culture and their language. In my case, I was placed with a family near Արտաշատ /Artashat/, a town and urban municipal community serving as the administrative center of Արարատ Մարզ /Ararat Marz/, the Ararat Province. It is located on the Araks River in the Ararat plain, 30 km southeast of Yerevan. The name of my village was Բաղամյան /Baghamyan/. But because of its proximity to Բերկանուշ /Berkanush/ Peace Corps and volunteers referred to this area as Baghamyan-Berkanush. After three months, volunteers were supposed to show improvement in their abilities to cope with their new environment, display some integration into the Armenian culture, and some language skills. In my case, it was not a mixed situation. On the one hand, I did not experience a cultural shock mainly due to my upbringing in the populous area of Lomé, in Togo. On the other hand, I was Black and there was no way hiding it. Therefore, I was the focal point of all attention.

I started to notice similarities between Armenian and Togolese cultures. The family has the typical Armenian family structure most participants talked and that I have observed, which consists of father, mother, son, son's wife, and the son's children. So, I was not shocked or surprised to experience life in an Armenian family. The way the family functions in Armenia has some resemblance to the family structure in Togo. The household I was staying with, in Baghamyan during the three months Peace Corps pre-service training from August 2015 to

November 2015, has six members: the husband, the wife, two children (boys), the husband's parents (father and mother). The husband's sister got married and moved with her husband to Russia. This move is widespread in Armenia these days. I will expand more on the impact of the migration to Russia on Armenia later. There is a division of family labors and responsibilities based on sex: men and boys do work that is more physically demanding like lifting heavy furniture and women and girls take care of sweeping the floor, and cleaning. Men also have the responsibility to bring money and food home, while women cook and serve the family.

On September 10th of 2015, it was a Friday, while I was wandering around the house, I saw something through the window to son's room that got me thinking. There were two dolls, one big and one small, sitting on top of a closet in the bedroom. I asked myself, "What are the dolls doing up there?" I asked that question because there were no girls in the household. Then, I realized that I was caught in my gendered world, the one that I grew up with in Togo, where only girls could play with dolls, and in my host family, there were not girls. Maybe, the toys belong to the elder sister of the family. She might have used them when she was a child and left them behind when she got married and moved to Russia with her husband. But she had her room in the house. From then on, I have been asking myself whether the toys were symbolic of aborted girls through sex-selective abortion. I am mindful of the sex selection through abortion. I am also aware of the fact that in Togo, in the Ewe culture, when one of the twins is dead at birth, they made a statue that represents the deceased child, and the mother must carry it on her, anytime she carries the other one on her back. If both are dead at birth, then she must carry two statues that represent both deceased children. Were the dolls representing something similar?

Then, I was moved three months later to my permanent site in the harsh cold of November in Armenia, a four-hour drive from my previous family. The name of the village was

Շիւնիսայր /Shinuhayr/, in the region of Սյունիք /Syunik/. Shinuhayr is the biggest village in the province of Syunik and used to be the home of the Olympic shoe factory that was the symbol of wealth and development during the Soviet era. There is one main road that cuts through the village from the intersection of the Highway 2 all the way to the famous Monastery of Տաթև /Tatev/. Shinuhayr used to have an airport where villagers were using to go from their village to Yerevan, the capital of Armenia in less than thirty minutes, some say. Today, when you walk through the community, you can see the ghost of a glorious past written all over the many abandoned buildings that popped all over the village. Today, the symbol of the village its proximity to the world's longest aerial tramway, which goes from Shinuhayr to Tatev. Peace Corps has estimated the actual population of Shinuhayr at 2500 people, but the reality on the ground shows otherwise. Someone from the City Hall told me that about half of the people only lived here on paper, through their family tie to the family. They left the village for a better life in Yerevan, or, of course in Moscow, Russia. In Shinuhayr had a post office, a City Hall and high school of 423 students and 45 staff members at the time of my research.

My new host family had the same structure as the previous one in Baghamyan, but my new family has two children, a girl, and a boy. The girl got married and moved to Russia, and the boy was married too but stayed with the parents. He and his wife had two children, a girl, and a boy. So, my new family had six members: the grandparents, the husband, the wife, and their two children. The boy was named after the grandfather, and the girl was named after the grandmother. It is part of Armenian traditions to name grandchildren after their grandparents. But, in the new family, the husband is unemployed. I heard he was a history teacher and then resigned because he wanted to go to Russia for a better life. Therefore, in this family, with the husband out of work, the wife is the breadwinner. She works as a music teacher at a local high

school. But despite the economic leverage that she has, most of the decisions are made by the husband, at least publicly. She still performs the primary gender roles such as housekeeping, cooking, caring for their two children, because of what Atanesyan (2014) referred to as “social prejudices and stereotypes” (p. 3). She cannot give orders because it is not socially acceptable when the husband is around. Indeed, Atanesyan pointed out that “if there is a giver of orders and one who takes them, the active part of the relationship which gives orders must be physically and psychologically stronger than the passive part, which must take and follow the orders” (P. 3). He went on to say that, this relationship to giving orders also explain why there fewer women in leadership position in Armenian administrations.

I also noticed, while living with the family I mentioned earlier, a difference between how they treat the boy and the girl in the family. There is a set of vocabulary that is used when addressing the boy and another set that is used when interacting with the girl. Often, the boy is treated like a prince, and he can get away with anything. For instance, when the boy runs around the house and chooses not to listen to the calls to stop what he is doing, he does not get any punishment. When the girl does it, everyone scorns her and makes sure she stops at once. The boy is often referred to as “Ուժեղ տղա” /ujer t’ra/ which means “strong boy,” because, boys are expected to be strong. He gets all the praise. On the other hand, the girl is continuously reminded to be a good girl, լավ աղջիկը /lav aghjik/. Nothing more. A girl with the reputation of վստ աղջիկը /vat aghjik/ will find it very hard to find a husband from the village. For that reason, family and relatives always make sure the girls carry a decent reputation in the community. At that point, my interest in studying gender relations in Armenia grew stronger. The gender-based parenting I witnessed later evolved into an interest to explore the sex selection through abortion in Armenian society. I needed to find a subject that best describes the cultural journey of girls in

Armenian culture. Indeed, there are enough articles written on gender problems, but one of the issues that are less talked about is the sex selection through abortion. Because the subject is taboo, I decided to explore it to find out about the reasons why a Christian country with intense pride in their Christian identity, with such a small population and with a history of victims of oppression, persecutions and genocide practices sex-selective abortion.

Language as Tool of Inquiry and Trust Building

Armenian is my eighth language, and there are similarities between some of the Armenian letters sounds and Ewe and French languages. The similarities have made it somehow easy to speak and understand Armenian at the “Advanced Low” level according to Peace Corps Language Proficiency Index as of October 2016. The reference to the language proficiency level is not to suggest that my proficiency level in Armenian is sufficient to conduct interviews in Armenian and understand complex colloquialism and emotional states of subjects. But it is important on the part of the researcher to know the language a little bit to be sure that the translator is capturing what they participants say in the source and recreate that in the target language. Another thing to mention is the community integration. How would I get a woman who has had an abortion to talk openly and honestly with me—a man and a “foreigner” to the culture? Would I have access to the stories that I need? Yes. As part of the Peace Corps project I am working on, we wrote a play in English composed of snippets of conversations and self-esteem surveys that the Let Girls Learn project financed through Peace Corps Armenia.

In Peace Corps, we work with the counterparts (CP) and language and cultural facilitators (LCF). Counterparts are home country nationals (HCN) who speak English and work with Peace Corps Volunteers on specific projects. They can be teachers or representatives of non-profit organizations. The counterparts act as facilitators in many aspects of our Peace Corps service.

They help with work-related activities such as interviews and conversations with community members on a grant or with personal issues such as solving problems with a landlord. In my community, my CP was a 39 years-old woman, mother of three children and English teacher. She has been teaching English for 16 years has been working with Peace Corps for eight years, but I was the first Black volunteer she had worked. People consider me more like an African from Africa because I once told them that I was born in Togo. Even though I explained later that I am naturalized American, and that I work here for the American government, it did not seem to matter to them at all. People in my community don't relate to me as American. For them I am African. The fact that people see me as an African affects my Peace Corps experiences.

Researcher as an African and as a Male

People are willing to talk to me about things, my Peace Corps counterpart said, that they would not discuss with 'real' Americans, those born in America. They believe Armenians are closer to Africans regarding culture, traditions and social values. This view may have made my integration easier compared to other volunteers regarding trust. I earned the title of “լավ տղա” /lav tgha/ (good boy) which is the proper recognition a male can get in a community like mine. On May 1st of 2016, I made խորոված /khorovats/, the Armenian barbecue. On that sunny day of the May 1st, all the teachers donated 2000 drams, which is about 4 dollars. I was invited as a guest and was not required to pay any money. We drove from the school to the forest for about thirty minutes around 2:30 PM. There were more people than the places to sit. Therefore, we needed to improvise using pieces of wood and stones as seats. We were about 35 people, twenty men, and 15 women. Women got the proper seats and the men had to improvise. While the men were cooking the sheep meat, the women were cleaning the tomatoes, peeling and cutting the onions. So, men were doing their work on one side, and the women on the other. From time to

time, there would be a toast during which we drank the traditional Armenian liquor known as օղի /oghi/.

I was helping with setting the fire for the khorovats, by bringing the dry wood. The school director, a lovely man, asked me if I knew how do prepare the khorovats. I said I have never done it before, but I would love to try. It was smoky and around the three-stone stove that helped prepare for the occasion. The smoke irritated my eyes which were in tears. After the women arranged the seasonings, the director and four women covered the meats with the juice and handed them to me. I dived into my experience of killing and cooking chicken when I was in Togo and found inspiration to make the khorovats. The military class teacher and the IT instructor were around to guide me. In the end, people enjoyed the khorovats and congratulated me on the job well done. There was a toast in my honor. I reported to Peace Corps that I was taught and allowed to make the barbecue at a school gathering in the forest. I was later told by that I was inducted into manhood in my community, and that in villages, not all men have the privilege to make խորոված. Knowing how to make the Armenian barbecue is a sign of status. The barbecue is usually made for special occasions. I mentioned in my report that I was integrating well into the community. Khorovats is a man thing in Armenia. Nobody has ever been able to tell me why women are not allowed to make khorovats.

Methodology and Conceptual Framework

Ethnography and autoethnography like any other scientific methodologies have different definitions suggested by various researchers. Despite the many descriptions, Singer (2009) noted that ethnographic methods “entails studying people within their own cultural environment through intensive fieldwork: the researcher goes to the data, rather than sitting in an office and collecting it” (p. 191). It involves doing observations on site, interviews, questionnaires, visual

recordings, archives, document analysis, journals, diaries and more, with the goal to express the social frame of reference of the participants. It has been used in its early days by anthropologist and sociologies to understand social interactions and to describe a group of people and cultures along with the customs, habits, and specific ways of life. Its origins date back to Malinowski's fieldwork among Trobriand Islanders in 1914.

Neville-Jan (2003) called autoethnography “an alternative method and form of writing” (p. 89), that Denshire (2014) said to be “falling somewhere between anthropology and literary studies” (p.832). Unlike ethnographers, auto-ethnographers write themselves as participants in the social phenomenon they intend to study. Autoethnography, though it may contain some elements of autobiography, goes beyond the simple writing of one's experience. According to Brodkey (1996), “auto-ethnography invites writers to see themselves and everyone else as human subjects constructed in a tangle of cultural, social and historical situations and relations in contact zones” (p. 29). The simultaneous used of ethnography and autoethnography approach as investigative methodologies to study the social phenomenon of sex-selective abortion and to present the result using ethnodramatic data analysis contribute the new ways of researching human interactions in the social context.

On Ethnodrama

Angrosino (2007) asserted that the ethnographic report has conventionally been presented in the form of “a written monograph, but it may also be a collection of photos, a movie or video, a museum display, a website or even a work of literature (novel, play, short story, poem) or artistic performance (dance, song cycle)” (p. xv). As someone who has been doing theater as a professional for the last fifteen years, I am usually confronted with the burning question of how to use theater as means for social development. In early 2000, I worked with Atelier Théâtre

Burkinabe (ATB) in Burkina Faso, where I learned how to use theatre forum as a tool for social development. The mission statement of the ATB is to create a form of theater, based on audience participation, that uses artistic expressions to trigger social awareness around burning issues to alter previous behaviors vis a vis these issues for a better socio-economic and cultural development. Since June 1978, ATB has organized the “Festival International pour le Théâtre du Développement” (FITD), which invites theater companies, from all over the world, that focus on theater for development. The format for the performances uses Forum Theatre, one of the three techniques of the Theater of the Oppressed.

Forum Theatre is a theatrical form in which a problem is shown to the spectators with an unresolved end. The viewer is invited to make recommendations and to suggest possible solutions. They are encouraged to enact these resolutions of the conflict. The scenario is then repeated to allow the audience to offer alternative solutions. The performance becomes a contest between the audience and the actors trying to bring the play, usually centered around oppression, to a different ending. In the end, the play ends with accumulation of knowledge, strategies and experiences. The main objective is that, as the audience get engaged in the re-enactment of the oppression, suggested solutions may break the cycle of the oppression, and create a new social environment with change in behavior. Theatre of the Oppressed also uses Image Theater, a theatrical form in which words are not spoken, but instead, the message is conveyed through imageries using actors’ bodies and props.

On Ethnotheatre and the Theatre of the Oppressed

The Theatre of the Oppressed is a form of Ethnotheatre. The Theatre of the Oppressed, term coined by Augusto Boal (1970), is being used for this project as report of the data analysis. Mitchell, & Freitag (2011), noted that “Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed framework

shows significant promise for mobilizing masses toward community dialogue and social change” (p. 991). As a discussion-based theatre art that addresses pressing social issues among people affected by these same issues. Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) is based on Paulo Freire’s (1968) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and it emphasizes urgency and engagement. Freire argues that the traditional model of teaching in which teachers actively transfer knowledge to passive students is oppressive. He then proposes to remediate the issue, a teaching method of “problem-posing” (p. 60). Freire argued that,

Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to the challenge. Because they respond to this as interrelated to other problems within a total context, not a theoretical question, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienated. Their response to the challenge evokes new challenges, followed by new understandings; and gradually the students come to regard themselves as committed. (p. 62).

The Theater of the Oppressed seeks a discursive approach to engage people affected by the oppressive social issues through theatrical and artistic means. Theatre of the Oppressed uses many techniques in addressing and tackling social issues revolving around oppression and exploring possible solutions. The main features of the Theatre of the Oppressed are games, Image Theatre and Forum Theatre. My study uses Forum Theater described above. Another important element of the Theater of the Oppressed is the character of the Joker, also known as the facilitator. The Joker is the neutral character that mediates and facilitates interactions between the audience and the actors.

Boal (1995) defined Theatre of the Oppressed as

a system of physical exercises, aesthetic games, image techniques and special improvisations whose goal is to safeguard, develop and reshape this human vocation, by turning the practice of theatre into an effective tool for the comprehension of social and personal problems and the search for their solutions (p. 14-15).

Ethnodrama and Ethnotheatre (theater is the building, while theatre is the art) is the combination of ethnographic fieldwork and theatre as means of representation. As Ethnography, the project used the classroom and the community I have been living in as cultural sites. The study defines culture as,

Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour" (Spencer-Oatey, 2008 p.3).

And a cultural site is the site that the researchers choose to do his or her in-depth observations of social interactions within the explored culture as define. In this study, cultural sites can be fixed like in the case of a classroom, school compound; it can be mobile like in the case of social gatherings, where the same interaction can repeat itself in different settings like a birthday celebration in a house as compared to a birthday celebration in the forest.

In the process data collection, I observed the behavior of students when questions about the gender arose. I also observed my community when I engaged with adults in a discussion about gender-based selection. I documented my personal experience as a form of auto-ethnography, keeping a daily journal of my interactions with subjects in the classroom, during after sessions, and in the community at large. Since I have been living in my community for

more than two years, my interactions have been based on mutual respect, and in some case, on trust with some community members, men or women, who shared with me their personal opinions on topics related to gender and selective abortion. For instance, on the topic of mandatory military service, a 27 years-old woman, mother of two children, a girl and a boy, told me during a private conversation in English that, the mandatory service only affects poor families whose sons must go to the frontline and cannot afford to buy their way out of harm way. She said she was afraid her son, who was 8, would grow up one day and go to the frontline and maybe, die.

As drama/theatre, the project uses storytelling and performative means to present the findings of the investigations. For instance, (Saldaña, 2016) reminds us Anna Deavere Smith, who created two famous productions using verbatim excerpts from conversations with the everyday people. In *Twilight: Los Angeles*, produced in 1992, she “profiles citizens’ perspectives about the city’s riots following the acquittal of the police officers who beat Rodney King” (p.17). The performance brought to the center of the social discourse, an issue that, maybe, would not have had the same attention and coverage in the media. My topic is trying to do the same thing by focusing on selective abortion that prevents girls from being born. This is a pressing social issue in modern Armenia.

Though a relatively new methodology to the field of research in any discipline, art-based research has been getting a lot of traction as valid research practice. I will be utilizing Ethnodrama as defined by Saldaña (2016) as “a written play script consisting of dramatized, significant sections of narrative collected from interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journal, entries, personal memories/experiences, and/or print and media artifacts such as diaries, blogs, e-mail correspondence, television broadcastings, and historic documents” (p. 13).

Most of the data will be located within 2006 and 2017. Ethnotheatre “employs the traditional craft and artistic techniques of theatre or media production to mount for an audience a live or mediated performance event of research participants’ experiences and/or the researcher’s interpretation of data” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 12).

Most characters in the play are built based on real-life people I talked with, read about, or heard about. Social institutions such as churches and the justice department can be personified as characters in the play, using words such organizations have said about the issues. I use information that I have been collecting as a Peace Corps Volunteers working on the Let Girls Learn project in Armenia. One of the conflicts in the plot will be the apparent silence of the Armenian Church clergy who proclaim Armenia is the first Christian nation on earth, yet they have not made any comment in favor or against selective abortion for, some say, political reasons. A friend of mine is working on getting an informal statement from a priest she knows in a casual conversation. The play is set in court, where characters engage in dialogue, based on interviews, reflection on my own experience, published literature, government review, articles, snippets, informal interview, daily conversations with everyday citizens, government reports, Facebook conversations, and e-mails, Corpses of sex-selective aborted girls or “Missing girls” (a term coined by Economist Armatya Sen in his 1990 review for *New York Times*) in the form of puppets or marionettes, plead their cause to playwright (the researcher) and urge him/her to give voice to their dead souls. Selections from the play will be performed as the dissertation defense.

On the use of Ethnodrama. Throughout the developing and developed worlds, organizations and community have used theater to address issues in their communities, to raise political and social awareness. The intent is also to evade the fury of oppressive governments. But such evasion is not always the result, unfortunately. As an example, one day, a group of

actors were rounded up and beaten up after a performance in Togo in 2001, for incitement to challenge the Togolese government. Among the issues usually talked about in these forms of theatres are feminisms and representation of women in the public discourse. Mlama (1991) observed that “The Popular Theatre movement in Africa is a response to a history that has undermined people’s genuine participation in the development process” (p.5). The same can be true for the patriarchal Armenian society where women have little to no say in decision making. For example, with the Let Girls Learn, I used Theater of the Oppressed approach to address issues revolving around gender roles and how boys and girls perceive each other. Like in many communities across Armenia, Shinuhayr is a community in the Syunik Marz (region) where expectations about boys and girls are clearly defined. Girls are usually pushed in the background when it comes to playing sport and taking leading roles in addressing issues affecting their community.

Boosting Girls’ Voices, which is the name of the project that I wrote and managed for Peace Corps Armenia, encouraged boys’ involvement in the theater, but the theater was run mainly by girls. The idea was to create an environment away from the community pressure to allow boys and girls to talk about gender issues among themselves. The project was a one-year ethnographic work in three steps: about 25 student-participants, age 12 to 17, get together and talked about topics related to gender. For instance, should or can a girl grow up to become a president or a soldier? We recorded data based on the information provided during the discussion. We turned the data into a short scenario. Then we performed the scenario using Image theater and Forum theater. And we collected data again based on the multiple resolutions the participants suggested. The project was so successful that the Peace Corps Headquarters sent its communication team to report on the project. Confidence has been raised amongst the

participants; trust has been built between the community's members and myself because the parents trusted me enough to let me take their children on an excursion and cultural trip to Yerevan, the capital where many of them had never been before. The trip would have never happened before the project. The success of the project was reflected in the community requesting an extension of my service in their village. As Migraine-George (2008) observed, "Popular theater offers a concrete representation of the many challenges faced by women" (p.2). This is what this dissertation intends to do, by representing the findings of sex-selective abortion investigation, not having the research sitting on a shelf, but placing it in the center of public discourse.

In addition to forwarding the use of drama as a means of social transformation, my dissertation aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion regarding gender relations in developing countries by examining sex-selective abortion in Armenia. I use government reviews, journal articles, news articles, and snippets of daily conversations to write a play using the Ethnodrama approach to address the issue of Armenia's "missing girls", is a term used by researchers when talking about the selective abortion that targets girls in the Caucasus. I decided to use the Ethnodrama approach because, as Prentki and Selman (2000) asserted, Ethnotheatre "is a process of theatre which deeply involves specific communities in identifying issues of concern, analyzing current conditions and causes of a situation, identifying points of changes and analyzing how changes could happen and/or contributing to the actions implied" (p. 8). Because sex-selective abortion is a sensitive issue in Armenia, I believed it was important to use a research method that makes the discussion on the matter more participatory, where actors and audience are engaged and involved in the discussion. There is a sense of belonging especially when using Theater of the Oppressed. Augusto Boal (1994) explained that participants

experience “the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds; the image of reality and the reality of the image” (p. 43). This enables, hopefully, a cathartic result shared by both, actors and audience members.

Data Collection. According to Angrosino (2007), “the ethnographic method involves the collection of information about the material products, social relationship, beliefs, and values of a community” (p. xvi). In the case of my study, I explore the gender dynamic in the Armenian. The study uses multiple methods of cultural data collection: observation, informal interview or conversation, and available data on the topic. As Angrosino (2007) noted, “it is desirable to approach the collection of data from as many different perspectives as possible, the better to confirm that things really are as they seem” (p. xvi). Observation and access to existing data were the key method of data collection for this study. The interview part was a bit challenging as the research topic remains a highly sensitive topic in the communities across Armenia. Nevertheless, in the form of a conversation or information interview or questionnaire, they study was able to get information written as answers to the questionnaire presented above under Method chapter. Information gathered from these three primary sources are used to write a play with composite characters. Drama as a presentation of research findings is a way to insulate participants' privacy and anonymity, as well to embody the findings and reach the audience at more than just a dispassionate cognitive level. For instance, I use information that I have been collecting as a Peace Corps Volunteers working on the Let Girls Learn project in Armenia.

Observations. Fetterman (1998) notes that observation is unique in the sense that it combines participation on the part of the researcher in the lives of the people being studied and at the same time maintaining a professional distance. Sangasubana (2011) citing Angrosino (2007), defines observation as “the act of perceiving the activities and the interrelationships of people in

the field setting” (p.568). For almost two years, I have been living in the Armenia community of Shinuhayr as an accepted member of the community with an official residency certificate delivered to me by the Mayor of the village so that I can have access to some of the benefits other villagers have access to. For instance, instead of paying a round trip to ride the longest aerial tramway in the world, which is situated right outside my village, I pay 1000 Drams-the Armenian monetary unit- instead of 3000 Drams. Such integration makes observation also a participant observation, which Scott-Jones and Watt (2010) note are “a key characteristic of ethnography and it is reliant of the researcher being accepted by the research group and becoming immersed in its culture” (p. 110). The observation sites are mainly the school I work at, my host family. Other gatherings such as funerals, birthdays and anniversaries are also part of the information collection. I take note if I can, but most of the time, I write my notes down when I come home. At school, I observe and take note of the setting of the classroom and the interaction between students. I give them activities around gender roles. For instance, I asked them if they had a chance to switch sexes, would they do it and why? I asked them questions about what they would like to become after the graduating from school. This allows me to collect information on what they think about the role of a men and women in Armenian society.

At Shinuhayr secondary school site. Girls are always together, and the boys are also always together. The school setting is the perfect microcosm of how Armenian society functions. Never will you see a male teacher sitting with a female teacher before class or during the breaks in the teacher’s lounge. Students equally model their behavior on what the adults do. There is little to no interaction between male and female students. In Armenian culture, it is not encouraged for girls and boys to hang out together. They can be together within the classroom space, work together in the classroom, but they can play together, or walk around the small

garden in the middle of the school. It is inappropriate, and they don't do it. The reason I have heard of the social interaction rule is that sexual activity may follow. This rule is self-reinforced among teenagers, between the age of 12 and 17, but not so much among children. One student quickly gets a bad reputation because she hangs out with boys. There were even rumors that she slept with boys from the village and the neighboring villages. These were just allegations. The situation got to the point that some parents demanded that I kicked her out of the school soccer team, that we created with a Peace Corps funded money, or they would withdraw their children. They did not want her to "contaminate" the rest of the girls. I kicked her out of the team. I had to demonstrate to the community that I shared their social values, or at least that I understood them. But trying to prove to a community that one shares or sympathizes with their cultural values sometimes creates a feeling of an ethical dilemma.

In the case of the girl I kicked out of the soccer team, I felt that I had betrayed values I swore to uphold like an American and a Peace Corps Volunteer. I was supposed to explain to the community that, the girl did not hurt anybody, that she was just seeing life differently. I failed her. I was not able to protect her. But on the flip side, I did not want to put myself in a situation where community members would think I did not respect their values and trying to tell them how to live their lives. Some Armenians do have resentment towards Americans because they believe Americans always go around telling people how to live their lives. There was an encounter between another Peace Corps Volunteer and a young man from her village in another province call Yeghegnazor. She said the guy told people in the community that sexual education is intended to turn their girls into prostitutes. In Yerevan, there is an anti-gay group that is so powerful that can convince people that, the 'gender' equality program that is being implemented are nothing but an attempt to turn Armenian people into gays and lesbians. This situation is so

bad that Peace Corps advised volunteers to avoid the use of the G-word as much as possible, especially, in classrooms and school settings. The girl I kicked out the soccer club, who by the way was a very good soccer player, later left the village and I have never heard from her since then.

Addressing gender equality in the classroom. The school usually starts at 9: 00 AM and ends at 3:00 PM, which gives me a lot of time to observe students and staff members. During the English lesson and as part of Peace Corps effort to promote gender equality through the Let Girls Learn project (now known as Girls Educational and Empowerment Fund), my counterpart and I designed lesson plans that included topics related to gender without mentioning the word “gender.” The word gender is viewed as something so negative to the point that Peace Corps ask the volunteers to avoid its use in the classroom as I mentioned above. The reason why we were told to avoid using the word ‘gender’ is not only because of some individual people and activists who have framed the term ‘gender’ as an attempt to turn Armenia into a country for gays and lesbians but because of the Armenian involvement Church. As I mentioned on above on page 16, when the Armenian Church representatives such as Bishop Galstanyan stated that “gender is a dangerous landmine placed in our value system,” most Armenians would act accordingly because, as noted before, the Church has remained an inseparable component of national social foundations and cultural identity. So, when the Armenian Church gets involved with an issue, it becomes very complicated to challenge the view of their view on the issue. Even though only 7% of Armenians go to church on regular base, and 23% of the 7% only go on special occasions, according to Papazian (2017), religion seem to be the defining factor on social changes and social discourses. So, I never used the term “gender” in any of my interactions with community members or students.

In the classroom, as part of data gathering, I use instead, the biological terminology of sex, male or female, boy or girl, and man and woman. I and my counterpart assigned activities that triggered discussion around gender roles in my lesson planning. One example of an observable task is to ask a student to describe a boy and to describe a girl. The objective of the activities is to collect data on the one hand, on what girls think of boys and vice versa, and on the other hand, what they think of each other. The analysis of the data showed that boys and girls talk about each other through the lens of the lens of their traditional values. Boys and girls expect girls to be beautiful and become mothers, and they expect boys to be active and become soldiers. At no time has anyone referred to boys becoming fathers. They also talk about the job they would like to do in the future. The girls are more into teaching, nursing, and the boys are into engineering, medical doctors, and soldier. One day, after class, I asked a girl who shot the gun well during a shooting competition, even better than some boys and won the first place for the school, whether she was going into the Army. She said, “No, it’s a boy’s thing.”

Doing observation at school and in the community as part of the ethnographic research was both rewarding and challenging. The participant observation provided thick data that had helped in designing interview questions and questionnaire to survey other participants. But there were some limitations on how far the questions could go in terms using specific vocabulary due to religious and cultural reasons. The observations have generated information that confirmed some assumptions regarding the place and role of girls and woman in Armenian society, how the gender roles are learned and enforced through daily interaction in the classroom and the school compounds among young children. The learned behaviors later impact the decision making and choice about what boys and girls want to become as contributing citizens to their country. In the military field, Atanesyan (2014) noted that “there are risks of social-psychological nature, which

determine self-perception of women as actual/potential militaries, as well as their perception by others based on existing gender roles and stereotypes in the society” (p.3).

Ethical dilemma. The interview was a little challenging, mainly because of the consent process, as the Armenians do not have the culture of signing a form that ties them to what they say. For me, the environment was a little bit difficult to have all the ethical requirements to conduct a proper research interview. Therefore, I had to find a way to get the information I needed, and at the same time respect the cultural environment of the people being studied. So, I designed an informal questionnaire and submitted the questions to the approval of Institutional Review Board at UND to grant me a waiver of the consent form. Most people are ready to share information on the topic; I was concerned that asking them to sign a formal paper would kill any chance of getting a rich, thick, and valid information from them. Instead, I informed them verbally of their rights and the ways that I would protect their identity and confidentiality. I got verbal assent from each person to continue interviewing them.

Existing data. Information on sex-selection abortion is available and accessible through the government websites, government libraries, non-profit organizations and international organizations such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. But I wanted to hear from people who may not have the chance to participate in studies conducted by the international organizations. I sent requests to groups, institutions, and individuals who did and are doing fieldwork on gender and sex-selective abortion. I participated in conferences and training organized by Peace Corps and by the European Union through local organizations such as International Center for Human Development. The government also had data on gender equality and the living conditions of women in Armenia. I also read articles, watched a lot of short campaign videos and explored booklets on violence against women.

Reactivity. Neuman (2003) referred to Reactivity as “the degree to which your presence as the researcher influences the behaviors of other because they know they are in a study may cause those study to act differently” in (Sangasubana, 2011, p.571). This study may have minor reactivity because the primary source of data used in my analyses came from access to existing data, conversation, observation, and informal interviews. The participants in the informal and online survey knew I was going to use their responses for this dissertation and they were honest about their answers if they were sure their identity was not going to be revealed. I did not sense anything like giving responses to please me, but if anything, most of them were eager to express their opinions on the issue.

Reliability. Reliability is believed to address the question of whether the researcher can collect data that is consistent and credible internally and externally (Neuman, 2003). Because most of the data I used in this study came from a triangulating data collection, using three major ethnographic sources—observation, interview and existing data—I believe that the information the study used to explore sex-selective abortion in Armenia has reasonable reliability. According to Denzin (1978), triangulation in social sciences is the use of “multiple techniques within a given method to collect and interpret data” in the study of the same phenomenon (p.301).

Validity. Validity “in the field research is the confidence placed in your ability to collect and analyze data accurately, representing the lives or culture under study” (Sangasubana, 2011, p.571). As a doctoral student and trained researcher, collecting data and analyzing has been the focus of my education in the Department of Educational Foundations and Research with experience in doing field work and conducting an interview. My background as a multicultural person and a theater person who has lived and worked in many countries helps me and gives me the confidence to understand other cultures and live in different cultures. It also provides me the

ability to represent these cultures in a way that is congruent with how participants themselves appreciate their culture. That is not to say that there may not be bias as a male researcher researching female issues, or as someone who grew up in the culture that is almost like the one being studied. I may be blinded or miss things that are so familiar to me and overlook them. But again, the fact that I am familiar with all three methods of gathering ethnographic minimizes the reactivity component and strengthens the reliability thus ensuring the validity of the study. The study also sent the play to eight participants as part of validity through member checking.

Ethnographic Reflection on Abortion

Abortion is among the most controversial societal issues that I have personal and deeper connections with in general. I have not witnessed sex-selective abortion nor been directly involved in the practice, but I do have personal connections to abortion. For these reasons, I have my views on abortions including sex-selective abortions. My connections to abortion range from being an active participant in decision makings that led to either performing abortion or not, to engaging in a discussion around abortion as a human rights issue. I share these connections to the issue and how it affects me, as a citizen, person and artist, to be transparent about how it may affect or inform my positions in my writings.

I was a teenager, in Togo.

- We cannot keep it.
- I agree. Then what shall we do?
- I don't know. If we cannot keep it, then we need to get rid of it. I don't think it is a human being yet.
- Let me talk to my friend, the doctor.

- I know some traditional ways to handle this. It is cheap, and it will keep us off the radar.
- Really?
- My sister did it many times.
- Oh well, let us do it.
- You must promise to be careful, next time.
- I promise.

We went on and performed an abortion. It was with the first girl I loved. After that, we had performed two other abortions in hospital, in the neighboring country of Ghana. The service there was cheaper and was believed to be better.

My Thoughts on Abortion

As teenagers, we did not want to break societal rules that did not allow pregnancy outside of wedlock. Even though the punishment may affect both the boy and the girls, it is usually the girl that pays a heavier price: she cannot go to school, and in the worst-case scenarios, she is kicked out of her family and may be forced to go live with the boy. In some cases, the boy's family may take her in, and in other cases, she may find her own place. Regardless of the scenario, she is often blamed for the situation. So, for most girls, like in my cases, abortion is performed to avoid the fury of the unspoken social rules, and to get rid of that impediment that can end all dreams that we have as younger people. We also from time to time blame it on the fact that we are not ready for parenting.

No matter how we view what we did, as good or bad, we don't perform sex-selection abortion. The girl had an abortion. My experience does not mean that people don't do sex-selective abortion, or that people don't want to do it in Togo. For instance, my cousin and his

wife fascinatingly had six girls. First, they had a girl. Then, they had another girl. Under pressure from the family and the wife to look for a boy, they ended up having a triplet! And he said no more. Now, would he have performed abortion had he had access to technology that could help detect the sex of the fetus? No, he would have not, because, he did have access to these technologies, as a wealthy person, working for international institutions and organizations around the world. These are all assumptions that I am making based on what my experiences are and what I know about Togolese cultures from the point of a Tem ethnic group member, from Sokodé, growing up in a suburban area of Nyékonakpoè, in Lomé. But there is some merit to my assumptions because, on the other hand, the older brother of my family had twins with his wife, and, as the tradition requires, the married couple must ‘close the door’ behind the twins. Indeed, in most part of Togolese cultures, it is advised to have another child after having twins, or else, the twins will die. The child that comes after the twins serve as gatekeeper who prevents the twins from going back to where they came from, which is a metaphor for dying. So, in their quest of the ‘gatekeeper’, they had another boy, but they wanted to have a girl. Therefore, they tried again and, luckily, they had a girl. So, one can assume that there is a sex preference in Togolese cultures, but it is only to balance the male-female ratio in the family and does not lead to a sex selection through abortion. At least, there is not yet a scientific research on it.

The Stories of Two Peace Corps Volunteers¹

Rape and abortion story. I was medivac’d, (medical evacuation = medivac) to Washington DC to get my knee fixed. There, I met a young woman. She needed to share something with someone, and for some reason, she chose me over all the rest of the Peace Corps

¹ After I wrote the stories, I sent them back to the participants for approval. They made minor changes and sent them back to me.

Volunteers that were with her for over a month before I got there. She came to my room and sat on a couch. I still have the image of how she was sitting on a chair. The light was dramatic to my artistic eyes, and I told her that I like the way she was lying. She was sitting in the armchair with her legs crossed, the head resting on her left hand. The armchair was by the window with a dimmed light showering her from behind. It was difficult to see her face. So, I turned on the table lamp. With its shade, the table lamp did not help a lot in term of lighting her face, but it did create a dramatic mood in the room. That was the first time she came into my room. She smiled and said she wanted to share something with me.

We had met three days earlier. I am not going to give all the details of our conversation here. But she gave me the permission to use her story in a play should I decide to write about her story. She told me,

“I was raped, during service,” she told me, and I got pregnant because of it. Silence. I was voiceless. I heard a lot of rape stories. I have met and worked with people who were raped. But I had never been in front of a victim of rape, with a baby of the rapist inside her. I was disarmed concerning what to do. She went on to say that was the reason why she was sent to DC. In my head, I knew the outcome: get rid of that fetus! But I did not tell her anything. I was the listener. She added: “That is not what is upsetting me now.” I was thinking, what can be more upsetting than being raped? She continued by saying that she was more upset with the way the person in charge of her case was handling the whole things. Long story short: she was upset because she was told to abort. At her first meeting with the medical personnel, she was asked when she would like to come in to do it. She was taken aback by the question and became defensive and resistant. Even though she identified herself as a pro-choice (in favor of reproductive choice), she

refused to cave in and abort the baby, because she was not happy with the fact that she was not being consulted on an issue affecting her and her future.

To put things in perspective, a Peace Corps Volunteer who gets pregnant during service is given a choice to abort, or her service will end. So, it appears the medical personnel were only trying to be helpful, maybe thinking that she wanted to continue her service, and it was a rape case. I am not trying to justify the behavior of the medical personnel who failed to ask what she wanted to do, and just went straight to a solution of their choosing. I asked her:

-Why don't you want to abort the baby? You have been raped. For me, it just seems like a natural solution, especially for someone who identifies as pro-choice.

-It is not about pro-choice or pro-life. It is about me, and what I want. I wanted to abort until I had that meeting.

-So?

- I am going to keep the baby. It is not baby's fault.

She kept the pregnancy, left Peace Corps and had a baby boy. I told her I was going to write a play between a mother and her daughter who wants to abort because she thinks keeping the unwanted pregnancy must destroy her dream. It is a work in progress.

It sits deep, in my inner self. I am always careful when I talk about issues that pertain to women's rights, or at least, that is what I try to do. When working on an issue that has to do with a specific group of people, I usually share my work in the form of informal conversations around the topic with friends who may or may not share a common identity with that group. For instance, talking about sex-selective abortion in Armenia, I share part of my findings with fellow

Peace Corps volunteers, when then share with me some of sex-selective stories they either witnessed or heard about in the community of their host family. It was in that same spirit that I was sharing my research findings and excitement with a Peace Corps volunteer, who told me she had an abortion. What makes her story unique among the thousands of thousands of stories out there, is that, she has a personal and deep connection to the abortion to the point that, she sees that part of her life as if something is missing. While, it may just be another case of abortion, another number or statistics that can be studied, for her it is a part of life that has affected her deeply. She noted that what makes the experience traumatizing to her, was not the fact that she went through the procedure. It was the absence and the silence of her partner when this was happening.

Until this day, the whole experience sits deep in her inner self, and she embraces it without casting blame. She owns that part of her life. She once searched and waited for that hurtful silence to be broken, and it turned into a word of acknowledgement and shared responsibility so that she could find closure. It never came. She waited again. She heard nothing from the young man she was with when all that happened. When she was done waiting, she went to a nearby river, cut a leaf from a tree and wrote the name of the guy on the leaf, the date their relationship began and the day it died. Then, she set herself free by letting the leaf sail down the river. She created closure for herself. She says she finds strength and learns something new about herself anytime she returns to that spot of her life journey timeline. She goes there from time to time, through storytelling or conversations with a friend, like the one she had with me.

CHAPTER III

THE RESULTS: THE TURNING OF THE DATA INTO PLAY

Why It Matters

For me, as a writer, there is no better way to share these ethnographic encounters with the complexity of the abortion issues than to ethnodramatize these data. Even though Ethnodrama uses the same traditional techniques of theatre production to perform data gathered through the research of participants' experiences, it is more than just an artistic work. It goes beyond the realm of creative urgency. I take abstract issues and make them real—human—by showing an audience the people who are making such decision. Saladaña (2005) noted, referring to Denzin (2004) that, “Ethnotheatre is a manifesto that exposes oppression and challenges the existing social order through an artistic rendering of moral and political discourse” (p. 1). There are many researchers such as Jonothan Kozol who wrote *Savage Inequalities* in 1991, Harry F. Wolcott with his performances of the Sneaky kid in 1994 and 2002, and many more, who have turned research data successfully in artistic representations using Ethnodrama methodologies. Saladaña noted that, “depending on the nature of their vision, contemporary artists employ traditional ethnographic methods to gather informative data for their plays” (p. 4). Saladaña also noted that “Examples of qualitative, ethnographic, and autoethnographic work presented in dramatic form have increased exponentially over the past decade and include diverse content from multiple disciplines” (p. 10). This research intends to contribute to that growing body of work.

The specific component of the methodology is the use Forum Theatre of the Theater of the Oppressed as the preferred means of presenting the findings of this sex-selective abortion study. I chose Theatre Forum as Ethnotheatre to represent this research because of the highly

interactive nature, allowing the audience to intervene at any moment to suggest a solution, rather than until the end of the performance to engage in a discussion around the issue. Turning the data into play is a way for me, the researcher, to give back to the community being researched, as they are given an opportunity to use the final product of the research to address the problem affecting them after the researcher leaves. The intent is to share the play with Armenian organizations that are working in the field of gender-related issues and sex-selective abortion so that they can use it to bring awareness around and reach their conclusion using Theater of the Oppressed. There is a local advocacy group that uses Theater of the Oppressed in Armenia that was put in contact with me through a Peace Corps Volunteer. Elements of theatre, such as the Greek Chorus, are used in the play to tell stories and give useful insights into the topic when needed. The stage directions may, at the time, elicit the conflict of interest in the research process without being too explicit. I did not use any identifying information such as names, and location of individuals, to protect participant identity.

Writing the Play

Stages directions. When I write a play, I try to minimize the stage direction; it gives, I believe, more flexibility to the director to add their artistic will to the material. Stage directions are essential parts of my writing, but too many stage directions restrict the director and the actors portraying the character. The fewer the stage directions, the wider the range of possibilities the actors can draw from to grow the characters each night they perform. I believe a good actor, when given a setting, a time, a date, and a historical and a geographical background, should be able to come up with ideas to create the given circumstances that tell the story of the character. A play is not a complete work until it is performed. So too are the characters in the play. So, any attempt to capture a definitive profile of a character does not really interest me.

Characters. The characters are concepts rather than human beings. Allegories, really. I choose the morality play approach in designing the characters. A morality play is an allegorical drama that personified abstract qualities as the main characters. Morality plays were very popular in the 15th and early 16th centuries in Europe. So, by personifying abstract qualities or concepts, the play does not put a lot of responsibility on individuals as who they are, but instead, as what they represent in the broader society. A policeman may have a view on an issue when he is in his uniform, and another view on the same issue when he takes off his uniform. The idea is, for an issue such as sex-selective abortion in this context, that it will be more productive to represent institutions rather than individuals.

The puppets. In the introduction I spoke of an image that has stuck with me: two or three dolls in the room of the young married couple with two sons who have a five or six years age difference between them. I know from my experience living in Armenia that boys don't play with, so who are these dolls for? Who are these dolls? Are they Missing Girls? I also know that, there is a wide-spread pattern in the practice of sex-selective abortion in Armenia, which consists in aborting fetuses after the first born until they get a boy. Therefore, looking at dolls in a room where two boys live made wonder. Also, the Togolese practice of wooden representation of baby-twins who die informed the decision to have a close conversation with these dolls so, I created puppet characters to represent the unheard, symbolic of the missing girls.

The Greek chorus. I wanted to capture the participative side of discussions I witnessed in the village I was serving in as a Peace Corps volunteer. One day, when the governor visited the village, a group of villagers met him in front of the City Hall, and the governor decided to have his meeting right there, in front of the Mayor's office, on the main street. The crowd started to grow around the governor and his security guards. The crowd gathered in a circle around the

governor and his security men in a way that no one was behind the governor. And people started to ask questions. There is something humble about the humble about the governor in choosing this format for his official visit to the village. The meeting was supposed to be formal, in a formal setting in the Mayor's office or the in the main hall of the secondary school where I taught, it was held outside, in cold weather. The format of the gathering broke away from the traditional power relation setting where the governor sits on stage and talk to the crowd. This format suggests something of equality.

From an artistic point, this scene from the governor's meeting inspired the creation of the set for the play, where the chorus represents the crowd. That is where the need of a Chorus came from. The chorus also comes in handy in providing commentary on actions and events to give clarifications on what is happening before the spectators. The chorus represents the interior dialogue that is going on in the audience, things that cannot be said by one character. Thus, as the voice of reason, the chorus prepares the audience to take on the role of participant during the interaction between the actors on stage and the audience members.

The use of the chorus cuts down the number of actors because of its ability to switch between the stage and the audience, take on different characters. It makes the presence of the Joker not isolated on stage. The Joker, a significant piece of the Theatre Forum, is a member of the chorus. That creates a smooth transition and a natural flow of action of the play, from the character of Le Fou to the Joker. The choice of two choruses suggests the complexity and diversity of thoughts and opinions within a group of people bound by the same cultural values.

Dialogues and Monologues. Most of the dialogues are direct quotations from data the study gathered during observations on site, interviews, questionnaires, document analysis, visual recordings, archives, journals. I want the play to reflect what the participants think about the

discourse surrounding sex-selective abortion in Armenia. Sometimes, the lines of the characters are direct quotations, and other dialogues reflect the findings after analysis of the data I collected. But the most central aspect of creating the dialogues was to make sure that the “Ethnoethere reveals a living culture through its character-participants, and if successful, the audience learns about their world and what it’s like to live in it” (p. 14). The creation of the dialogue was intertwined with the characters building. The assignment of lines to characters was done through coding. According to Saldaña,

A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data. The data can consist of interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journals, documents, literature, artifacts, photographs, video, websites, e-mail correspondence, and so on (p. 3).

So, the excerpts that have generated, for instance, Religion, as a descriptive code (the one-word that summarizes the excerpt of the data being coded), can be arranged and linked together in an artistically to serve as lines for the character Religion, (just in case Religion is a character). The process is used to create the dialogues for other characters anytime the play uses a direct quotation from the data. Most of the codes were directly taken from the data (the process is called *in vivo coding*). According to Saldaña, “since monologue and dialogue [...] are two fundamental components of playwriting, *in vivo codes* may highlight particular passages from transcripts and field notes worth including in the script” (p. 15).

Set. The set is also inspired by the same observation on the visit of the regional governor. The scene is mentioned above under the subhead *The Greek Chorus*. A thrust stage seems the ideal setting, but it is up to the director to make these choices. In a traditional proscenium theater

setting, there is a slight curvy line of five chairs center upstage. Tradition, Religion, Politics, International, and Intellectual sit on these chairs. Tradition sits in the middle, Politics and International sits on the right side of Tradition and Religion and Intellectual on his left. Politics and Religion are the ones sitting near to Tradition. The proximity between Tradition, Religion, and Politics suggests intertwined these three components are in Armenia society according to the data analysis. Chorus I is on stage right including Le Fou, who is more downstage, close to the audience. Chorus II is on stage left, including Little Girl and Writer. The stage is set in a way that looks like a big oval with a full opening downstage. Benches are ideal to use for the choruses. The members of each can be limited to four each. But it is up to the director to make that decision based on resources and needs.

Plot. The “plot is the overall structure of the play” (Saldanna, 2005, p. 14). The plot for this play is simple, linear, and easy to follow: A young unborn girl is tired of being sexually discriminated against through sex-selective abortion. She decides to take things into her own hands and explore why she is being denied a chance to live. She seeks help from the local writer who decides to help her. They take the matter in front of the traditional chief of the village to talk about the issue. The plot is created based on the analysis of the data through coding. The organization of the code, categories, and themes through the process of labeling and linking the coded data, informed for the most part the structure of the play. The use of a descriptive code and the use of in vivo coding has made it less challenging to come up with a plot that best serves the play.

CHAPTER IV
THE PLAY: THE CASE MISSING OF THE GIRL

Characters and Roles

Intellectual: He/she uses technical language that sometimes upsets the chorus. The intent to make the character gender ambiguous to suggest the complexity of gender based on physical appearance. Ideally, the role, in the case, should be played by a woman, humanized through the character's demeanors that the audience can like, hate, and sometimes have mixed feelings about. This makes the character complex like the issue addressed and discussed in the play. While constructing the character of Intellectual, the image that came to mind first was a male in a suit. So, this character also expresses a personal gender bias that associates doctor with a man and less likely with a woman. This will avoid the simplistic dichotomy "men versus women" in gender discourse.

Favorite lines: *"Abortion is a human right. It is sometimes performed to save human lives in life-threatening situation, and the case of unwanted pregnancy such as rape"* (ICHHD Report, 2017, p. 42; Focus group for doctors, Yerevan.)

Chorus I: Chorus I represents the people, what they say publicly and secretly, and what they dream about. They all can use a neutral mask.

Favorite lines: *"A woman's first child was a girl; her family did not take her home from hospital and she has to go to her mother's place"* (Excerpt from survey)

Chorus II: Chorus II works with puppets and marionettes, which represent the Missing Girls and those who support them in the society.

Favorite lines: *"My name is Missing Girls"*

Le Fou: member of Chorus I. His opinions are outrageous, sarcastic and immoral yet practical.

Favorite line: “This is what I suggest: let us stop selling this modern family crap to our people. We all know it is not working and it will never work. Let us allow people to have their children without fear of not being able to feed them. So, when a family finds themselves with seven children some of whom are girls that they don’t want, I will come in with my NGO -I am working on it- collect these girls, take them to other countries where they will be happily married to good suiters.”

Politics: He has a baton that he uses as scepter. He represents people in power, stakeholders, special interest groups, and the military and the governing power. Politics’ views sometimes align with Intellectual’s view as they share the intellectual elite status and reports to the governing power and the special interest groups.

Favorite lines: “No, you have never advocated for sex-selective abortion, my dear International. You only advocate for abortion as a human right. You have never pressured me into doing anything. You always suggest ideas.”

Religion: It represents religious institutions.

Favorite lines: “We have been silent about the issue and afraid to talk about it publicly to the point that some NGOs have to create a guide to talk about the issue” (A practical guide for spiritual servants to ensure support to family and community for the prevention of gender-biased sex selection. Yerevan, ICHD, 2017)

International: International governments, International NGOs, and International institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, USAID, and similar.

Favorite lines: *“That is fair. But I have never advocated for sex-selective abortion.”*

Writer: is an international volunteer worker, who is a PhD-student and a freelancer, with a focus on gender and transnational feminism. The preference will be that he is male to show male support for female causes. He works with local NGOs that fight for gender equality, eradication of gender violence, and against gender-biased selective abortion. He carefully criticizes everything and everybody because of his status of outsider. He writes things down more than he speaks openly about them for fear of political backlash against his international organization and from his international organization against him.

Favorite lines: *“We are talking about sex-selective abortion that has prevented these girls to be born.”*

Little Girl: She is a human representation of a Missing Girl. A member of the Chorus II, she is the representative of the Missing Girls. She has a red shoe and light blue dress in her hand. She is wearing a long-white ghost-like dress. She holds a red shoe and a light blue dress throughout the play, using them as accessories.

Favorite line: *“How can I be so important yet so expendable?”*

Tradition: Can be a woman or a man. Tradition represents all that is seen and referred to as reason why things are and should be what they are. He or she is the moral authority that many publicly respect and try to live by. Tradition is cross-dressed and makes it difficult to tell whether it is a he or a she.

Favorite line: *“You made me, you can change me. Don’t make it look as if I am the one telling you what to do. You are the one making me, and making it look as if I am the one controlling you.”*

Note on the choice of Tradition over Culture as character in the play

Though, there is not a single definition of ‘Culture’ in the field of social science. Dencheng (2010) observed that “Scholars have all tried to define culture in a satisfied manner, but all failed. As early as 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn listed 164 definitions of Culture that they had found in the anthropology literature” (p. 735). This study uses the definition suggested earlier by Spencer-Oatey,

Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behaviour and his/her interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behaviour” (2008, p.3).

And ‘Traditions’ on the other hand is defined as “the handing down of information, beliefs, and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction” (Merriam-Webster, 2018; retrieved from www.merriam-webster.com). The notion of “handing down” makes the choice of Traditions as character more relevant to this project².

Prologue

Synopsis for the play

In the virtual village of Armenia called Village, things are not looking good. The socio-economic situation and national security threatened by the war with the neighbor have led to an interesting and parodical situation. How can a country with a population of 2500000 practice a sex-selective abortion and at the same time talks about increasing the number of the population? The abortion

² The study uses two working definitions of culture and tradition: one in the research part, another one in the play.

through sex selection led to a distorted sex ratio at the end of which are the missing girls, a term coined by Amartya Sen in 1990. If the practice continues, the total number of the missing girls will be the equivalent of no child being born in the Village for two and half years. Village may well disappear one day if quest of boys maintains its current course. So, Little Girl, an unborn girl, decides to take her destiny and the future of her Village into her own hands.

Production notes

A thrust stage seems the ideal setting, but it is up to the director to make these choices. Also, the play can be performed anywhere. In a traditional proscenium theater setting, there is a slight curvy line of five chairs center upstage. Tradition, Religion, Politics, International, and Intellectual sit on these chairs. Tradition sits in the middle, Politics and International sits on the right side of Tradition and Religion and Intellectual on his left. Politics and Religion are the ones sitting near to Tradition. The proximity between Tradition, Religion, and Politics suggests intertwined these three components are in Armenia society according to the data analysis. Chorus I is on stage right including Le Fou, who is more downstage, close to the audience. Chorus II is on stage left, including Little Girl and Writer. The stage is set in a way that looks like a big oval with a full opening downstage. Benches are ideal to use for the choruses³. There are no specific requirements for the costumes, but it is preferable to identify some character through symbolism. Politics uses a scepter, Chorus I uses the puppets, Religion has a Bible, etc.

³ The members of each can be limited to four each. But, it is up to the director to make that decision based on resources and needs.

Setting

It is this time of the year when the winter starts to fade away. The year is the 2017⁴ in this imaginary village of Armenia called Village. The social atmosphere seems to suggest that the usual war can break out at any time. The economy is not at its best, and the political situation leaves the villagers a bit hopeless.

***Scene 1.** A room with a table and two chairs. On the chair near the table is sitting the Writer, with his head on the table. There are papers on the table, a book, a pen, a glass of water and some papers on the floor. It is early in the morning. In an unconscious move, the Writer turns on the lamp, which wakes him up. He jumps as if he was coming from a nightmare. He looks around for a while, drinks from the glass. As he gets ready to write, he notices something on the other chair in the room. It is Little Girl. He does not recall putting the puppet there.*

Little Girl: Until when? I'm waiting.

I wait for the day my turn will come.

If there is any turn at all for me

in this part of the world.

How can I be so important?

Yet so expendable?

I was once a queen.

Some say I was once a goddess.

⁴ The year must be changed to the year of the production every time the play is performed.

Some were singing. Some were dancing.

Others were sad. Others were merry.

Still, others loved each other.

And there were those who hated each other.

Evenings and mornings, Mornings and evenings.

There was an evening. There was a morning, and there were evenings and mornings. Then, the cloud. I have gone missing. Intentionally interrupted. Here I am. I know. Human language cannot express it. But I have to find a way. Somewhere, with watery eyes, the air is the whistling sorrow of an unborn girl, a girl like me, who has made home the cloudy sky.

I know that sound. I am that sound.

It is the sound of the moving tears.

The friction between multiple fading cries,

of many “me’s” out there,

who, like me, are crying and yelling.

Yelling or crying, whichever comes first!

Does it matter?

Ears of a human being can barely hear it.

Can you hear it?

Oh, I am grateful. I totally forgot. Unlike you, I have been assigned

A name, not a number, a name:

Next time we meet, call me, Missing Girl.

Short beat.

Writer: (*Calmly*) How did you get in?

Little Girl: You left the door open.

Writer: You know you cannot be here.

Little Girl: I can be anywhere I want.

Writer: Then go somewhere else.

Little Girl: I need your help.

Writer: Look. We went over this conversation before. I have been working on these issues for only three years. I do not know enough yet to help you.

Little Girl: You do. You just don't know yet.

Writer: It is a more complex situation than I thought some years ago.

Little Girl: Therefore?

Writer: There is nothing I can do.

Little Girl: There is always something we can do.

Writer: I don't have the power to change anything.⁵

⁵ Excerpt from a conversation with an Armenian woman I named K.

Little Girl: That is what everyone says.⁶

Writer: I am an outsider.

Beat. Children' voices from Chorus II in the background.

Chorus II: But you promised!

Little Girl: Do you hear that?

Writer: It was three years ago.

Chorus II: We wish we were to be born, somewhere else, far away from here.

Writer: We all wish we were born somewhere else.

Little Girl: At least I would have been born.

Writer: And die of Ebola or Malaria, forced into child marriage, or gunned down in school shooting; you name it ...

Little Girl: At least I would have been born.

Writer: Or die in wars that have been thriving here and there, which promise to last forever.

Chorus II: At least I would have been born.

Little Girl: At least, I would have breathed the air, that air I am being denied a chance to taste; the same favor that is always granted to you.

Writer: Me?

⁶ Idem

Chorus II: Your kind, the other sex.

Writer: That is not always true. Just for the record, I did not request to be born, and, my kind, the other sex also faces similar fate under different circumstances. (*Beat*) Look, huh, it is not that simple to make your case.

Chorus II: The case of the Missing Girl!

Little Girl: Tell them, we know no time.

Chorus II: But we know that the train that comes to our side of the world often carries a sign that reads “The other sex Only”.

Writer: That is not good.

Little Girl: We are getting used to it.

Chorus II: Waiting is part of the game.

Little Girl: You wait for your turn. It may be longer, sometimes shorter. But the ride often takes six to ten months. But these days, things have become different. Waiting has turned into hope.

Chorus II: Hoping is also part of the game.

Little Girl: For some moons and for some reasons, the train comes, picks us up, all well documented, and for some other reasons, drops us off halfway through on the 9-MJ.

Writer: Halfway through on what? 9-MJ?

Chorus II: The nine-month journey.

Little Girl: The ritual that often ends with the “complete expulsion of a live or dead fetus, whose weight is over 500 grams, from the maternal body from the 22nd week of gestation.”⁷

Writer: Pregnancy.

Little Girl: You call it pregnancy?

Writer: We call it pregnancy.

Little Girl: You are a writer...

Writer: ..., but I am not a woman.

Chorus II: You are not a woman. Why does it matter?

Writer: I was once asked why I write about women.

Little Girl: Really?

Writer: Yes. People can be very nasty when it comes to these types of issues. You know, White people talking about Black struggles, men researching women, etc. can be tricky.

Chorus II: Oh.

Writer: Yes. Some women think their “womaness” gives them the right to speak for other women, or it gives them the expertise needed to help other women around the world in the name of the universal woman experience. Nevertheless, when you take a closer look at what they are doing, it is not much different from what they are supposedly fighting against.

Little Girl: I see.

⁷ International Center for Human Development, Report 2017, p. 7

Writer: Sometimes, they engage in a discourse that imposes certain cultural values on the rest of the other women; they unilaterally decide these other women need their help.

Chorus II: What is it that they are fighting for or against?

Writer: Not to let anyone—meaning men—tell them how to live their life or what to do with their body. So, if one day you finally make it here, to your destination, you may well have to fight for your place in society, or continue this fight, and more. You know, the situation of your kind around here is not enviable, but it could be worse. Elsewhere, you could be gunned down, in a classroom, and ...

Little Girl: You said that already.

Writer: Anyway, now you see why I cannot help you.

Chorus II: You are not the only man who is going to help us.

Little Girl: Before you, there was Amartya Sen. He gave me the name Missing girl⁸. I am one of the 40 percent of the 3.9 million missing women under 60 years of age globally each year.⁹

Writer: Ok?

Little Girl: We know you have been researching missing girls.

Writer: That is right.

Little Girl: The central character of the plays you wrote all have a young female character as the protagonist.

⁸ Amartya Sen in an essay in *The New York Review of Books* in 1990, coined the term Missing girls.

⁹ World Bank Poverty Report, April 2015, p. 1.

Writer: I was only trying to tell a story of my sisters.

Little Girl: Well, we are your sisters now. And you work you won't mean anything if you don't share them critically with the world.

Writer: This world can be very cruel sometimes to people who try to make a difference. Nonetheless, since this is a culture issue, and I am not from here, it will be culturally inappropriate for me, to interfere. Oh-they-are-here-again-to-tell-us-how-to-live type of situation? Yes, I always try to avoid that as someone who has been at the receiving end of that attitude.

Chorus II: We will make you one of them. One of us. One of our people.

Writer: Huh! I must come clean. I have been writing about sex-selective abortion as part of my dissertation. You see, I want to get my Ph.D. so that I can be proudly referred to as "Doctor," and hopefully get a good job. That is my main goal. And talking about this issue is just part of the process. Nothing more. I have no intention to try to end sex-selective practice around here.

Little Girl: I have heard good things about what you have done and written.

Writer: It is also part of the process. Who am I to come in to try to change people's way of living? I am only trying to get my Ph.D.

Little Girl: Writer, we don't want to be just another number lying between the many pages of the thousands of reports on us that are out there.

Writer: That is exactly what I am doing: turn you into another statistic.

Little Girl: We want to speak.

Writer: Speak? How?

Little Girl: You are using art-based research, Ethnodrama, right?

Writer: Yes, but it is not like I am the first to...

Little Girl: Come with me.

She drags him off stage.

Scene 2. *Outdoor. A compound of a public school in Village. The set suggests a courtroom.*

One can hear a donkey braying 'hee-haw' in the background. In a proscenium theater setting, Tradition, Religion, Politics, International, and Intellectual sit on chairs. Tradition sits in the middle, Politics and International sits on the right side of Tradition and Religion and Intellectual on his left. Politics and Religion are the ones sitting near to Tradition. Chorus I is on stage right including Le Fou, who is in a more advanced position downstage. Chorus II is on center stage left, including Little Girl and Writer. Benches are ideal to use for the choruses.

Tradition is not happy. There is a sound of inaudible little girls' chatter. One can pick up some words here and there. Little Girl and Writer appears

Writer: What is this place?

Chorus I: We are innocent. We haven't done anything! We are hopeless victims of invention, development, progress, of a cruel civilization.

Writer: These voices!

Little Girl: Yes.

Writer: What is this place?

Little Girl: In each part of the Global Village, people gather to talk about issues that are relevant to their community. This time, it is us at the center of the discussion.

Writer: I like this idea. Who can attend?

Little Girl: People you cannot imagine.

Chorus II: I could have been a good person if I had had a chance to be born. My name is Missing Girl.

Writer: Now I understand.

Tradition, from his sitting position is clearly annoyed by the complaints of Chorus I and Chorus II.

Tradition: *(With authority)* Enough! Enough of all these complaints and cries! *(Everyone keeps quiet. Addressing Writer)* And you, who are you?

Little Girl: That is the writer we talked to you about.

Writer: You talked about me?

Tradition: *(To Writer)* Sit down!

Writer: Thank you.

He sits down.

Tradition: *(To Little Girl)* Is that him? *(Little Girl nods. Pointing at Chorus I who display the puppets of girls)* Do you recognize anybody among them?

Writer: Me? No.

Tradition: They are your missing sisters and they are complaining. Their complaints take away my sleep, and I don't like it.

Writer: I see.

Tradition: They say you know about some of their problems and their struggles and you have been writing about them.

Writer: Writer and journalist.

Tradition: Your sisters are not happy. They are not happy with you.

Writer: Not happy with me?

Tradition: They think you are not using your writing skills and potential to talk about all those injustices that have been happening to them since the collapse of the Empire.¹⁰

Write: I write, and nobody reads it. People are too busy working. No time to think.

Tradition: They say you are supposed to give them voice.

Writer: Me? Give them a voice?

Tradition: Is that him?

Little Girl: Yes, that is him.

Little Girl walks over to Writer and says something in his ear.

¹⁰ Reference to the Soviet Empire.

Writer: Alright. I tried many times, as I am doing now, to amplify the concerns of communities through my writings, but it usually falls on deaf ears, or in the hands of those who have bellies where their brains should be.

Tradition: What was that supposed to mean?

Writer: Many times, through my writings, I have tried to draw attention to issues that are plaguing communities around the world. Every time my words were met with resistance from special interest groups.

Tradition: Do you think the people in power have dismissed your attempt to bring awareness on social issues?

Writer: Yes.

Tradition: I am listening.

Writer: SIG. Special interest groups such as religious leaders, politicians, intellectuals, you name it.

Tradition: We are listening.

Writer: These SIGs often get in the way of appeals for minor changes. For instance, Women's-rights groups have been campaigning for a decade for a domestic-violence law in Armenia. So far, all their efforts have failed. Depending on the session of parliament, lawmakers have either refused to take up the legislation or voted it down.¹¹

¹¹ Sahakyan, A. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/armine-sahakyan/eu-is-giving-armenia-its_b_9653262.html#

Tradition: Why would they do anything like that?

Writer: As the saying goes, “A woman is like wool: The more you beat her, the softer she will be.”¹² I cannot explain how this mentality is being passed down to the younger generation, because I am not the traditions.

Tradition: What do you mean by “I am not a tradition”?

Writer: I don’t create and transmit content and patterns of values, ideas, and other symbolic-meaningful systems as factors in shaping human behavior,¹³ such as that wool metaphor.

Chorus I: What is he talking about? What is wrong with trying to make a woman soft? He is clearly not one of us! I mean just look at him!

Chorus II: Oh really? “Just look at him¹⁴”? Do you really want to go that low?

Chorus I: I am just saying it.

Chorus II: What does his look have to do with anything? The man has been inducted into the manhood of community two years ago.

Chorus I: No matter how long it stays in the river, the trunk of a tree will never become a crocodile.¹⁵

¹² Idem.

¹³(Triandis, in Hofstede,1981, p. 15).

¹⁴ Reference to the race of Writer. This can only be relevant if the actor is from different ethnicity. Or the director can use artistic mean to make Writer physically different from the rest of the actor.

¹⁵ Togolese saying.

Chorus II: Քանի լեզու գիտես, այնքան մարդ ես: You are as many people as the languages you know.¹⁶ The man speaks our language, he teaches our children in school for almost three years now, for free, and he is a good boy, which means, he is socially, culturally and officially a member of this community.

Chorus I: He is supposed to be the one amplifying our voice.

Chorus II: Well, he is trying, he is teaching English to our kids. And you, you can't even marry off your girls, and age is getting the best out of them.

Chorus I: At least I have boys, what do you have?

Writer: (*Loudly*) People, there is nothing to amplify around here.

Chorus I and II are clearly upset by the Writer's remarks.

Chorus I: You took an oath to give voice to the underserved and to make the oppressed be heard!

Writer: (*To the choruses*) No, I did not. I took an oath to serve my community to the best of my ability and my potential. And this, you know that this issue is not one of them.

Tradition: It is my understanding that now you are a member of our community. Based on where you are originally from culturally...

Chorus II: America?

Tradition: No. Africa. I know we do share a lot in common in terms of cultural practices and values.

¹⁶ Armenian proverb: Քանի լեզու գիտես, այնքան մարդ ես:

Writer: Some but not all.

Chorus I: But you promised.

Little Girl: What about your writing about the oppressed¹⁷?

Writer: Look, I write about feeling, pain, and complaints, and I have been doing that since day-one in all my writing. But the truth is that I am at the point of my career where I need to get my Ph.D. I told Little Girl before, I understand the gravity of the topics I addressed in my writings. For instance, I was at the European Union conference on gender-biased selective abortion. But it was never my intention to stand in front of a court, trying to make a case for these issues.

Tradition: Now, you are. What would you do? I know there are many people like you in our community, who are struggling to catch up with diversity. We are happy you are one of us. Now tell me, what do you think about the issues?

Writer: So, it is not me talking?

Tradition: No, it is the writer in you that is talking.

Writer: Alright. I just wanted to make sure. You all know how much I love this community. I really want to be able to come back if I happen to leave the country.

Tradition: It is not for me to decide whether you can remain in the country or cannot, but you are always welcome here.

¹⁷ Reference to the Theatre of the Oppressed created by Augusto Boal (1998).

Writer: Earlier, I mentioned that I have no power—not power—I think authority is a better word. I have no authority over what becomes a law or policy. As a matter of fact, this specific one must do with the doctors and politicians and other intellectuals.

Tradition: One what?

Writer: The case of sex-selection through abortion.

Tradition: Doctors and Politicians?

Writer: And their SIGs.

Tradition: Their special interests groups? Are you suggesting that they are responsible for what is happening?

Writer: I am not sure about being responsible, but they sure are exacerbating the issue. Let me just put it this way: they are complicit!

Tradition: Complicit? Little Girl?

Little Girl: Yes, Your Honor?

Tradition: Listen everyone. You all know well. You also know why you are here. I require us to meet every year to discuss issues that are bleeding through our community. And this year's topic is Sex Selective Abortion. A group of unborn and yet to be born girls are not happy with the status quo. They are complaining about the way they are being treated before conception, during conception and sometimes after birth. I must admit some of the complaints are difficult for me to understand. Therefore, I am going to ask the representative of the plaintiffs: What are you complaining about? Let us hear it.

Little Girl: Hello everyone and thank you for taking time out to be here. I know in this part of the world, I have never been the most desirable outcome. Every year, more than 2000 stars are turned off. They will never shine again. We don't notice it because the stars are far away from us and there seem to be too many of them. When asked if a family must have only one child, what would the preferred sex be, 54% of the respondents said they would prefer a boy.¹⁸ Sometimes their smile disappears when people come to the train station and find out that it is me getting off the train. A family falls apart because of me. Mothers pray to God to give them boys so that their society can be proud of them. I am not wanted because often, I am a source of pain and harm to my older kin.

Chorus II: We love you, our beautiful¹⁹ girl.

Little Girl: Even those who publicly say, like you (*pointing at Chorus II and the audience*) that they do not care about the sex of their children, deep inside their heart, they wish they had a boy.²⁰

Chorus II: This is a bit of an overgeneralization our girl.²¹ And what is wrong with desiring thing? Are we putting 'desire' of trial?

Little Girl: Does it matter? I know there are some people who genuinely want girls. Others who just want to have children.

Chorus II: But you are an important part of our community. We need you. To have children. To clean the house. To set the table. And the most important of all. To become a good housewife.

¹⁸ Word Bank, Poverty Report, April 2015

¹⁹ Cultural expectations for girls. It is very important that girls look beautiful.

²⁰ Excerpt from a conversation with K.

²¹ "our girl" is an endearment way to call girl in Armenian "մեր աղջիկը".

Little Girl: Yet, unwanted.

Tradition: How so?

Little Girl: In many cases these days, before I get to my destination, some have already chosen to end my journey.

Tradition I: Why and how?

Chorus I: That is why we are here to find out, Your Honor.

Chorus II: Our girls, it is not that easy for us to make these choices. How dare you bring us before the moral high court? Don't you know we are at war? Don't you know we have to keep the family lineage? Haven't you heard about the incident where upon learning that he had a daughter, the husband went to a hospital and beat his wife²²? We don't want to get beaten up. A woman's first child was a girl; her family did not take her home from the hospital and she had to go to her mother's place.²³ We want to go back to our husband. We must have boys!

Le Fou: Cut the crap!

Chorus II: It is easy for you to say, you don't have to experience that.

Le Fou: Yes. I don't have your experience because I am not a woman. But that does not mean I cannot express my views on matters that affect my community. And, this is not just a woman's issue. It affects the family, because the man always has a say in these matters.

²² ICHD, Report 2017, p. 37.

²³ idem

Tradition: (*Mocking Le Fou*) Alright Le Fou, we are listening. Everybody, listen up! Le Fou has the floor!

Le Fou: “They say a son is born to a man and a girl is born to a good man. If I have four daughters, I won’t worry; I’ll have two more and set up a dance group.”²⁴

Chorus II: What about being told, as a woman, a pregnant woman that “You better bring a head of a cheese than a girl!”²⁵ Does that sound like crap to you?

Le Fou: Whatever!

Chorus II: Don’t whatever us.

Le Fou: I am whatever whoever I want, wherever I want and however I want.

Chorus II: How about you talk to your fellow men.

Le Fou: I am not my fellow men. I am Le Fou. How about you talk to God, ask Him to talk to the men. I did not create them.

Disagreement from the crowd.

Le Fou: Or maybe you can ask the Priest to talk to God,

Chorus II: What is wrong with you? How dare you?

Le Fou: Dare me? Isn’t that what he says his mission is, talking to God on your behalf? Why don’t you ask him to ask Him, why He is not giving you a son? Am I God?

²⁴ ICHD Report, Focus group interview 2017.

²⁵ Idem.

Chorus II: (*Ignoring Le Fou to address Tradition*) We have been accused of not being able to have boys. How do I make a boy or a girl willingly? I wish I could, I could have given them as many boys as they want.

Tradition: I don't think anyone wants a crowd of boys running around the village either! What a recipe for self-extinction. Ba ho!²⁶

Chorus I: It is not always men who yearn to have sons. We have heard conversations where it is the women who have wished they had a boy even when the husband did not care.

Chorus II: Why not?

Why not hope for a girl when you know that giving birth to a boy during the first pregnancy erases the possibility to abort a girl fetus because of sex-selective abortion?

Why not wish for a boy, when you know that it will lift the pressure off the shoulder of your husband whose sexual performance will not be questioned anymore?

Blessed the woman who has a son during her first pregnancy for it clears the way for the next child to be born regardless of its sex.²⁷

That is the reality, and why not hope for it.

Long beat.

²⁶ Ba or ba ho. The most popular phrase in Armenian language that can mean anything from surprise, anger, mockery, etc.

²⁷ The sentence is a parody of Matthew 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Le Fou: People, have you ever asked yourself what would happen “If the number of girls was small, we won’t have future mothers!”²⁸ What would happen in this case?

Tradition: Good question Le Fou. I said it earlier, that we don’t want a village full of young men only! How would that look like? Ba ho!

Chorus I: “Homosexuality may spread”²⁹

Writer: Wow! I understand you are a making a case for your situation.

Chorus I: “Or women will have more than one husband”.³⁰

Writer: So, what?

Chorus II: So, what?

Writer: Scare tactics!

Chorus II: Does that seem normal to you?

Writer: What?

Chorus II: Women walking around with multiple guys? Guys marrying guys and girls marrying girls?

Writer: What is your point?

Chorus II: We are a Christian nation. That is my point!

Writer: What is that supposed to mean?

²⁸ (Excerpt from ICHD focus group interview)

²⁹ idem

³⁰ idem

Le Fou: That we are Christians when it works for us.

Writer: Oh, I see.

Le Fou: You don't, here, religion is a more complex situation than it appears. (*Addressing the crowd*) But people, do you think that with a lot of boys walking around, there will be more wars as women are the symbol of peace and men are combative.³¹

Tradition: We have always been at war since the creation of our nation.

Chorus II: The war may break out again at the border at any time. We say there are many boys, but after the April incidents we saw how many boys perished.³²

Le Fou: So, what you are saying is, we are killing girls through sex-selective abortion so that we can have more boys who are going to die on the border anyway? What is the endgame here? Let me ask you this, Politics, and all of you: does the selective slaughter...

Intellectual: Abortion. Selective abortion.

Le Fou: ... of the girls' fetuses turning them into boys?

Chorus II: What do you mean?

Le Fou: We are talking about having a son, right?

Chorus II: Ok?

³¹ Excerpt from informal conversation/survey, 2017.

³² Focus group for doctors, ICHD, p. 43, 2017.

Le Fou: When you selectively abort a girl, does the aborted fetus turn into a boy fetus in the next pregnancy? Or do you keep the aborted fetuses somewhere, and some scientific magic turn them into boys?

Chorus II: It keeps the family modern, we are being told.

Chorus I: What? Where is the connection between sex-selective abortion and modern family?

Le Fou: I can't see any connection.

Tradition: (*Talking to him/herself*) I hate that modern family thing. (*To the crowd*) Let's move on!

Chorus II: "If the number of girls is small, men will have to bring in foreign women from abroad and marry them"³³ and ...

Writer: And when these women conceive girls they will abort them...

Le Fou: Kill their baby girl fetuses...

Writer: They are not killing. They are not babies yet ...

Chorus I: We are!

Writer: Not yet you are not.

Chorus I: We are!

Le Fou: I will drink to that.

Tradition: Nobody is drinking to anything yet!

³³ Focus group for doctors, ICHD, p. 43, 2017.

Le Fou: Roger that! To go back to what Politics said regarding marrying women from other countries, it is not going to happen.

Chorus II: Why?

Writer: First, because it is not a viable solution.

Le Fou: Second, it is stupid.

Writer: It is not even a solution.

Chorus II: How is it not a solution?

Le Fou: What makes you think that you can just go out there and get some women, because you want to? Oh, you cannot just go around and take girls, you sound like our neighbors. Third, no women want to marry into the hell you are creating for girls. Believe me, I traveled around the world

Tradition: (*To himself*) I know it is a matter of time before we hear about the travel thing.

Le Fou: And I know how people think.

Tradition: Wow!

Le Fou: As a matter of fact, a small group of girls you have around, they are also leaving the country for better life far away from home.³⁴ I know that for sure.

³⁴ There a growing trend of young university graduates who know English leaving Armenia for China. I know about 20 of them, some of whom are my close friends. There is not data or research on that yet, to my knowledge.

Writer: That is right. And we are talking about ending selective abortion and you are talking about getting married and making children.

Chorus II: But it is good to have many boys for our country's army³⁵.

Chorus I: It doesn't mean getting rid of me! You can have as many boys as you want for the country's army, and at the same time give me a chance to be around.

Le Fou: (*Pointing at somebody in Chorus II*) Your sister beat you at the sniper's shooting competition!

Chorus II: (*The person from Chorus II*) What is that supposed to mean?

Le Fou: I don't know. Think!

Chorus II: Oh my God! Are you suggesting we send our girls to war? Le Fou is suggesting we send our women to war!

Le Fou: You said it. I don't recall making that statement.

Here, various members of Chorus II take turns speaking.

Chorus II: With all the pressure, we are getting from outsiders to keep a small family.

Le Fou: What pressure?

Chorus II: Modern family.

Tradition: I hate that word!

Writer: Who is exerting the pressure?

³⁵ ICHD, Focus group of men, 2017.

Chorus II: Some outsiders we were told.

Le Fou: Blame it on the outsiders. I think, for your financial situation, anyone reminding you to have fewer children is doing you a favor.

Chorus II: We must keep our family smaller to be able to feed them.

Chorus I: Therefore, girls' fetuses must make way in order for you to achieve your modern family goal, and make ends meet.

Chorus II: We have no job.

Chorus I: Then kill the boys too!

Chorus II: They are going to die on the line of battle anyway.

Writer: Wow!

Chorus II: Money has left our village. We need to protect our country. And girls cannot do that.

Writer: Your Honor, we need to bring the debate back to the main topic.

Chorus II: (*Addressing the crowd*) Don't you want to see your last name flowing forever on the river of history?

Little Girl: You will not be there to see your name flowing on the river of history.

Writer: Your name may not even make it to the shore of the river of history.

Little Girl: Your Honor, you need to stop this. I think this is getting out of hand. We need to refocus on the reason why we are here.

Tradition: I see plenty of connections between what they are talking about and the topic *du jour*.

Writer: Your Honor, I agree with you, but I think we should refocus the debate on sex-selective abortion.

Little Girl: In our country.

Tradition: Alright (*to the crowd*) That is enough people! Little Girl, how do the parents know which one of the babies is on the train?

Little Girl: They have technology. They use ultrasound.

Tradition: What is that?

Writer: It is a device that, can detect many medical problems and, can also detect the sex of the fetus at an early stage, inside the womb.

Tradition: Why would anyone want to know the sex of their children before they are born?

Chorus II: We must know which one is coming so that we can buy the right clothing.

Tradition: The right clothing for a baby? What happened with the joy of waiting?

Chorus I: Gone with time.

Writer: I think Politics and Intellectual will be able to help us understand what is happening to our village.

Tradition: Is this happening only in our village?

Little Girl: No, I met many “me’s” out there from all over the world. But it is the proportion at which it is happening here that is scary.

Writer: The number of boys born for every hundred girls is widening: 115 for every 100. For a country with about three million people living in it, it is about 2000 girls every year. Your

Honor, this is the equivalent of two lifespans with no child being born in our country. Think about it.

Tradition: Someone go find me Intellectual and Politics!

Little Girl disappears and reappears with the Politics and the Intellectual behind her.

Scene 3. Same setting as in scene 2.

Chorus II: Oh God! This going to be bad!

Chorus II: Politician is coming! This is bad!

Chorus II: She doesn't understand. "A man is not a man until his wife gives birth to a boy".³⁶

Chorus II: Of course, what wise man will let girls inherit the family wealth? Parents who give their property to their daughters might be unwise.³⁷

Chorus II: And we are at war.

Tradition: Politics, Intellectual. How are you?

Politics: Could be better your Honor.

Intellectual: Is everything alright, Your Honor?

Tradition: You always ask that same question whenever I ask to see you. Have a seat!

Politics: Those seats are not appropriate for my rank.

Tradition: Please just have a seat.

³⁶ Excerpt from conversation/informal survey, 2017

³⁷ Participants focus, World Bank, 2015.

Intellectual: Alright. Why are we here?

Tradition: These little girls over here are not happy.

Politics: Your Honor, you brought us here to tell us that some little girls are not happy?

Tradition: They think you are the reason why their trip to the Village has always been interrupted. The girls, along with some supporters, have specifically mentioned you two, as main actors in preventing them from being born!

Politics: How dare they?

Intellectual: Really?

Tradition: These are serious accusations!

Politics: (*Looks around and sees Writer*) I knew it. He knows only to speak. And often, his words are nothing but empty and hollow imaginations.

Writer: You find my words empty and hollow?

Politics: Of course, I do!

Writer: You do because you think only about the present. With your belly acting as your thinking organ, you always come short in seeing what lies ahead.

Politics: The present is what concerns me.

Writer: You mean egoism, naivete, hypocrisy, and money have turned you into an emotionally blind person.

Politics: We are at war, Mr. Dreamer. Do you understand? The war is now, and we need an army! (*To the crowd*) Am I right?

Chorus II: You are right, as always, Politics, you are right. We need men to fight and defend our country!

Politics: In his dream, he thinks we can win war with words.

Chorus II: With words?

Politics: He also thinks an army of women can help win the war. In his dream, he talks about peace, in his dream, he has created this perfect world in which women are equal to men.

Chorus II: Women are not equal to men!

Chorus II: Women cannot go to war!

Little Girl: What does that have to do with me being aborted?

Beat.

Tradition: What does that have to do with her being denied a chance to be born?

Politics: Your Honor, I don't understand.

Writer: I told you, you have a belly in the place of the brain.

Tradition: We are among the top three in the world, according to the Global Village Government, in sex-selective abortion. Does that mean anything? Writer has gathered information from credible sources from NGOs, EU, etc.... but for almost ten years now, you have been reluctant, or shall I say resistant to implementing policies that were suggested to you.

Politics: What suggestions?

Intellectual: If I may, Your Honor.

Tradition: You may.

Intellectual: I would like to thank Writer and other journalists out there for the civic work.

Le Fou: Cut the crap and get to the point!

Politics: What are you doing? Thanking Writer and other journalists out there for their civic work?

Intellectual: The “media monitoring has been inspired by the unequivocal leadership and vigorous efforts of various national media outlets and numerous individual journalists, reporters and editors in promoting gender balanced news, increasing the value of girls in our village and preventing gender-biased sex selection.”³⁸ But things are not as easy as brother Writer makes them look with the stroke of his pen. Some journalists, like Writer, “rarely confronted the data and statements of officials with questions and proper fact checking.”³⁹ (ICHD, 2016, p. 7).

Writer: Here is another one, who took an oath to protect life only to see him cutting many short!

Intellectual: “It was clear” and it still is now “that when discussing abortion, journalists had” and still have “difficulty discriminating between the cases pertaining to choice, from the ones that clearly depicted discriminatory practices.”⁴⁰ Therefore, I am proud to say that I cut life short to save life in some serious cases and that I respect people’s choice to abort sometimes.

Writer: Why is it that, so many of the lives that you cut short happen to be hers, theirs?

Intellectual: What do you mean?

³⁸ ICHD, Report, p. 3, 2017.

³⁹ ICHD, Report, p. 7, 2017.

⁴⁰ Idem.

Tradition: Do you recognize the little girl over there? (*Pointing at Chorus II*)

Intellectual: No. My hands are tied.

Tradition: (*To Chorus II*) Do you recognize this man?

Chorus II: It is him. It was on April 26.

Intellectual: Who are they? What are you talking about?

Tradition: They are accusing you of cutting their life short through what is known as gender-biased selective abortion.

Intellectual: I see. Abortion is a human right. It is sometimes performed to save human life in life-threatening situations, and in the case of unwanted pregnancy as in cases of rape.

Writer: We are talking about sex-selective abortion that has prevented these girls from being born.

Little Girl: Why is it that in our village I always happen to be at the receiving end of any social adjustment or operation?

Intellectual: I would not go that far young lady. Many of your brothers are going through the ritual of sacrificing their lives to protect this village as we speak, so you are not always at the receiving end of all social adjustment or operation as you said.

Little Girl: I would not mind going through the same ritual, if only you would allow me to sacrifice my life to protect our village.

Chorus I & II: Holy cow! What is wrong with this girl!

Little Girl: There had been many “me’s” at war before in the history of our village. There are many “me’s” out there fighting to protect their Motherland. Open your eyes, and read the good read, and you will see me, as a warrior. I have been called many names. Look and you will hear.

Intellectual: I agree. See, reality is not what we see. It is mostly what is behind it. Sometimes, we may be lucky when what we see is what is behind it. But more than often it is not. See, “Only gross differences of size or color are perceived by an outsider in a flock of sheep, each of which is perfectly individualized to the shepherd. A diffusive blur and an indiscriminately shifting suction characterize what we do not understand. The problem of the acquisition of meaning by things, or (stated in another way) of forming habits of simple apprehension, is thus the problem of introducing (1) definiteness and distinction and (2) consistency or stability of meaning into what is otherwise vague and wavering.”⁴¹ Therefore, as for the question why you are at the receiving end of social and structural adjustments, you may want to ask Tradition or Religion, or even Politics. This is above my competency and power. My hands are tied.

Politics: She would not dare. (*With anger*) I will beat the crap out of you both and crush you like cockroaches (*pointing at Little Girl and Writer*).

Tradition: Language!

Politics: I don’t even have to sit or stand here trying to explain myself to you, weak people!

Tradition: Language! I can’t say it for the third time, Mr. Politics! You know what will happen.

⁴¹ (Dewey, 1997, p. 121)

Politics: I don't understand him when he talks, and I can't understand what he writes. And that one over there, (*to Intellectual*) he knows better why things are the way they are. We need a strong army and a strong army is not the one full of women.

Writer: Hegemony! It is called *hegemony*⁴².

Politics: What?

Writer: With your scare tactics, "the dominated can be influenced in such a way that they accept dominance, and act in the interest of the powerful out of their own free will."⁴³ The sole goal of your discourse is precisely to manufacture such consensus, acceptance and legitimacy that maintain, nurture and perpetuate your dominance.⁴⁴

Politics: He is speaking his language again.

Tradition: Continue Politics.

Politics: On the other hand, there is this pressure coming from International.

Tradition: What pressure?

Politics: I am pretty much under siege. The pressure to have fewer children in the family, and tendency to adopt what is known as modern family as opposed to traditional family.

Le Fou: Blame it on Internationals!

Tradition: What is that nonsense? Intellectual, Writer? Are you aware of that?

⁴² Gramsci, 1971.

⁴³ (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 255)

⁴⁴ Herman & Chomsky, 1988

Intellectual: Yes, I am. It is called Structural Adjustment Programs.

Writer: Structural adjustment programs consist of loans provided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) to ‘poor’ countries in the name of free market.

Tradition: Where is the problem?

Politics: The borrowing countries are required to implement certain policies, imposed on them to obtain the loans.

Intellectual: Every now and then, the policy comes with economic hardships that demand some shift in the culture of the borrowing country.

Tradition: (*To the Chorus*) And you?

Chorus I & II: Yes!

Tradition: Yes what?

Chorus I: Yes, we know about it.

Tradition: I see. That is where the famous ‘modern family’ comes from. Why am I the only one left out?

Chorus II: We know you will not be pleased.

Tradition: How so?

Chorus II: Tradition and modernity, they don’t usually get along...

Tradition: Well let me assure you, that I am the endgame for modernity. Anyway, what the hell does that modern family has to do with aborting girls’ fetuses?

Chorus I: Language, Your Honor!

Tradition: Why does this modern family thing target girls?

Politics: Because of the economic hardship, people are encouraging to keep a small family unit. That small family unit can also play a role in sex-selective abortion.

Chorus II: The protection of our country. Family lineage and name, bread winners. Someone to look after us when we get old.

Writer: Your Honor, there is something about you that contributes to the problem. Handing down to the next generation cultural practices, you know.

Tradition: Now you are accusing me!

Politics: I told you, your Honor. This is the only thing he does best. And when he is not doing that, he is out there, inciting people to hate the wonderful nation building work that I am doing, or he talks about making peace with the enemy. I would not have accomplished anything had I chosen to listen and consider what he has been saying. And now, he is accusing you, Your Honor. He should be decapitated at once!

Tradition: *(To Writer)* I am listening.

Writer: Your Honor, in your name, we have come to view girls and women as only good for making babies, nothing more.

Chorus II: Cleaning, house, taking care of the babies, cooking food...

Tradition: Women make babies, don't they?

Writer: That is not my point.

Politics: Then what is it?

Writer: We have come to believe that motherhood is the sole purpose of each of these tasks.

Chorus II: What else is the purpose of a woman if not to bear a beautiful and strong child? Men do not bear children.

Writer: You never know what science can do! But that is not the point I am trying to make here.

Politics: What is the point you are trying to make then? That God has not bestowed the woman with the genius to become a mother, which allows us to constantly feel the beauty of the godly conception?⁴⁵ Women! Writer has shown his true face. Glory be to God the Almighty!

Chorus II: Long Live Politics! God is our Savior!

Writer: Oh please, you don't even read the Holy Scripture.

Politics: What?

Writer: You only refer to the Holy Scripture without even reading what He is asking you to do.

Politics: That is outrageous!

Writer: (*To all*) Who can name one of the Holy Scriptures? (*Beat*). That is what I thought. You call yourself a fisherman, not because you know the art of fishing and practice it, but only because you were born into a fishermen culture. Your Honor, I believe in motherhood. I once heard my mother talk about the "Joy of Motherhood"⁴⁶. She even once spoke about "Motherism"⁴⁷ as a brand of feminism centered around motherhood that will best work for our

⁴⁵ Monitoring of online print media on sex-selection in Armenia, ICHD, 2016.

⁴⁶ Emechita, 1979

⁴⁷ Acholonu, 1995

village. I am not sure about that. But my point is, Motherhood cannot be the sole purpose of woman, just as I believe that women should not give up motherhood to become a valuable member of our village.

Tradition: What does that have to do with small family and the missing girls?

Intellectual: There is this new wave of family format flowing throughout the world. The idea is to have no more than two children in a family.

Tradition: What?

Chorus I: That is true.

Writer: And the family consists of the father, the mother and the kids.

Intellectual: No more than two kids.

Tradition: Where do grandparents fit?

Politics: They are not part of the modern family.

Tradition: What is that nonsense?

Writer: It is called civilization.

Politics: We are living in a new era, Your Honor.

Little Girl: What does that have to do with me?

Politics: Well young girl, let me put it this way. Since you cannot fight. Because you are not strong, we would rather have boys, who can defend the country, in the modern family. Believe me, it is a hard decision for a family to make. Right?

Chorus II: That is right.

Politics: You see little girl, we love you. Look around, how we dress you to make you beautiful...

Chorus I: What about your plan to increase the population by a million by 2040?⁴⁸. Are you planning on doing that without us?

Little Girl: You love me only when I am born. Mother? Is that true? Did you throw me into the eternal darkness because of what they just said? Father? Is that why you did not even want to look at my face? But you seemed happy when I was inside you those early days? Now you are unhappy.

Chorus II: I love you girl.

Little Girl: No, you don't.

Chorus II: It is not that simple.

Little Girl: (*To Politics*) And you, how long do you think you are going to keep depriving me of a chance to live, with your war mongering discourse?

Chorus II: What is she doing? She is going to get herself a slap in the face.

Politics: Look little girl, I am not here to answer questions from you. My job as always is to come up with ways to keep our country safe. And that is what I am doing.

Chorus I: But does that have to do with killing us?

⁴⁸ Excerpt from a speech by the Armenian President, June 2017.

Intellectual: I wouldn't go as far as calling it killing of our girls. Because an unborn girl is not a girl yet. And some of them are not gender-biased. They are money-based.

Chorus I: Money based?

Intellectual: You cannot just have children. You have to be able to have the financial resources to take care of them.

Little Girl: You mean a family cannot just have a bunch of girls running around because they are not financially fit to have children, but it is totally fine to have a house full of boys.

Therefore, it is totally fine to kill fetuses based on sex.

Intellectual: It is not killing! It is abortion, which is a human right!

Little Girls: What kind of human right targets girl fetuses?

Intellectual: Now, that is another debate we can have.

International: (*Coming on stage*) It is simple young lady. Doctors kill fetuses because people come to them and ask for it for various reasons. Sometimes they may suggest to a family to kill the baby for biological complications in life-threatening situations. Now let's use the appropriate terminology in the current situation: to abort. I am sorry that you happen be the one who must make way for things to work better in your society. Plus, people die every day. And we may also argue that you may not even be fully "human" before the surgical intervention that stops your development, or you may well be born, as you badly wish, only to die in a car accident, or from one of these awful diseases, or in a war, or in domestic violence, or you may even become a horrible mother-in-law that will hurt her daughter-in-law, who knows...

Long beat.

Chorus I & II: Wow!

Intellectual: (*To International*) You sound like Le Fou.

International: I might sound cynical, but isn't life cynical?

Writer: Wow!

Tradition: Who is that?

Intellectual: This is International. (*To International in a low voice*) Did you get my text?

International: I did.

Intellectual: I need your help. I can't handle this alone.

International: Here I am. (*To Tradition*) Allow me to introduce myself. I am sorry to break into your private discussion. I was looking for Doctor and Politics and was told I could find them here. My name is International. Some call me, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, USAID, and more, it depends. But I like to go by International. I love working with Politics. And money is always my driving force. We help people around the world.

Politics: (*To Writer*) See, I have been trying to tell you that I am a good person and I work hard for the good of this country. But you never listen. Your mind is clogged with jealousy. You are letting your jealousy take the best out of you while I am giving dignity to this country.

Writer: Dignity to this country? Your ignorance and pride are your grave. When will you ever mention one thing that you did not so well? You make it sound like everything you touch is good even though facts, which you hate, may suggest otherwise. We are talking about how certain practices are taking away part of the country you pretend to love so much, but the only thing that you want to hear is that music of your so-called accomplishments that of course has led to what

we are here to talk about. In your pride, you have created a situation in which this girl cannot be a girl.

Politics: I am going to slap you!

Writer: If you dare to raise your hand on me, you will feel the wrath on my punch! If you think I am one of these female journalists you slap at will, and the congresswomen whose hair you pull during a debate, think again.

Politics: I am going to have your tongue cut off!

Writer: As you are doing to the missing girls.

Politics: Empty words. Missing girls.

Intellectual: It is a name that we use to refer to the girls who were not born due to the gender-biased selective abortion. It was first used by Amartya Sen, as you all know now, to refer to girls who were not born because they were girls⁴⁹.

International: In the case of your village, even though progress has been made, the situation remains alarming. About 2000 girls are missing every year due to sex selective abortion.

Tradition: My understanding is that *Selective abortion* is an “intervention to terminate an unwanted pregnancy for some specific reasons, for example, based upon the fetal gender.”⁵⁰ Am I right?

Writer: That is right, Your Honor, but I may use fetal sex instead of fetal gender.

⁴⁹ Amartya Sen in an essay in *The New York Review of Books* in 1990.

⁵⁰ ICHD, 2017, p. 7.

Tradition: How so?

Writer: If we agree that “Gender can be thought of as the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex,”⁵¹ while sex is biological differences between male and female such as the genetic differences and genitalia and all that, how can a fetus possibly have a gender? Is a fetus exposed to any type of culture? Maybe, maybe not. (*Smile*). Therefore, it is safe to talk about sex-selective abortion instead of gender selective abortion. Now, back to International, regarding the 2000 girls who were missing every year in our country, it seems to me, International, that is what you always wanted in the secrecy of your mind, right?

International: I am not following you!

Writer: This whole sex selective abortion thing is helping your attempt to control the overpopulation of the global village; fewer mouths to feed, more money in the pocket.

International: Those are some horrible accusations you are throwing out there.

Writer: Anyway. Before you got here, Politics, your good friend, mentioned the pressure you are putting on him/her to advocate for smaller family units in our country.

International: Pressure? We work hand in hand with mutual respect. I give him money.

Writer: He even suggested that the pressure you are putting on him/her contributes greatly to the situation of the missing girls in our country.

International: Politics?

⁵¹ Torgrimson, B & Minson, 2005, p. 785-786.

Writer: And now, you seem to be advocating for the ending of sex-selective abortion because, you have come to realize that these girls can contribute to the economy of the country, which you control.

International: That is fair. But I don't control the economy of this country. I only help.

Politics: No, my dear International. You only advocate abortion as a human right. You have never pressured me in to doing anything. You always suggest ideas.

Chorus II: (*Chanting*) International never pressures Politics!

International only advocates abortion as a human right!

International never pressures Politics!

International always suggests ideas!

Great ideas for the betterment of my lives!

Long live International! Long live Politics!

International: I think we heard from the people, Writer.

Politics: Writer, the people have spoken.

Writer: You mean the people have sung! What about the fact that the pressure to have a modern family combined with the pressure to have a boy exacerbate the sex-selection through abortion situation?

International: We call that unintended consequences or side effects of a great social program. I have never asked anyone to have fewer children. You may want to explore the fast degrading economic situation you are living in these days.

Writer: Your modern family model combined with some traditional and cultural behaviors make it hard for girls to see the end of the tunnel.

Beat. One can hear the donkey bray its hee-haw only one time.

International: You forgot to mention the economic hardship which is an important variable to be left out of the equation.

Writer: Whatever.

International: Anyway, I am aware of the elements you have just mentioned, and I am working diligently to address what I've referred earlier as unintended consequences with the help of my great friends Politics, Intellectual, and sometimes with you, Writer.

Politics: See big mouth, we are working on it while you are only talking.

Writer: You only work on things by ignoring advice and recommendations from credible researchers.

Politics: Another one of your lies.

Intellectual: Politics, I have been trying to explain to you for the past 10 years, that even though the idea of small families may be a good one, we need to be really careful in how we sell that to the people.

Politics: Are you accusing me of not doing anything?

Intellectual: Not really, but you usually do not take into account some of my advice. We have brought to your attention some of the factors that speed the sex selective abortion in our country, but you ignored our advice. I specifically told you that the root cause of the problem lies in the expendability of a girl in our society. You ignored me.

Tradition: Expendability of girls?

Intellectual: Investing in a girl is like throwing money out of the window.

Members of Chorus II acting an incident that happened in the village few days ago (Based on a conversation Meron, a Peace Corps Volunteer, heard from her host family, 2017)

Chorus II: What is it?

Chorus II: It is a girl.

Chorus II: You know we cannot afford another girl, my son. Your older brother had three girls and you had one. That is enough girls already. But the choice is yours. We hope you will do the right thing.

Chorus II: I will do the right thing. Honey, we must do the right thing for the sake of my family name.

Chorus II: Do I have a choice?

Chorus II: Thanks for your understanding. My family name is on the line.

End of the acting out.

Intellectual: Politics does not seem to see any problem with that.

Politics: I am going to cut off your tongue as well as your balls!

Chorus II: Intellectual is in trouble!

International: Politics, sometimes it takes you too long to implement recommendations from scientific investigations.

Politics: You too?

International: I am only stating a fact.

Politics: Your fact sounds like an accusation.

International: To come back to what the Writer was saying earlier, I have to admit that there is some truth to what he said. But it has never been my intention to hurt little girls. Can we even imagine a world without girls? I don't want to live in that world? Can you?

Chorus I & II: No!

International: And I believe the same is true of my good friend Politics.

Intellectual: I have warned Politics about the dire consequence of trying to implement those recommendations from International in our cultural context, but as always, he brushed my suggestions off with a glass of wine when I showed him/her the findings of scientific investigations.

Politics: I cannot take this anymore. I am going to have your head cut off.

Tradition: Quiet! Politics, quiet! Why do you always have to threaten your peers when what they are trying to do is to have a conversation.

Politics: Did you not hear what they were saying about me? They are making it sound like I can just draft some policies on a piece of paper, read it on national televisions and abracadabra-Jesus-God-Son-of-Mary, problem solved! There are problems that policies will never solve. And this is one them. People in our culture believe in boys, and in boys we all trust! I cannot change that with my policies.

Writer: But you can change your politics.

Politics: I am so going to cut out that tongue of yours, fry it in olive oil, and eat it! I swear I will eat your fried tongue!

Chorus II: Ew! This is bad!

Tradition: Quiet and sit down at once! Little Girl.

Little Girl: Your Honor!

Tradition: Politics!

Politics: Your Honor!

Tradition: Hand your scepter to Little Girl. (*He obeys*) Listen, we are here to have a conversation about a crucial issue that is, it is my understanding, hurting our country: girls are missing. And we are going to find out why and stop it.

International: We know why...

Tradition: I said quiet! I can't let you eat people's tongues.

Le Fou: Fried tongues.

Writer: It is done already! No wonder why the people of this country can't talk!

Tradition: You too, Writer, zip it!

Chorus I & II: This is bad. We have never seen Tradition like that!

Tradition: And you too, People, be quiet! This is getting too much for me. I need to consult with Religion.

Politics: I was going to suggest that.

Tradition: How so?

Writer: Politics enjoys the blessings of Religion.

Politics: I often consult with Religion in some of my decision-making processes.

Tradition: Someone go find me Religion.

Little Girl: He is already on his way.

Scene 4. Same setting, with the presence of International and Religion. Religion comes on stage a little surprised to see the crowd and the court-like setting. In a spiritual gesture, Religion blesses the crowd and takes a seat next to Tradition.

Tradition: *(To Religion)* God bless you Religion.

Religion: May the Almighty keep watching over you, my dear friend Tradition.

Tradition: *(Smile)* He had better.

Religion: I am on my way to the Church and I heard your voice with this unusual tone, and I wanted to check out what is going on. *(He looks around)*. What is happening? What are you all doing here? It seems like I am the only one left out of this unusual gathering.

Tradition: I was about to send someone to get you.

Religion: God read your mind, communicated it to me, and here I am.

Chorus II: There he goes again.

Tradition: We are addressing the complaint of the little girl. There is some disturbing data and testimonies and complaints that have been brought to my attention, and I am wondering if you are aware of some these? The sky has become dark above our country and our village. Some

stars are vanishing, turning the sky into a floating grave above our heads. The rate at which these stars are disappearing is scary. About 2000 of them each year.

Religion: This is scary indeed.

Tradition: Some of the stars are among us today. They are here to ask why they are being targeted.

Religion: Targeted by who?

Tradition: Based on what I am hearing, it is you, it is me, it is them.

Religion: Me?

Tradition: You. At the beginning, I had the same reaction. As things moved on, I realized how indirectly connected I am to the problem.

Religion: Who are complaining?

Tradition: She thinks she is not being treated very well.

Religion: Where are her parents?

Tradition: That is where the problem lies.

Religion: I don't understand.

Little Girl: I have been selectively targeted by an abortion practice.

Religion: Oh Lord, have mercy. The abortion thing is getting out of hand. No one has the right to end life apart from the One who gives life. This is "a problem of calamitous consequences. The Armenian Church is the absolute supporter of the equality between men and women. But the

word gender is a dangerous landmine placed in our value system. As for sex-selective abortion, the issue must be rephrased in terms of the unborn mothers of Armenia.”⁵²

Tradition: That is an interesting issue. It is my understanding that this is not a debate about abortion, or the right to be born, or not to be born. That is not the question. The question is why target the girls?

Religion: People are intentionally aborting girls.

Writer: The practice is sex-selective abortion; some call it Gender-biased selective abortion. The Missing Girls are the targeted aborted girls.

Religion: Hello Writer, causing troubles again (*with a smile*).

Writer: No, Father, I am just doing my thing.

Religion: He once asked me: “Why does God choose to speak only to men these days”? And I was like “What do you mean, my son?” and he said, “In our religion, the medium between God and humans are all men”. And I said, “There is a reason why God sent His son, not His daughter,” and we laughed.

Politics: Thank you so much, Religion. There is a reason why God sent us His son, but not His daughter.

Religion: That is true!

Writer: God also needed a woman back then to give us that son.

⁵² Rafik Santrosian, 2017, <https://www.evnreport.com/arts-and-culture/sex-vs-gender-through-linguistic-expression-in-armenian>,

Politics: At least I am not the only one who thinks that thing over there (*pointing at Writer*) only has his mouth to run. (*To the Writer*) I hope you use some of your nasty words *vis a vis* Religion.

Religion: I am lost. What is going on here?

Tradition: Little Girl, why don't you explain to all of us what your complaints are.

Politics: I am not going to sit here and listen to a little girl talking.

Tradition: Yes, you are, and you are not to cut her off. Listen to me, all of you. The accusations against us are grave. You better listen because you don't want to taste my anger! I will take away your ability to procreate at will!

Chorus II: No, please, Tradition, we have nothing to do with this.

Religion: (*To Tradition*) Can you really do that?

Tradition: You never know what tradition can do to people.

Religion: I see.

Tradition: Religion, you do the same too. You tell people if they do this they will get that, if they don't do that they will go to places you yourself have never been before.

Religion: Well I say those things based on the Holy Scripture.

Tradition: Well some of the writings in your Holy Scripture are based on me. Before you, there was me. From me you came out and to me you will return. Anyway, let us get back to the point *du jour*. Based on what I heard from them (*pointing at the Chorus II*), you have been playing a big part. Now keep quiet and listen or Religion will deny you the blessing of God, if there is any

left after what you have been doing to your girls. (*To Religion*) I have heard that they don't even read the Holy Scripture at all.

Religion: That is why I am here, to read the Holy Scripture for and to them.

Tradition: Little Girl, the floor is yours.

Little Girl: My name could have been Anna, Annahit, Anni, Annikki, Selma, Selima, Meghna, Meghan, Mari, Mariam, Chu, Zahra, Fatima, Nura, Nora, Naira, Erick and Ericka. (*Make a long list of girl names from all over the world, especially those names which cut through cultural and geographical boundaries*).

Chorus I: Erick? Is she seeing herself as a boy?

Politics: This is nonsense. Now she sees herself as boy, or should I say, she wishes to be a boy.

International: Let her finish!

Politics: Finish what? She is supposed to be a girl, and she is calling herself Erick.

International: She is trying to say that somewhere, boys are being targeted too.

Intellectual: There is a pattern of "missing boys" in most countries in Africa that is also related to the same traditional customs underlying the "missing girls" phenomenon we are experiencing in our village, in which parents are highly responsive to expected benefits from children in old age.⁵³

Writer: But unlike what is happening here, the missing boys are not targeted in their mother's belly. To be honest, sex selection abortion is probably rare in Africa, because most African

⁵³ Waldron 1985.

countries have low co-residence rates with sons and daughters, which would make them relatively balanced in their treatment of children.⁵⁴ This pattern was also noted by Sen (1990) in his original article bringing attention to the missing women phenomenon.

International: She may well grow up to become everything a boy can become or even become a boy.

Politics: What?

International: It is called science, my friend, science.

Writer: She does not need to become a boy to be valuable member of her community.

International: I am just saying.

Politics: Usually I don't have any explanations to give to anyone, especially to an unborn child.

Writer: Missing girl. She finally has a last name: missing girl.

Tradition: Quiet! Continue Little Girl.

Little Girl: I know it is not with a happy heart that families decide to get rid of me. I heard pain in each and every breathing of a sleeping mother who just had an unwanted abortion because of the pressure from her mother, her mother-in-law, her husband or friends or even from community members. I also know the little secret of every woman to have a little boy. I also know that for most of them, me not making it out of the dark tunnel of life (that I love being in) is also due to the fact that the inability to have a boy is a source of shame for both the husband and wife. I know my history very well. I was once thrown into the mouth of an angry volcano to

⁵⁴ Waldron 1985.

calm it down. I kept quiet. I was thrown into the mouth of horrible beings so that they could bring tears from the sky for the crops. I did not complain. I was once queen and goddess, but it has been taken away from me, and I did not fight back. When change happened around here, and everything I held dear had been taken away and replaced with new ways of doing things and seeing life, I lamented along with you all. Then you turned me into a book, a piece of land, a mirror you barely look in. You seem to want me when you need me around to reproduce. Not even for sexual pleasure. Only to reproduce. My body has been placed as “constitutive and internal to the making of identity and taboo subjectivity.”⁵⁵ My womb has become a place of display and proof of your manhood. My body has become the geographical place to “project the memories and fantasies of racial and cultural authenticity.”⁵⁶ Sex selective abortion is one of the many tools you opt for to display the proof of your manhood, to guarantee your patriarchal identity.

Long beat.

Scene 5. *Le Fou comes back and goes to sit with Chorus II.*

Tradition: Well Religion, you heard her.

Religion: What does that have to do with me?

Little Girl: It has been shown ...

Writer: In other parts of the world, such as China, as Avraham Ebenstein noted, religion had played a role as far as the attitude of a community towards girls and women and towards boys and men as well. Often, this implicit barter will be further reinforced by religious norms that

⁵⁵ (Bernard, 2005, p. 577).

⁵⁶ Idem (p. 579).

develop to enforce the agreement, such as Confucianism's focus on filial piety, or the need for a son to pray for the dead in Hinduism. Will that be true for Christianity?

Religion: Well God sent us His Son, which clearly means something. There is a reason why He did not send His Daughter.

Tradition: What is that supposed to mean?

Religion: There are things that only men can do and there are things that only women can do.

Politics: I have been trying in vain to hammer that in the head of this stupid Writer. My mission is to create a strong nation and state. And to do that we need boys to protect this country. Unlike these two who are jealous of the fact that I succeed wherever they fail. Luckily, unlike them who only go around dragging my name through the mud and making assumptions depraved of facts, I have the support of International and the benediction of Religion.

Writer: Since you mentioned it, let us talk about it.

Politics: Talk about what?

Writer: The support from International. You have sold your soul to some of them, and they promised to safeguard your interests and theirs.

Politics: This is crazy. I am going to ban you from this country.

Writer: As usual.

International: I believe there is a misunderstanding here. You are right when you talk about interests. It is mainly the interest of the people of the Village. And of course, the interests of the people I represent. And Politics, I must tell you, has been doing a great job so far.

Politics: (*To the Writer*) Do you hear that?

International: There is a growing and disturbing problem in your country: sex selection through abortion. The International Center for Human Development (ICHD) in partnership with us, note that "a total of 2000 female babies are not born in Armenia because of sex-selective abortions, according to the project "Combating Gender-Biased Sex Selection in Armenia" implemented since May 2015.⁵⁷ On the issues of the selective abortion, we have been giving a lot of money to Doctor-Intellectual, and sometimes to Writer, so that they can properly investigate these issues.

Writer: And then forcing unwanted policies on us!

Chorus II: But why is it then that International ask us to have only one or two children?

Chorus I: Sometimes this International can be caught up in swirling contradictions.

Chorus II: You pushed Politics to implement laws that are anti-human rights.

International: How so? I was trying to help.

Chorus II: Under the new law, a woman seeking an abortion must attend a counselling session with her doctor and then wait for three days for the procedure.⁵⁸ This is a human rights violation.

Intellectual: This is to allow doctors to pass on information about the dangers of abortion.⁵⁹

Chorus II: The laws are "band-aid solutions" that focus on reducing sex-selective abortions without addressing the root causes: poor socio-economic conditions and patriarchal values.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ ICHD, report, 2016.

⁵⁸ The Guardian, retrieved on October 21, 2016.

⁵⁹ The Guardian, retrieved on October 21, 2016.

⁶⁰ Ani Jilozian at the Women's Support Centre in the capital, Yerevan.

International: Please can I finish my thoughts? I would like to put things in context here and set the record straight. In 1991, 105 boys were born for every 100 girls (around the natural rate), but by 2015 the figure had changed to 115 boys for every 100 girls.⁶¹

Tradition: What have you found, and why is she not satisfied with the work you have been doing?

International: There are many factors that contribute to sex selective abortion, some of which we talked about earlier. And you happened to be one them.

Tradition: How so?

International: Our findings suggest that one of the reasons for the missing girls' problem is that in traditional Armenian families, "daughters-in-law move in with their husband's family ... [and] the eldest son is the one to care for the parents. In a country with almost no social security net, this tradition means boys remain the favored offspring."⁶²

Tradition: What else have you found?

International: We have found that, boys are the carrier of the family name.⁶³ So, for the people of your country, having a girl, means the extinction of the family name.

Le Fou: My cousin even once said he wouldn't wish that on his worst enemy.

Tradition: Wish what?

Le Fou: Having a girl.

⁶¹ ICHD, report, 2016.

⁶² The Guardian, Oct. 21, 2016.

⁶³ Excerpt from survey.

Tradition: I did not know that.

Chorus II: Oh, Tradition did not know that. Interesting.

Chorus I: It is a widespread mindset around here.

Tradition: This does not make it a tradition. Can you imagine making all human beings practice one tradition?

International: That I can't say. I am going to leave that to your people to decide. But what we know for sure is that there are expectations put on men in your society as breadwinners for their family, which makes it barely possible to see any value in having a girl. And there is the war.

Tradition: That I am aware of. Anything else?

International: Women don't go to war here. That seems to place a lesser value on them from national security vantage.

Tradition: But women make these soldiers.

Writer: You would think the connection between the two variables would be a done deal.

International: There are economics and accessibility to advanced technologies, which allow early identification of the sex of the fetus.

Chorus II: We don't have jobs!

International: (*To Tradition*) These are the economics.

Chorus I: Yes, you don't have a job. Not good enough reason to target me.

Chorus II: We can't afford to have many children.

Chorus I: Not good enough reason to target me. Birth is a natural lottery. You are rigging it!

Chorus II: It is our human right to know the sex of the baby.

Chorus I: It is mine to be born!

Chorus II: This is no right of yours. I decide whether you can be born or not.

Chorus I: Then don't do anything that can lead to me, just because you can get rid of me at will.

Chorus II: She is telling us not to have sex?

Chorus I: I am telling you not make me if you are not ready. It is an abuse of power!

Tradition: Quiet Everybody!

Chorus I: We may decide never to come to your country at all, and we will see how you can perpetuate this family name of yours that is more important than me, a little girl, getting a chance to be born.

Le Fou: That was a good one!

Tradition: International, please continue.

Writer: You need to seriously consider what the missing girls are saying. Lysistrata?

Aristophanes? 411 BCE?

International: Where was I? Economics, sex-selection through abortion, access to technology...

If this continues, with the actual distorted sex-ratio of 112-115 to 100, compared to the natural ratio you will end up eliminating your country from the map.

Intellectual: It is a hyperbole.

International: It is not! And you know that, my good friend. “In the human species the ratio between males and females at birth is slightly biased towards the male sex. The natural sex ratio at birth is often considered to be around 105. This means that at birth on average, there are 105 males for every 100 females.”⁶⁴ After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a deviation from the natural sex ratio of 105/100 occurred in the South Caucasus. Currently the sex ratio in Armenia (114.5/100), Azerbaijan (116.5) and Georgia (109.4) are the highest in the world.⁶⁵

Chorus II: Come on! What about China, India, etc.?

International: In China or India the social impact of this may not be significant, in small countries of the South Caucasus the low fertility rate and the continuous choice in favor of boys may influence the future family model and fertility.⁶⁶ (*To the crowd*) What I mean is that you will lose about 96,000 girls over the next 50 years.

Chorus II: Wow!

International: And with an aging population that you have around now, in 50 years, I think you get the picture.

Religion: We will lose as many mothers as if there were no births in the country for two and half years.

Writer: Many girls or women. Not mothers yet.

⁶⁴ World Health Organization WHO,
http://www.searo.who.int/entity/health_situation_trends/data/chi/sex-ratio/en/

⁶⁵ “Missing women in the South Caucasus: Local Perceptions and Proposed Solutions”, World Bank, 2015

⁶⁶ Idem.

Chorus II: What?

Writer: Not all of them will turn out to be mothers.

Intellectual: Your Honor, what you see is not always reality. We, researchers have methods we use to see what is behind what you see, which is where reality often lies. We don't just make assumptions; we research.

Tradition: And how do you do that?

International: We observe. We notice. We ask questions. We question what is normal. We take a closer look. We analyze.

Intellectual: In nearly all cultures, women and men must confront societal practices that sometimes undermine the ability of women and girls to equally access opportunities such as education or good paying employment. Our village struggles with gender issues like violence against women and equal access to employment.

Politics: You said it: "In nearly all cultures, women and men must confront societal practices that undermine the ability of women and girls to equally access opportunities such as education or good paying employment." Why is it such a big deal in our country if it is everywhere?

Writer: See, you are blinded by your one-sided egocentric view of things. We are talking about the future of a country that you pretend to love so much, and you cannot see what a big deal it is when the country is losing its girls at an alarming rate.

International: These writers and journalists! They are the same everywhere.

Politics: You cannot compare this bandit to the rest of the hard-working journalists out there. This one only criticizes. He is not patriotic.

International: He is as patriotic as you are but in a different way. They criticize what we do, but even though they can hurt us with their words choices, they are valuable members of their community and society at large.

Politics: I hate comparisons as realities differ from one culture to another.

Writer: There you go. Realities! The magic word! For you, this village has its realities that are totally different from the rest of the Global Village. In the name of your realities, which are never clearly defined, you grabbed power and cling to it like a baby who is afraid of falling off its mother's back. Whether the people of the Village swim in a swamp of ignorance and ill-informed nationalism, when you change your suit at every meeting you go to, that is reality. Whether the people of the Village cannot have access to decent health facilities, and therefore perform abortions at home, putting the mother at risk, when you party with your friends with the benediction of Religion and International, that is reality. Reality, for you, is when this little girl, while she is not saying abortion is right or wrong, but simply ask "Why me?" you can't even give her the attention she deserves from a father, as you claim you are.

Politics: That's it. I've had it. I can't take this anymore! You are abusing my patience. I am going to get you killed.

Chorus II step between them.

International: Oh my God! You can't threaten to kill a writer or journalist or activist. You will turn them into a martyr, and they will haunt your every sleep. Believe me.

Writer: That is what he does best: slapping female journalists at will. You have not heard anything yet. I am just beginning.

Tradition: I don't know what to do with these two.

Intellectual: Tell me about it! If I may, Your Honor, we were talking about how we reached some of the conclusions regarding the issue at hand here.

Tradition: You may proceed! Everybody quiet!

Intellectual: So, we were talking about the science behind the statements and arguments that we were making for sex-selection through abortion in our country. In this case, the study used Ethnodrama⁶⁷ to investigate selective abortion in our country. Ethnodrama used an ethnographic method of data collection, and the Theatre of the Oppressed to present the findings.

Chorus I & II: Ethnographic method?

Writer: It is a way to investigate a social issue by going into the field, observing people, taking notes, keeping a journal, talking to people (notes on daily observation during classroom activities, personal journal on conversations and interaction with community members, stories from community members, informal questions and answers sessions) even becoming a member of the community being researched.

Tradition: The Theatre of the Oppressed?

International: It is a discussion-based theatre art that addresses pressing social issues among people affected by these issues. It is based on Paulo Freire's (1968) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and it emphasizes urgency and engagement. Engaging people affected by the issues is a way for the researcher to give back to the community being researched, as they are given an opportunity

⁶⁷ Saldaña, 2005.

to use the final product of the research to address the problem affecting them after the researcher leaves. That is what we are doing here, now.

Intellectual: And then present the report in the form of theatre. Ethnodrama uses drama to present research findings rather than the traditional academic reporting. It is an art-based approach to instigating social issues. “Picasso’s *Guernica*, and Brecht’s *Mother Courage* are notable examples of how art-based reports of investigation are used to provoke public awareness, shifts in understanding and catalysts for action.”⁶⁸

Tradition: Why can’t you write your paper in a normal way like everybody does and let me have my sleep. Now with you, art-based approach, I have been sitting here, talking about things some of which I have no idea what they are, for the most part.

Intellectual: The choice of using Ethnodrama over the conventional research methodologies, has been informed by the urgency and the sensitivity of the topic and concerns over the protection and the safety of the participants. Data to write the play was gathered from three main sources: government databases (government annual reports over the last five years), international organizations working in Armenia (qualitative and quantitative data, World Bank and UNICEF reports over the last five years) non-governmental organizations (ICHD) and ethnographic field work. The information gathered from these three main sources was used to write the play with composite characters.

Writer: Drama as presentation of research findings is a way to insulate participants’ privacy and anonymity, as well as to embody the findings and reach the audience at more than just a

⁶⁸ Greenwood, 2012, p. 4.

dispassionate cognitive level. For instance, I will use information that I have been collecting as a Peace Corps Volunteers working on the Let Girls Learn project. One of the conflicts in the plot will be the apparent silence of the Church.

Religion: What? Didn't I just make a strong statement condemning the practice of abortions in our country? Didn't I, in my opening statement condemn killing, in general, at the April 26, 2017 ICHD conference on this issue?

Writer: Yes, but you focused more on killing in general and spread some fears around how dangerous the word gender is for the moral and social value of our culture.

Religion: What do you expect me to say? That our Church should just give up our moral values and embrace the LGBTQ community?

Writer: We do appreciate you speaking out against killings in general. But you did not emphasize sex-selective abortion. My point is, Your Honor, though we take pride in ourselves on being the first Christian nation on earth, we have not made any strong public comment in favor or against prenatal sex selective abortion as some would expect for political purposes, some would say.

Tradition: Do you ever have any section in your research approach that tells stories of ordinary people like us, and how we can benefit from your fancy research findings? For instance, what we should to reduce sex-selective abortion?

Intellectual: Not always. But in this case, we do have some recommendations and proposed solutions.

Tradition: Alright good people, why can't you just tell us the solutions instead of explaining all these drama research ethno thing? Am I right?

Chorus II & I: That is right!

Intellectual: We need to lift the double burden off the shoulders of working women.⁶⁹

Chorus II & I: What? Double burden?

International: By loosening the parenting roles and inducing fathers to take greater participation in childcare. It is believed that with greater flexibility of gender roles around parenting and increased breadwinning functions extended to women, their sense of security will gradually improve, impacting elasticity of choice.⁷⁰

Chorus II: It is clear now that this guy does not understand what is happening here. Things are more complex in our life than your research can handle.

International: I can give you that.

Chorus II: You are talking about financial power of women.

International: Yes, I am. I mean, we are.

Chorus II: Where are they going to get that financial power? You are talking as if there are jobs out there, and we, men, are preventing our wives from getting out there and working. But the problem is there are no jobs.

⁶⁹ ICHD, 2017, p. 10.

⁷⁰ Idem.

Le Fou: People! They are trying to make our women believe that there are jobs out there and we are preventing them from getting those jobs. *(To International)* You are trying to set our women against us! For example, I don't have a job, why wouldn't I want my wife to have one if she could get one?

Chorus II: In your case, Le Fou, it is because you drink a lot. But yes, there are no jobs.

Chorus I: You also said, and I quote, “Increasing women’s financial standing and boosting their employment opportunities would place them in a situation, where they can have a significant impact on preference dynamics.”⁷¹

International: Of course.

Chorus I: “Preference dynamics”?

Intellectual: Unless girls cannot be seen as money makers within the family structure, the issues will not be resolved.

International: Part of the issue. Remember, one of the reasons families usually mention is the fact that girls are seen as a waste of investment? That is where this mindset of instilling financial values into being a woman comes from, by offering them jobs and opportunities to contribute to the finance of their family.

Writer: If that is the case, well, the problem will never be solved because, the way things are in this part of the world, there are not enough money-making opportunities around for those who are under the social pressure to provide for their family. So, how are the women going to gain that financial contribution when there are no financial opportunities to cover working men, not to

⁷¹ (ICHD, 2017, p. 10).

even mention the working women? When a man goes out and earns something, it is for the whole family. I believe when a woman also goes out to earn something, she brings it home, thus contributing to the household financial status.

Le Fou: I have something to say.

Chorus II: How many drinks did you have today, Le Fou?

Tradition: Okay, everybody. Let us hear what Le Fou has to say about this important issue.

Okay, Le Fou, let us hear it.

Le Fou: This is what I suggest: let us stop selling this modern family crap to our people. We all know it is not working and it will never work. Let us allow people to have their children without fear of not being able to feed them. So, when a family finds themselves with seven children, some of whom are girls that they don't want, I will come in with my NGO--I am working on it-- collect these girls, take them to other countries where they will be happily married to good suiters. I know you are asking yourself: Where is she going to find the money? Well, I will get paid by the future husbands, not because I will ask them to pay, but because it is part of their culture in that part of the world to pay money and other things as a sign of love and to thank you for raising their future wife and future mother of their kids. Or, wait for it, I can even invite the suiters to come here, right here, in our village, so that you can negotiate the dowry yourself. See, problem solved. No need to kill our innocent girls. The other option will be for men in this village to start paying some fucking dowry as a thank you to the bride's family. That way they will start seeing some value in girls. This would be a step.

Long beat.

Chorus I: Wow! Now Le Fou wants to put us on sale!

Le Fou: Put you on sale? Who talks about putting girls on sale?

Tradition: Wow!

Le Fou: I understand the culture shock, you know, resistance to new ideas, new things. Now I know this is not going to resolve the issue like a magic wand, but it is a step in the right direction.

Chorus II: Wow!

International: This may sound immoral, but it makes sense logically.

Intellectual: No, it does not. This is human trafficking!

Politics: Wow! Le Fou! I was not expecting that.

Tradition: Have you finished, Le Fou?

Le Fou: I rest my voice at this point.

Tradition: Does anyone have any other great idea on how to resolve this issue?

Beat. Depending on the situation, the play can end here, and turn it over to the audience for conversations. Here, the Joker states the scenario the conversation wants to explore. But for the purpose of 'ending' my thoughts, which can also be presented to the audience as possible denouement, I add the following ending.

Religion: Someone needs to break this silence. I guess we were talking about solutions. So, to follow in the footsteps on my predecessor, Le Fou, ...

All: What?

Religion: I will take a closer look at the suggestions in the booklet International and Intellectual gave the church and try to educate people on it based on our religious values. But you have to help me here: encourage people to come to church. It is not enough to be religious

Politics: As for me, I will talk with members of the government see what we can come up with.

Writer: I will be celebrating women's and men's achievements in my writings and unbury these great women we lost to man-made history.

Intellectual: I stand with abortion rights, but I am against selective abortion.

Chorus I: We will be waiting.

International: I will keep looking for answers, in a more culture sensitive ways.

Le Fou: I have a question.

All: Le Fou!

Le Fou: Let us imagine this scenario: If you were to have ONLY ONE child, would it be a boy or a girl?

All: A boy or a girl!

Le Fou: Or something in the middle.

All: Le Fou!

Silence.

Little Girl: "IF I were born, I could have become a good person."⁷²

⁷² Astghaolk NGO, sticker, 2017.

Tradition: Thank you for taking time out to come to this meeting. One last thing before you all leave. Think about these questions now that we are all aware of sex selective abortion in our country, what do you think about sex selective abortion? Why do you think people decide to do selective abortion in our country? If you were to have ONLY ONE child, would it be a boy or a girl? Why, what do you think can be done to prevent selective abortion? Would you ask parents not to end pregnancies because it is girl? If yes, what is ONE thing you can say to convince them not to do so?

Religion: Think about God the Almighty when you reflect on these questions. Do not challenge God!

Another place where, the audience can openly make suggestions as well, but tradition will be acting like the Joker.

Scene 6. *All leave the courtroom except Writer, Le Fou, Little Girl and Tradition.*

Tradition: I think we failed to solve the issue.

Writer: It was not meant to be solved. We have tried to bring awareness to the issue.

Little Girl: How can I be so important yet so expendable?

Le Fou: Life here has turned its back on you.

Writer: The cloud has gone darker.

Little Girl: All these noises around me. Writer, I am sorry to drag you into this. You must be afraid of me.

Writer: It could have well been me. It is never easy to take on issues like this one.

Little Girl: I have become a source of disappointment, fighting, violence, and disagreement.

Tradition: Disagreement is a healthy thing.

Little Girl: My name takes away the smiles on good people's faces who are just trying to be good citizens to the community they love. Amartya Sen has found us a name. An identity. A story. I have a name. "Missing Girl."

Le Fou: Some will say it is Culture.

Little Girl: Culture. That word.

Tradition: On Le Fou's last question, I really hope one day, we will all say: "Both, or sex doesn't matter, or whatever happens, as long as the child is healthy."⁷³

Le Fou: Culture breeds individuals into believing one thing over the other one. Those women and families who abort you are not evil.

Little Girl: They love me once they set eyes on me. Some father avoided eye contact with me for over six months when he realized his awaited son was a girl, but once we made eye contact for the first time, it was a love story at first glance. They love me. I love them. I just wanted to let them know how I feel.

Tradition: You have no idea what humans do to their kind out of fear. I have seen worse. They become blind, deaf. And they justify all their actions sometimes in my name. But when you look deep inside them, more often than not, they think they are doing right.

Writer: Some do.

⁷³ Excerpts from informal survey, conversations, 2016.

Tradition: Can I ask you one thing?

Little Girl: Sure.

Tradition: Do you really believe it is your right to be born?

Little Girl: I don't know. I am not even sure I should be telling people to abort or not to abort. But I don't want to be the one being aborted all the time.

Tradition: Fair enough. Hope next time you and I meet, I will not be the same tradition.

Writer: What is up with the Lysistrata thing?

Little Girl: *(Smile)* I guess we will see.

Tradition: Thanks for your understanding.

Little Girl: And sorry for dragging you through this.

Tradition: It was worth my time.

Little Girl: Writer?

Writer: Yes, ma'am!

Little Girl: Are you coming?

Writer: Where?

Little-Girl: To the end.

Writer: This is the end.

END

CHAPTER V

EPILOGUE

This chapter focuses on discussing and reflecting on the methodological processes and artistic choices. I explore the back stories and the given circumstances that have led to the various characters in greater detail. For example, why does it make more sense to assign the role of judge and arbiter to Tradition? How do these diverse personalities relate to one another in the play to suggest the real-life situation in Armenia? What are motivations behind the two choruses, politics, and the aesthetic choices? How do I visualize the two choruses from an artistic point of view? It gives guidance to people who want to use it as the method of investigation on how the various characters function relative to their counterparts in Armenian society, synthesize these stories, and to connect all this back to ethnography, drama, and the realities of being female in Armenia.

In the first part, I explore some of the challenges I faced as a researcher, playwright, and a male African American working in Armenia as Peace Corps volunteers in an almost racially homogenous country. Then, I explore the complexity of navigating between artist and researcher with regards to turning the scientific data into a play. What needs to be sacrificed and when and where? How do I, as an individual, find that real balance between art and academia? Finally, I make some suggestions regarding how this method could be used by another researcher by outlining steps that must be taken for a successful application of the method.

Exploring the Challenges as a Researcher and Playwright

As in any research that requires meeting human beings, exploring sex-selective abortion in Armenia using a performative approach as epistemology has presented some challenges. Some

of the problems have to do with the complexity and sensitivity of the topic being studied, and others are research-related questions that every researcher may face. But the most significant challenges I dealt with were the fact that I was Black in Armenia and my religious beliefs did not align with the Armenians'. In this section, I explore what it meant to be Black in Armenia during the research period and how hiding parts of my identity while a participant-observer helped me access information I needed for the research.

Black in Armenia

I arrived in Armenia for the first time in the winter of 2012. I stayed there for 45 days from December 15, 2012 until January 31, 2013. I was visiting an Armenian friend I had met at the University of Dakota. I spent most my time in Yerevan, and from there, I went to visit the main tourist sites. The second time I came to Armenia, I came as Peace Corps Volunteer. It was on August 25th of 2015. The conditions were different from the first time I came because, as a volunteer, I had to work in a village school as an English teacher for two years. Even though I had visited Armenia before my Peace Corps service, the first official meeting with the family I would be living with was backward. We were in the City Hall where we were going to meet the host families. We were standing in line, and the family had to guess who their volunteer was. When my turn came, I could read some sadness and a sense of deception on the face of my family. It hurt me to feel 'unwanted,' but this might be the first time they were seeing a Black man face to face. But that did not erase the feeling of the 'unwanted one.' The other five African Americans would later complain about the meeting format between the host families and the volunteers. They said that they felt as they were being forced on people who did not want them, and the experience reminded them of their life in the U.S. Three of them left their service earlier, and the other three completed their service, including me.

As I moved into my permanent host family three months later, the same scenario happened. The father did not want me around, but as I then found out, they accepted me for financial reasons. I had to live through that until I moved out to find a personal apartment in a public housing unit. From that time, I started working on my integration into my community. Later, the host family told me that the Peace Corps had to beg them to take me because no one else wanted to have a Black volunteer. That hurt to hear. Then, the same thing happened at school, where the teachers were not happy with my director who brought them a Black person. My counterpart did not know how to interact with me. That had created a sense of loneliness. I was feeling unwanted and secluded.

As time passed, I managed to win over my coworkers. The Russian, who was the fierce critic of my presence in their community, gave in after she discovered that, all the stereotypes about Black people on TV, in movies, and the news were just movies and news. People would ask me questions like: Why were you born Black? Do you smoke weed? Why are Black people violent? Why don't they want to work and go to school? I did not shy away from these questions, but instead, I answer them all to the best of my knowledge. What these painful interactions did to my research was that they allowed me to get close to my community who often invite me into their homes for coffee. At school, my performance as teacher and volunteer had earned me the title of a hard worker and good boy. These were the two qualifications that made it possible to recruit people for interviews, to have a conversation about the place of girls and women in Armenia, and to collect data on sex selection through abortion. Interestingly, I was welcomed into some homes *because* I was Black. I was granted access to places and conversations because people think I am culturally close to them, as African.

Usually, people invited me to their home for a cup of coffee or a shot of the traditional vodka either to take a picture with me or to show me their family members and friends. For instance, a family insisted that I waited until their son came back from work to meet me. Most of the time, when me and my site-mate—a term we used to refer to volunteers living close to each other, but in different villages—walked around the village or went shopping, people would come and asked him for permission to take my picture. Despite the racial bias, Armenians I interacted with believed that I shared some of their cultural values. Some would refer to Ethiopia to make a connection between Armenian churches and African churches. Armenians and Ethiopians have the same churches in term of the services they provide, and, sometimes, their architecture. Other would mention similarities between the Armenian extended family structure and the African family structure. They also talked about patriarchy, and the gender role. For these reasons, they believed that culturally, I was closer to them than a *real* American, born and raised in the United States of America. For them, I was an African with an American passport. But culturally, I was close to them. There was some truth to those assumptions.

Hiding identities. Apart from the attention I got wherever I went in Armenia due to the color of my skin, there are other elements of intersectionality that I needed to conceal during my research. For instance, I did not reveal my official age to reduce the pressure of being asked every day to get married to a random girl in the village. With my reduced age, they usually concluded that I was still young and that I had time to get married one day. I was advised by the Peace Corps staff not to reveal my Muslim cultural background. Even though I identify myself as Muslim, I do not pray. I am Muslim because I was born into a Muslim family and grew up observing Islamic holidays on the calendar. Now, I see myself as a believer with no association with any mainstream religions. I usually refer to my Muslim background as counter-discourse

when people try to convert me into Christianity. But in Armenia, there was no way I could mention my cultural connection to Islam. I denied being a Muslim when someone pressed me on the topic because my name “Hamzat” is nothing but a Muslim name with a “t” at the end. I intentionally added the “t” to tone the Islamic connection down. I always told everyone the story about how I attended the missionary school in Lomé, which of course makes me a Christian Catholic to be accurate. I would make the sign of the cross sometimes as a proof of Christianity and to end any suspicion.

The reference to the religious background does not mean that Muslim people don't live in Armenia. There are Muslims living and working in Armenia, mainly in Yerevan. There is even a Shia mosque in Yerevan called “Blue Mosque.” It was created in the 19th century during the Soviet era. That explains why a lot of Iranians come to Yerevan. Nonetheless, the reason why my religious background mattered is because Armenians are suspicious of Muslim people, and they ‘hate’ them as a nation, because of the history and actual conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenians hate Muslims through lingering historical conflicts with Turkey and Azerbaijan, who are the enemies to the Armenians. Therefore, had I revealed my Muslim connections, no family would have hosted me. For the age part, some people in my village thought it was selfish not to have children. There were young girls in the school where I worked who referred to a 50-year-old unmarried teacher as very “selfish,” that was why she did not get married.

Being a male working on a “women’s issue.” I was very challenging to work as a male with girls in high school and exploring a “women’s issue” in the abortion through sex selection. In the Armenian society, especially in villages, any contact between teenage boys and girls with no family ties is considered inappropriate. In my village, I had never seen a male teacher walking

with a female outside the school compound. Even in the teacher's room, female teachers would sit on one side, and the male teachers on the other side. I was warned by my counterpart to be careful in my interactions with other female teachers. She told me the story of a male volunteer who was attacked by a female teacher's husband some ten years ago. The husband did not like the fact that they were working alone sometimes in the English cabinet. In my case, I was able to sit among female teachers in the teachers' rooms and discuss with them. But I was cautious in my interactions with the teenage girls outside the school compound because I knew they might be labeled "bad" girls. Most of our communications happened in the classrooms, during the clubs, and on Facebook. If we needed to work one on one, I always advised them to come with their friends, sisters, or brothers.

Negotiation Between Artist and Researcher

For this project, I wanted to use my background in theatre to contribute something to the academic field. Thus, I decided to "investigate a particular facet of the human condition for the purposes of adapting those observations and insights into a performance medium" (Saldaña, 2005, p. 1). I wanted to explore the living conditions of women in Armenia through the study of sex-selective abortion. Because the project is a doctorate dissertation, it must be didactic, informative, academic. But how to write a project that can be entertaining yet informative? Can the artistic choices truly capture the lived experiences of the participants and yet meet the academic aspects and requirements? I needed to use an art form that is like "a manifesto that exposes oppression and challenges the existing social order through a rendering of moral and political discourse" (Denzin, 2004, p. 3). The manifesto, in this case, is the Forum Theatre as Ethnotheatre. Arguably, Saldaña (2005) noted that "playwrights are and always have been ethnodramatists" (p. 4). In my case, I am an ethnodramatist, because I have published plays on

women's conditions in Togo. I observed these conditions. I listened to stories on these conditions. I witnessed these conditions as a son, a brother, and a friend.

The use of Ethnodrama as research methodology made the finding of the balance between the academic and the art more difficult, because of the use of Forum Theatre, a branch of the Theatre of the Oppressed, as the artistic representation of the play. The benefit of using Forum Theatre for this project is that it does not necessitate professional actors to perform the play. But it does have rules. For example, Theatre Forum uses short scripts and require a facilitator, or Joker. A typical Forum Theatre performance displays oppression. The play is shown twice. During the second performance, members of the audience usually referred to as 'spect-actors' are asked to shout 'Stop!' and then the member steps forward and take the place of one of the oppressed characters. The spect-actor shows how she or he would alter the status-quo to reach a different outcome.

'Spect-actor' actively participate in the resolution of the social oppression displayed during the replay. Augusto Boal coined the term in 1950. Different spect-actors may propose different alternatives. But, the main actors remain in character while improvising their responses to move the action in the new direction. The Joker monitors the situation and facilitates the interaction between the players and the audience. The intervention of members of the audience can be a time-consuming initiative and, it requires patient and artistry on behalf of Joker, who must remain neutral and avoid directing the action in any direction. That is why the scripts performed are usually short. In the case of this research, the first performance can last an hour and a half. But we may be looking at a three-hour production with the replay, and the 'Stop!' The length of the production and the replay may be a weakness of the methodology, but if managed well, it can produce excellent results in terms of the social impact. Nevertheless, as trained artist

in Forum Theatre, I know that Ethnotheatre performances can be informative without being didactic. How was that possible in this study? How are these differences blended together in my script to address the urgency and the social need of the topic?

Before this research, I was doing professional theater for more than 20 years. During the time I was doing theatre, acting, writing, and directing, I realized that the purpose of theatre is not to educate or teach a lesson per se. Indeed, Stanislavsky (1953) wrote, “Let’s not declare that theater is educative. No, theater is entertaining... Let people go to the theater to entertain themselves. But when they come to the theater, and we have closed the doors, we can instill into their minds and souls whatever we want” (p. 228). But “since time in memoriam theater has been a unique medium to transmit relevant social and political ideas, to give comment upon eternal or current burning issues and acute problems, as well as to shape people’s attitudes and opinions” (Kurmelev 2016, p. 76). Therefore, it is important to find the right balance between these two components of theatre.

Somewhere in between. The finding of the middle ground occurred during the turning of the data into a script. Ethnodrama encourages the inclusion of the researcher as a character. I included the researcher’s point of view through the Writer, and I created the Joker in *Le Fou* to meet the methodological needs of Ethnodrama, and at the same time, respond to the creative and innovative needs of the artist. When I was working on this project, the artist side tended to take over. I needed to find the real balance between the art and the academic. The help of my doctoral committee was significant in guiding me towards that balance. They managed not to silence the artist at work and at the same time put that required academic aspect in the back of my head. The advice from the committee was significant in negotiating the complicated and overlapping

identities as researcher and playwright. Nevertheless, because it is a dissertation, we need the academic part: the didactic aspect of the project.

In the attempt to reduce the academic tone of the play, and as part of a validity check, the study sent the play to eight participants as part of validity through member checking, as I mentioned in Chapter II under the subhead “Validity.” Arpineh from Women for Development NGO, the organization that uses Forum Theatre to promote social changes, noted after reading the play that, it was a little too long for Forum Theatre. She also confirmed that the information and facts presented in the script are accurate. On her part, a participant I will call “C.S,” who studies gender in Armenia, suggested that the setting of the play needed to be explicitly stated to ground the action in its geographical location. She also mentioned that despite the accuracy of the information in the text, the complexity of sex-selective abortion issues makes it hard to completely capture in a play. She also questioned the ability of Little Girl to use words as she is a little girl. There was a read-through by some Peace Corps Volunteers. The ability to have a read-through before the final draft, and to get feedback as a validity check from people in the culture being researched, and from fellow Americans who were knowledgeable of the issues being studied, were significant. They were substantial in terms of the movements in the script, the creation of the dialogues and the building of the characters. For instance, the mentioning of Armenia in the setting, and the conception of Le Fou were direct results of the feedback.

There was a benefit in the ability to have PCVs (audience members with some knowledge of the topics) giving feedback from their points of view, and experts and participants reading the script and noting whether the project represents the reality on the ground on the research topic. But though the way the feedback was designed in this study was essential to do the validity check and improve the artistic aspect of this type of methodology, it can be a massive challenge.

Getting participants to read a 50-plus-page script, getting a group of people who have some knowledge of the issues at hand may require a lot of resources and sometimes a bit of luck. The task may be more challenging if the participants of the country of the investigation do not speak the language of the research. In this study, the language of research is English while the participants mainly use Armenian. Therefore, I had to pay a translator, and my knowledge of Armenian played a large role in collecting the data, transcribing and translating them, and turning them into a play.

Turning Data into Play

The process of turning the ethnographic data into Ethnodrama has been addressed earlier in Chapter III. But I explore, in this section, the dramatic elements that were the primary focus of the dramatization of the data. I give specific examples that illustrate the process, the challenges and weakness in the process. Though turning the data into a script involved all the dramatic elements, this section explores only three of them. The setting and the set capture the description of the observations sites to ground the action (the data) in its original geographical location. The dialogue tries to maintain the authenticity of the data and yet display artistry. The characters, individual or composite, mostly are based on the participants. Saldaña (2005) noted that, “A playwright of Ethnodrama is not just a storyteller; she’s a story-*reteller*” (p. 20). The notion of retelling a story entails inventiveness, artistic decisions and aesthetic choices. What to keep? What to let go? What to change? What to focus on? Smith (2000) advised ethnodramatists to focus on certain aspects of the participants’ interventions, for instance, on “the very moment that language fails them” (p. 53). In doing so, the ethnodramatist, Saldaña (2005) wrote, can remove “lengthy sentences or extraneous passages within an extended narrative, whose absence will not affect the quality of the data or their intent, could be edited” (p. 20).

Set and Setting. The difference between a play-script and a novel is that the play must be staged to become theatre. And theatre needs a space. Thus, the importance of scenography which focuses on the overarching conception of theatrical production that affects the visual and aural. Among many elements of scenography, I will discuss in this section how the analysis of the data informs the set and the setting of the play. The set is the physical representation or suggestion of the geographical place of the action. One example of description of the set is,

A room with a table and two chairs. On the chair near the table is sitting the Writer, with his head on the table. There are papers on the table, a book, a pen, a glass of water and some papers on the floor (Scene 1).

This what the audience sees in front of them. I am among those who believe that a set should be minimal so as not to take away attention from the acting. The setting, on the other hand, is the literal description of the time and place where the action occurs. It heavily influences the design of the set. An example of setting the play is,

It is this time of the year when the winter starts to fade away. The year is 2017 in the imaginary village of Armenia called Village. The social atmosphere seems to suggest that the usual war can break out at any time. The economy is not at its best, and the political situation leaves the villagers a bit hopeless.

Someone who knows about Armenia knows that there are some political instabilities in the country and that the nation is virtually at war with its neighbor Azerbaijan. The setting establishes the tone in the building of the characters. It takes into consideration the time and space. In Ethnodrama, because the data collection happens in a physical place, elements of the ethnographic analyzes and observation sites must be considered during the conception of the

scenography. The description states the location of the action in the script. In this case, it is the country where the ethnographer collected the data. Because most of the observations happened in a village, the community represented in the play is from a place called “Village.” The use of village also intends to capture what the analysis of the data suggests. Indeed, the data analysis shows that, among those who practice sex-selective abortion, most of them live in the countryside as opposed to people living in Yerevan or big towns. Therefore, it serves the study to set the play in a space where the problem seems more pervasive and needs more attention. The paragraph shows examples of how the setting of the play used ethnographic data to ground the action into its natural environment, using findings from the analysis of the data.

What the characters say. Most characters are composites. The set and the setting impact how characters behave, and what they say. For instance, a play set in Armenia, in 2017, implies that the ongoing war with Azerbaijan may influence the characters’ behavior and how they see and interact with the world. It also influences the given circumstances—the entire condition, both environmental and situational—which in return determines the actions and behavior that a character undertakes. As a director and actor, when I work on a character, I usually ask these questions: What does the character say? Does she mean what she says? What are her objectives and goals and how does she achieve them? And most importantly, what are her relationships with other characters? How do these relationships help or prevent a character from achieving their primary goal? These conventional character-building-techniques have been applied in creating the characters in this play. Most of the dialogue comes from what the participants said during the interviews or a quote from an article or inspired by what someone said during an informal conversation.

But because this is not just a playwriting project, I wanted to maintain the academic component. I felt the need to weave the research methodology through the play to inform the audience. Thus, I created scenes or meetings between characters that lessened the didactic grips on the script or encounters that prioritize lecturing over the artistry. Still, it did not seem to have worked well. For instance, when International says:

It is not! And you know that, my good friend. “In the human species the ratio between males and females at birth is slightly biased towards the male sex. The natural sex ratio at birth is often considered to be around 105. This means that at birth on average, there are 105 males for every 100 females.” After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a deviation from the natural sex ratio of 105/100 occurred in the South Caucasus. Currently, the sex ratio in Armenia (114.5/100), Azerbaijan (116.5) and Georgia (109.4) are the highest in the world (Scene 5).

These lines could be placed at the end when Writer, Le Fou, and the Tradition are talking about the outcome of the meeting. There, Tradition could have asked how the Writer got to the findings on the issue, and these lines from International might work. It is tedious to have the passage that far into the play. It would have made more sense right at the beginning or during the prologue. Another possibility would be to create another scene between Little Girl and Writer at the beginning of the play. It makes more sense there because the setting is appropriate: Writer is in a working environment when Little Girl visited him. Little Girl even mentioned that she knew about Writer’s work on women’s empowerment and on sex-selection abortion. This moment in the play could be the more appropriate time to talk about the methodological approaches used to gather the data on the topic. But because I wanted the academic to be part of the conversation, I fell into the trap of presenting it to the public, which in the play was during the meeting.

As an academic, I wanted to show data and numbers to make a case. But as a playwright, I did not want to do that. The result was a lecture that met the academic requirement of the project. A lot has been said about the construction of the characters and the dialogues, but I would also like to discuss some of the motivations behind the choice of I made regarding some characters. For instance, why is Tradition the arbiter? What explains the pragmatism behind Le Fou? What is the need for choruses? As I said before, most of the characters in the play are composite and fictional. Even though, for credibility purpose, Mienczakowski and Morgan (2001) suggested that “no fictional characters, dialogue or scenarios are permitted unless they can be validated by informants and researchers as reasonable, likely, typical and representative of the range of behaviours and outcomes experienced in the setting” (p. 221). While I completely agree with the suggestion, the issue of their recommendation is that, like in the case of this study, the use of fictional characters is the way to conceal the identity of the participants and protect them against retaliation. Also, eight participants and the informant checked the credibility of the fictional aspect of the play through a validity check I referred to above under the subhead: *Negotiation between artist and researcher* in Chapter II. And as the play is intended to be performed as Forum Theatre, the fictional component of the characters makes them relatable as they don't represent a specific person, but a whole range of people the spect-actors can identify with.

Why is the Tradition the arbiter? Having Religion, as a character in the play was a straightforward decision, as religion is an essential feature of the Armenian identity. Almost all participants hinted at their Christian faith. So, as an artist, it makes sense to capture that collective identity in the role of Religion. At the same time, I wanted to display the complexity of religious practice and cultural manifestation through traditions in Armenia. For instance, as

discussed earlier in Chapter I, Armenians claim they are the first Christian nation, yet they barely go to church. Christianity has, therefore, become a feature of the mores rather than a religious manifestation. All the households that I visited in Armenia had no Bible. They do not pray before the meal, and they don't go to church on Sundays as required by the Bible. I asked my counterpart, she told me it was enough for her and her family to believe in God. No need to read the Bible since they are first Christian nation. That attitude vis-à-vis the religion in Armenia makes character of Religion a conflicting and complex manifestation of the Armenian realities regarding the characters' primary goals and the resources available to achieve these goals.

The contradictory nature of the Armenians vis-à-vis Christianity makes the playwright wonder if Tradition has not a role to play in that inconsistent religious behavior. And one way to examine that attitude is to make Tradition the mediator because of its cultural proximity to Religion. Tradition is defined, as “the handing down of information, beliefs, and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction” (Merriam-Webster, 2018; retrieved from www.merriam-webster.com). Because it is the channel through which what constitutes cultural behavior are passed down from one generation to the next, the state of women's affairs can be well understood by questioning the role of traditions. Because elements discussed in the play are cultural, such as gender expectations for girls and boys, and the place of women in Armenian society, for me it is necessary to put the culture on trial through Tradition. Tradition says it so well, “Well let me assure you, that I am the endgame for modernity” (p.94).

There is also an attempt to avoid putting culture on trial. Most participants when asked for instance why girls cannot play football—soccer—they say: it is the tradition, or it is the culture, and they need to respect the culture. There is a sense of the existence of an imaginary

body of people who decide what the culture should be, and the feeling that that same body has to say when the culture can be changed. No such depository of cultural behavior exists, apart from, maybe, the religious leaders who control the religious discourse. But people can change or influence culture over time, not by focusing on the culture but on the tradition. Today's traditions were once novel aspects of the same culture. It is also a powerful image to display tradition, not culture, as a character because it is easier to criticize tradition than to challenge the underlying culture. And to change principles, we should change the patterns. And these changes, over time, may become an integral part of the culture we want to change without anyone noticing. That is why I choose Tradition instead of the culture in this case, to be the arbiter.

Writer, The Researcher as Character in The Play

The inclusion of the researcher in the Ethnodrama as a character-participant is problematic decision. Saldaña compared the place of the researcher in Ethnodrama to the one of a director in a play. He noted that, "sometimes the researcher's best positionality is offstage" (2005, p. 18). This position of the research aligns with the role of the ethnographer as participant observer. Saldaña also suggests that the researcher in the Ethnodrama be a Brechtian narrator, using the distancing effect. The distancing effect is an acting technique that encourages actors to distance themselves from what they are saying. This mirrors the distancing nature of the involvement of the participant observer with participant being observed. But the inclusion of the character-participant known as Writer, has to do with my involvement in the research as auto-ethnographer. There is still the distancing effect. Most of the things Writer says are reports from what I discovered while collecting the data the analysis of the data. The inclusion of the character-participant shows the degree to which the researcher has been accepted or integrated into the community he is researching.

Implications

Like many former Soviet countries, Armenia has been severely affected by the breakdown of the Soviet Union. Dudwick (2015) noted that, “The collapse of the Soviet state significantly affected family formation by throwing people out of work and removing the many supports that family rely upon” (p. 6). The inability of some of the newly formed states such as Armenia, to even meet the basic needs of the citizen, has led to a redefinition of the family unit. The need to have fewer children started to become an important variable to work with when thinking about having a family. In Armenia, the situation has been exacerbated by the fact that family must have boys for diverse reasons, including sending them to war to protect the country. Therefore, the urgency to have a boy to protect the country and the need to have few children to have a decent living standard has led to the increase in the practice of sex-selective abortion. People decide to abort female fetuses to achieve that balance between patriotism and financial burden. One participant noted that “people want many boys in their family so that when some die in the war, there will be some left to take care of them when they are old” (Participant, 2017). This statement, a shared view among the participants, is one the many reasons that some use to justify their practice of sex-selective abortion.

The ability of the family to abort girls has increased with the access to ultrasound. Dudwick wrote: “by the end of the 1990s, ready access to ultrasound and abortions allowed people to reduce the size of their family while taking steps to make sure they had a least a son” (p.6). The consequence of the access to ultrasound is that there are families who, after having a girl the first time, would keep trying to have a son. Along the process of trying to have a son, a lot of girls go missing. One participant said something in a conversation that has been summarized by this line in the play “Blessed the woman who has a son during her first

pregnancy for it clears the way for the next child to be born regardless of its sex” (Chorus II, Scene 2). Some women, who do not want to abort because of their Christian faith, wish they had a son during the pregnancy. The obsession with having a son has led to the devaluation and dehumanization of girls and social stigma. Fathers who have only daughters are nicknamed “childless” fathers.

Regulating Girls’ and Women’s Bodies

Though society also regulates boys and men’s bodies, women’s bodies are primarily the space where the power writes its rules and designs its cultural identity. In case of Armenia, boys have to make their bodies available for the army and are required to use their bodies to display physical strength as a form of masculinity. On the other hand, women’s bodies are the theatre where patriarchy loves to express its hegemony. As Bernard (2005) noted,

Gender inequalities and imbalances; the perpetuation of women’s oppression by tradition and customs; an embedded and effectively regulating patriarchal system with its tendency and capacity to marginalize and stifle women’s agency; and the conceptualization and representation of larger ideological issues such as identity and nationalism as network of patriarchal power relations realizes itself through women’s bodies (p.575),

are expressed on and through women’s bodies. In the case of sex-selective abortion, despite all the cultural motivations for the practice of sex-selective abortion, and the external factors such as social honor, national safety, and economic pressure, on thing that is true is that it is women’s bodies that are used to make the decision to abort or not to abort. The abortion process, unlike the conception process does not biologically involve men’s body.

But in the case of Armenia, the sex-selection through abortion involves mothering which patriarchy controls through mores for preserving honor, family names, financial stability, and national security. Even though women are the carriers of the babies, something that men cannot biologically do with the actual state of science (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Beatie), patriarchy managed through traditions to get control of women's bodies. The expectation is that women must obey in the name of subjective cultural norms, but women do resist and negotiate these mores. Referring to Doyle (1994), Bernard (2005) stated that, any attempt to "escape this order can be perceived as sexual transgression and the reason the woman's body must be subjected to masculine regulation" (p. 579). My counterpart's son cannot wrap his mind around a female soldier at war. He does not even understand why he takes on these roles apart from the fact that he is male. Like many boys, he does not know why the society gives him the power. He only knows that his masculinity 'naturally' granted him the divine right to decide the fate of his sisters. Women's bodies become a place where society maps its cultural identity, safeguards its traditions, within a border drawn by masculinity, harvests the kind of child it wants, when it wants it.

The Superhumans Boys Are Not and Men Pretend to Be

The National Center for Educational Technologies of Armenia recently published data on girls' and boys' achievement. According to the data, 136 girls finished their secondary school with excellence as compared to 86 boys out of a total of a sample 222 students in 2017-2018 (retrieved from <http://ktak.am/index.php/en>, April 19, 2018). Gender discourses in 'developing' countries have the tendencies to ignore the burden of the gender expectations on the boys. Even the so-called 'developed' countries have focused only on girls, rightfully so, as the oppressed group. This attitude is no surprise, because in almost "every society women as a group relative to

men are disadvantaged socially, culturally, politically, and economically” (Weaver-Hightower, 2003, p. 471). Liberal feminists and radical feminists—mostly White middle-class women—were the leading voices in the fight for gender equality and equity. But a closer look at the approaches that some gender experts used seems to solve the gender issues by substitution: take the ‘power’ away from the boys and give it to girls.

Anna Yeghoyan, who works with the youth in the Gyumri—the second largest city in Armenia—during training on “Women and development” in 2016, brought up the danger of focusing only on girls in Armenia, despite the data showing that the system is leaving the boys behind. Her argument was that, one day, when women will be in the position that men are, we will be having the same conversation around boys’ and men’s empowerment. Elsewhere, experts sounded the alarm. For instance, Weaver-Hightower (2003) coined the term “boy turn” to refer to the “corpus of research” (p. 472) that are drawing the attention of the risks of leaving boys behind. However, in a conversation through email, Weaver-Hightower pointed out that, though,

there is a danger of ignoring boys. There is, however, an equal danger of a conservative backlash against girls based on the problems of boys. There are too many people who blame attention on girls for the problems that boys have, and that is a terrible mischaracterization. Boys’ problems are mainly cultural (the valorization of masculinity you talk about), not due to girls (April 2, 2018).

One day, on my way back from school, a female custodian and I were talking about family and the importance of having children. She told me that she had a good boy with only one bad thing. I asked what that bad thing was. She told me he would not get married. I asked her, “why?” She replied he would not get married because he thought he was not financially stable to take care of a child and a wife. I could see the sad look of despair on her face. I told her, the way

her son, who was 45, talked about raising children was a responsible way to think about things. This type of pressure that young men face every day goes unnoticed in the gender discourse arena. In her report on the “Missing woman” in the South Caucasus, Dudwick (2015) cited a focus group member who said: “Today, boys have to think twice before getting married. If they don’t have a job and they are not established, they cannot get married [...]” (p. 5). But not everyone shares the view expressed by the focus group member and custodian’s son. Some see the failure to get married as a failure. The financial variable that those who make the decision not to get married explore does not matter.

During a girls’ football match in 2016 in a nearby town of Goris, one female volunteer lashed out at a 9-year-old boy who was trying to play soccer with the girls. She argued that, in the Armenian society, boys get to play football every day because it is socially acceptable to do so. But girls can’t. Therefore, this boy who was trying to play with the girls had no right to do so, because, as a boy, he is privileged over the girls. That boy, who was not responsible for deciding what is culturally acceptable or not, was punished by a gender activist who thought that the way the gender issues must be addressed was to take things from boys and hand them over to girls. The boy did not ask to be privileged neither did the girl asked to be oppressed. But the situation is more complicated than a simple dichotomic view of boy and girls. One day, the Biology teacher I mentioned in Chapter I, shared a personal story with me. He told me how he needed to perform his gender roles by pretending and acting. He needed to repress some of the things he wanted to do because they are socially acceptable for men to do those things. He tried to do dishes and laundry, but he was afraid someone might see him and spread the news around the village. He praised his wife as a strong, intelligent woman. He told me, he was not even sure whether his wife would allow him to perform these housekeeping tasks.

In the dining room of our school, Armen, the husband was helping Armenuhi, his wife, to set the table for the children's school meal. I was waiting for my daily tea and chatting with Armen. The Armenuhi hands the plate to Armen through the kitchen window, and Armen lays them on the tables. Then, it all stopped. Armen would not perform the tasks he was doing anymore. He went into the kitchen and started to smoke. I did not understand the sudden change in what he was doing. When I looked around, I saw three teenage students who came into the dining room. They were girls. They were standing at the counter ready to order something to eat. Then, it all started to make sense to me as for why Armen, a man in his 50's quit setting the table. Setting tables is a "woman's job." A man who performs such jobs, publicly, brings a dishonor not just to his manhood but to the whole family. I later asked Armenuhi if I could help, and she rightfully declined my offer. She refused my offer to help, not because she did not need it, but because she was protecting me, a man, from the shame and dishonor. These stories are two of the many that I have witnessed during my almost three years living in Armenia.

When we talk about gender, we tend to ignore stories that can highlight Armen and Arthur. We instead, rightfully so, focus on the side of the story that can generate heated discussions around the oppression of the victims: the girls and the women. To change a culture, we need to change the traditions, the way we perform the mores and values to teach them to the next generations. Boys can set the table. Boys should be allowed to be humans, not the superhumans they are not. My counterpart's son told me that girls are better snipers than boys in Armenia, but he could not grasp why his sister should go to the army. Other factors make him believe that he is the one who must go to war because that is the culture, the traditions. He loves his sisters and treats them very well, but, there are cultural lines he would not tolerate, as a young man, guardian of the honor of the family, and protector of his country. He is the guardian of the

family in the absence of his father who then lived in Russia. The reason why he does not want his sister to make ‘mistakes’ is that, in Armenia, when boys make mistakes, the community forgives them. But when girls do, they are quickly labeled “bad girl.” And that label makes it hard for girls to find a husband in their community. As one interviewee noted, “society forgives boys who have 50 girlfriends, smoke, drink, have sex, but a girl who doesn’t remain a virgin is never forgiven”.

How Do These Cultural Expectations Impact Sex-Selective Abortion in Armenia?

While society has “placed woman’s body as constitutive and internal to the making of identity and taboo subjectivity” (Bernard, 2005, p. 577), boys’ bodies are also controlled by the cultural behaviors. Both girls and boys must get married or be subject to criticism and dishonor on the part of the society. Boys must be strong and give their lives to protect the country. Girls must later become wives and achieve their ‘divine’ role of mothering. In the case of the sex-selective abortion, it is the body of the women that are endangered. Even though the desire to have a son is not always a man’s decision, the reasons why they perform the abortions rarely mention the danger of multiple abortions. In their 2016 report on reproduction health in Armenia, the United Nations Population Funds specified that “The improper use of Cytotec as an abortifacient can sometimes lead to complications such as hemorrhage, post-hemorrhage anemia, incomplete abortions and sometimes even death” (p. 68). Some participants, men, and women suggested that the reason why they don’t want to have daughters is that, the girls suffered a lot of hardships, have no control over their lives, and cannot make decisions on their own not because they are unable to, but because the society and family do not nurture that independent behavior. In the interviews that Dudwick (2015) conducted, a woman participant stated:

I personally agree with having a son preference. Not because he will be the one who continues the family name, or that he will take care of me, but because I pity girls... girls have more problems, a boy seems to have an easier life. Being a mother is very important and a heavy duty. The only obligation a man has is to support the family financially, all other issues are solved by woman (p. 15).

Three main reasons seem to encourage the practice of sex-selective abortion in Armenia. They are social, political, and financial. At the social level, people want to have a son to carry the family name and prove their manhood to their community. At the political level, having a son a distinguished contribution to the protection of the country which is at war with its neighbor. At the financial level, Armenian ruling powers are unable to recreate the basic living standards that they were used to under the Soviet Union. The underprivileged seem to be getting poorer, and the handful of rich people are getting richer. But the financial situation of young couples appears to be the persistent issue affecting sex selection through abortion, because of the choice family must make to make ends meet under the social, political, and financial pressure.

Looking Forwards

The practice of sex-selective abortion could have some dire consequences due to the gender imbalance in Armenia. Elsewhere, like in China and India where the sex-selection through abortion has been going on for too long, researchers noted that there are too many men as compared to women due to selective abortions. In their article “Too Many Men,” (Denyer & Gowen, 2018) wrote:

The consequences of having too many men, now coming of age, are far-reaching:

Beyond an epidemic of loneliness, the imbalance distorts labor markets, drives up savings

rates in China and drives down consumption, artificially inflates certain property values, and parallels increases in violent crime, trafficking or prostitution in a growing number of locations.

Though the reasons behind the practice may vary from one country to another, the consequences could be the same. One way or the other, the practice of sex-selective abortion is a gender equality issue and must be addressed as such. As shown in the research, girls are aborted because of their sex and the gender role assigned to them by subjective customs. To explore the case of the missing in Armenia, and to contribute to the discourse on gender, the study used the Ethnodrama as investigation method. The objective is to continue the ongoing discussion on sex-selective by including the voices of the people.

Boal (1995) noted that, “maybe theatre in itself is not revolutionary, but these theatrical forms are without a doubt a rehearsal of revolution” (p. 69). The case of the missing girl is an attempt to be part of the body of works that offer the rehearsal of revolution in how societies view women around the world. “Because theater is the space of representation par excellence and therefore offers a central context to reflect on the issues of representation in its discursive, aesthetic, and political meanings, it has been used by women specially to contest and subvert abusive forms of (mis)representations” (Migraine-George, 2008, p. 5). Until the play is performed, the study will remain incomplete. Therefore, the play must be translated into the Armenian and make it available to NGOs to perform. Because the process of writing this play considered the representation of people and their stories, I examined artistic elements required for the participants to re-present themselves and be heard instead of the ‘saviors’ speaking for them. As a follow-up on the effectiveness of the project, the researcher will keep in touch with the organizations who are going to use the play and document reactions from the audience. The

researcher will ask organizations that will perform the play to assess the audience before the performance and alter the performance to evaluate the impact of the approach on their understanding of the issues.

As a researcher and playwright, this study has equipped me with a better understanding of gender issues and how multifaceted and significant a “women’s issue” can be from one culture to another. The urgency of the issue may be the same in all society, but it always requires a deeper understanding of the culture in which the problem is rooted. I also learned about myself as a privileged male working in Armenia, and how this privilege, when used appropriately, can make a difference in other people’s life. Moving forward, I would like to apply the same methodology in addressing further aspects of gender-related issues in other parts of the world.

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