

SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND STEREOTYPES REPRESENTED IN KARGIN

HAGHORDOUM

by

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Introduction

As much as pop-culture remains the mass and widely-spread source of entertainment and is considered to be “low-culture”, it contains cultural codes specific to the society. Moreover, pop-culture is the very thing which describes the layers of the culture in the most possible objective way. While people take pop-culture with doubt and in a stereotypical way, they cannot deny their influence on the pop-culture and vice versa. Armenia is no different from this perception of the pop-culture. Kargin Haghordoum, the Armenian famous sketch show is a vivid example of this fact. While being comedic and entertaining, in a subtext Kargin Haghordoum represents stereotypical and social issues in Armenia, such as gender roles, class differences and conflicts and the post-colonial influence of Soviet Union on Armenia. This sketch show has been on air since 2002 and has continued until 2009. The main actors of the show are Hayk Maroutyan (now mayor of Yerevan) and Mkrtich Arzumanyan. Kargin Haghordoum usually was broadcasted on Armenia TV in the evenings as sometimes it contained PG-13 content. Sometimes the male actors acted as female characters to make the show more absurd and funnier.

The show also concentrated on people of special professions, most commonly doctors and policemen as in a stereotypical way they are the most complained about professions in Armenia. In other words, it shows the reality or more likely how Armenian people see the reality. The show touches upon the discrimination and gender inequality and the stereotypes about man and woman’s role in the Armenian society. The show has also brought to light the problems of post-colonialism, urban and rural differences and so on. Thus, during its seven years of existence the show has become “an encyclopedia” collecting the specific and stereotypical features of the Armenian society, starting from gender equality problems to how

people of certain professions are perceived which in an exclusive manner describes the whole social construct of the Armenian society inclusively.

Literature review

Edensor takes a great step in examining how pop-culture defines national identity and how it transmits into everyday life. Edensor thoroughly discusses and defines the national identity and how it is influenced by and influences popular culture. Moreover, this aspect starts defining people's everyday life and this is what Edensor discusses as well. He also represents how the landscape and rural areas of the country are represented in the popular culture. "Argentina is inevitably linked with images of the pampas: gauchos riding across the grasslands. Morocco is associated with palm trees, oases and shapely dunes, and the Netherlands with a flat patchwork of polders and drainage ditches." (2002, p. 39) The book also represents how historical and cultural sites and places fall into the sphere of the popular culture. As an example Edensor uses the perception of the Scottish national identity and how it is connected to the famous movie Brave Heart how the geography, history and national identity is represented in the movie. Edensor talks about how the commodities and objects represent the nation in a social construct and how this is drawn into the pop-culture.

Omar discusses how masculinity defines the percentage of violence in the society and how it differentiates gender roles. She argues that the higher the perception of masculinity is the society, the higher the acceptance is towards violence. Omar specifically defines what is masculinity and how it is measured. Also, she considers other factors such as what gender the "victim" of the masculinity has. Another factor is whether alcohol was involved in the scenario or not. The study survey was conducted among 80 undergraduate male students (2011, p. 17). It showed the participants who were tighter to masculine norms, were more tolerant towards violence. Those results were calculated also taking into account factors such as age, race and

parent's education. The study concentrates more on gender as a social construct, rather than biological sex.

In their analytical report Osipov and Sargizova show both male and female participants respond to stereotypical, yet important questions about gender roles in Armenia. The report shows how the role of the females is undermined in Armenia both by men and women. The conducted survey was focused on knowledge and opinions about gender equality, violence towards females, man's role in the family, marriage, sexual reproduction and health. Analyzing the various questions asked, one can conclude that in this era, traditional and female oppressing family values are still present in Armenia. Osipov and Sargizova concluded from the answers that the violent behavior towards women is still somehow dominant in Armenia and the Armenian household. The violence in the survey is not only limited by physical violence, but also psychological. 53.3% of male perpetrated psychological violence towards women among the participants of the survey (2011, p. 20). Moreover 95.5% said they had controlling behavior towards women. The interesting thing is to question if gender equality has come far enough already, 83.3% male respondents said yes on the contrary to 89.9% of yes by women.

Said not only focuses on orientalism as a science in his book, but also describes the Western world perception of the East in his book "Orientalism". He defines "orient" as the other in the eyes of the Western people (p.1, 1978). The book was influenced a lot by the ideas of Michel Foucault and mostly his concepts of discourse, knowledge and power equation. The West controls the East with the self-awareness and knowledge of how developed and more academic it is than the East. This idea is very Foucaultian as he believed that the world is controlled by the discourse and knowledge is power. Said frequently uses the concept of hegemony in a sense how the West is imperialistic over the East. The West perceives oneself as this academic and scientific center of the world, while the East is yet too far from developing. Said thought that the stereotypical attitude of the West towards the East (uncultured,

uneducated) became a justification for the West to colonize the East. For the Western rulers they were saviors, rather than invaders and portrayed the East as a part of the world which needed civilizing. This book became one of the most fundamental sources for the post-colonial theory.

Manstead brings the example of a case study in UK and Wales about how social economic status or SES forms the identity in his article. When forming the identity, one does not pay attention to social economic status but rather race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation. Manstead's article proves the opposite. He believes that socioeconomic status plays an important role how one perceives himself or herself. Manstead brings the example of a data analyzed by Easterbrook, Kuppens and himself which includes two large groups British adults showed that the participants pay a lot of attention to the importance of their social class or SES in their identity formation. Also, the perception of the SES influence on other factors defining one's identity (2018, p. 11). Another point in the article can be the idea that "social class gives rise to culture-specific selves and patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting" (p. 5) One of those patterns can be 'hard interdependence' which is specific to the people of low-income and working-class environments.

Giddens and Held examine all aspects of the social classes and the conflict between them. Firstly, the authors talk about the classical studies of social classes using the pioneer of the social class term Karl Marx (1982, p. 12). They mostly use the economic side of what Marx thought is a social class, meaning capital, value, price and the profit. Using the economic aspect of the social class Giddens and Held draw the basis of their book. This is used in defining the role of social class now and class conflict theory. They believe the social economic statuses, the difference between the rich and power, the low class and the higher class creates a conflict among them whether people want it or not. Giddens and Held believe that in the modern world class is not evident in the wealth but also in technological, cultural and daily aspects.

Voskanian analyses the Armenian individual in his article. Firstly, the author defines what is the society and who is the individual. He not only makes the claims from the sociological point of view but also analyses the society and the individual as a philosophical unit. Most importantly, he shows what kind is the Armenian society and comes to a conclusion that it is “kargin” society. He briefly explains the concept of “kargin”, its literal and beyond the obvious meaning (para. 30, 2012). He says that Armenian society is built on this concept and every action a person takes is the kargin grasp of life.

Voskanian claims in his essay that the mythological creature homo trickster is the archetype of a human being. The trickster is the creature which is cunning and smart and using those qualities he or she fulfills his or her desires. The trickster has evolved to become a homo trickster, the living person who is using his or her knowledge and skills to find a place in life. According to the Voskanian, all the people are homo tricksters more or less and in the run to succeed in “the trickster race”. He thinks the homo trickster can be the genius poet and the corrupt official, mythological creature or a small smuggler (p. 89, 2005).

Walker analyzes in his article how corruption is still present in post-Soviet countries. Despite that there are 15 post-Soviet states, Walker mostly concentrates on Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine. As much as those states are different, there are also similarities between them and the observations made in the article can refer to all post-Soviet states. Walker observes that in post-Soviet countries the business of the state is divided between the leaders’ families, creating inequality and those who are not ready to contribute cannot be part of leadership (p. 9, 2011). This approach has changed somehow and now the leaders of the state influence the judiciary more according to Nations in Transits study on authoritarian regimes. The judiciary is a tool for the leadership to neutralize their political opponents.

In conclusion, the literature reviews of the sources above relate to the capstone topic mentioned in the introduction. The sources analyze gender, social and demographic issues

which are primarily present in Kargin Haghordoum. The articles, reports and books found above touch on topics such as corruption, gender inequality and social classes.

Research question

How is gender represented and what is the role or the perception of the woman in the show?

Gender is the typical social construct in the show as women are the ones staying in the house, doing the housework and bringing up the kids, while men are the ones who are outside earning money for the family. Having a lack of sexual life because the man is not present in the house, the woman is usually represented in the bed with her lover.

How is the presence of the Russian culture evident in the show?

Armenia is a post-Soviet country which has inherited a lot of features from the Soviet Union. One of these features is corruption and most of the times the policemen and the doctors are the ones who are portrayed as corrupt people in the show. One of the heritages of the Soviet Union in the show is the post-colonial and nostalgic feeling towards Russia.

How is the daily, typical Armenian from the perspective of the show?

The show has a specific way of representing the Armenian everyman with his good and bad sides. That everyman is the person finding his or her way through life by “tricking”. This is a reference to the mythological creature trickster and why it is related to Armenian everyman.

Methodology

The methodology of the capstone is a scholarly research and an original analysis. As pop-culture is not well examined and moreover, some piece pop-culture in Armenia, specifically, the capstone requires a lot of self-thought and analysis. Of course, capstone needs theories to back up the self-thought and analysis and that is why I chose some theories which

explain the show from the gender, social and psychological perspective. Firstly, I did a content analysis of Kargin Haghordoum. I have picked some sketches which represent the problems and issues I wanted to talk about. I did a deep discourse analysis on those sketches, the way specific people of specific gender and specific profession talk, act and move. Thus, this is the psychological aspect of the research. As the show is region specific, nobody understands the region as the local of it. Thus, I chose socio-psychological research of a human being, more specifically on an Armenian human being by an Armenian author. In a gender part I used the Feminist theory to identify how women and men are different in the show and why. Though the theory is called Feminism and it is widely thought that it only concentrates on women, it also puts a lot of emphasis on men's roles in the society. Marxist theory was great to analyze the classes; the rural/urban and the rich/poor. Also, this theory is useful for showing the differences between people of different professions, specifically doctors and policemen. Another theory is the post-colonial theory as the presence of Russian superiority is evident in the show. Many people, specifically are presented as cheap workers in Russia, because Russia is culturally and linguistically close to Armenia and also because people have a nostalgic feeling towards Russia. Also, the characters in the show usually mention Russian cities when talking about something elite and superior. I also drew comparison between Kargin Haghordoum and another Armenian pop-culture piece to show how pop-culture differs in Armenia. It was interesting to bring examples from Armenian literature to back up theories about national identity in Armenia, and more particularly from pieces of Armenian contemporary literature and it shows how can the literature be similar to pop-culture in a way.

I also use some conducted research about corruption in post-soviet countries, gender and class perception in Armenia. The sources clarified and became a persuasive point for the theoretical part. I also conducted a survey of how many people are familiar with the show, whether they love it or not, what is the reason behind it, how much they reference the show in

their life, does the show represent the Armenian culture in their opinion and so on. The survey helped to understand if the show actually represents the Armenian reality or it is a conspiracy theory.

Analysis and Findings

Definition of pop-culture

Firstly, it is important to define what popular culture or in short what pop-culture is. Some define pop-culture as the “culture based by the taste of ordinary people, rather than and educated elite.” However, this definition is quite marginal and discriminating as it suggests that the ordinary is not the educated. The sociological definition of it is “Popular culture is the accumulation of cultural products such as music, art, literature, fashion, dance, film, cyberculture, television and radio that are consumed by the majority of a society's population” (Crossman, 2019). This definition somehow eliminates about the opinion of the ordinary people or the masses being the uneducated. Pop-culture is not a famous or very convenient field for analysts and scholars to do a research on as they prefer the high-culture. However, does high-culture actually define the nation, the society and does not it marginalize the society into high-class or more precisely high-cultured people only? The name of pop-culture itself suggests that it is popular, thus, it has popularity amongst people which itself means pop-culture is the culture chosen by “democracy”. It is the majority and the high-culture only meant for high-class people is the minority as high-class people do not dominate in the society.

Thus, does it mean pop-culture is in reality the right thing as it is supported by masses “with love”? Though, as Edensor suggests in his book “National identity, popular culture and Everyday Life” some analytics folk culture is “folk, national”, it might not be confused with pop-culture as folk is the high-culture which “reflects the true nature of the national or regional

context in which it is set; it grows out of the area and reflects the cultural mores of its people, and is located firmly ‘in place’” (p. 14). Thus, what is the distinction between pop-culture and the folk culture if they both reflect the true nature of the nation? There might be a question how or why pop-culture can reflect the true nature of the nation? It reflects the nature of the nation because masses love pop-culture and masses love what they can best relate to and that is how pop-culture reflects the true nature of nation. If so, was now-folk culture once pop-culture and will now-pop-culture become future-folk culture?

Edensor claims, “national identity is grounded in the everyday, in the mundane details of social interaction, habits, routines and practical knowledge” (p. 17). When seeing a piece of popular culture on TV, people say “this is not the face of our nation”, “this is not us”, “we are higher than this”. However, a pop-culture piece, film or sitcom about real life is so natural that it cannot eliminate the main cultural codes. Thus, it is “the everyday, the mundane details of social interaction, habits, routines and practical knowledge”.

Etymology of the word “kargin”

Kargin Haghordoum has been one of the most widely viewed and known mass media items of Independent Armenia. The sketch show is even familiar in the community of people who have not watched it. Firstly, it is important and useful to analyze the title of the show “Կարգին Հաղորդում”. Of course, “հաղորդում” means “show”, but it is hard to fully define what “կարգին” means. In many dictionaries, more particularly according to BararanOnline the word “կարգին” means “Օրինավոր, կանոնավոր, վայելուչ, ինչպես հարկն է”, in other words “legal, regular, presentable, appropriate”. Thus, literally, “կարգին” people are the ones who follow the law, act based on constitution and do not have problems with the authorities. However, this explanation is in a literal context. In reality, it is the opposite. In the realm of

unwritten laws, “կարգիւն” is the person who acts beyond the accepted law and escapes from the responsibility of being punished from his or her illegal actions (Voskanian, 2012).

More precisely, “կարգիւն” people who do not act on the law, act on “panyat” which is a Russian word. The word “panyat” has been Armenianized and means “notion, ideology” of living and acting. However, the word derives from the Russian word “понять” which means “to understand, grasp”. (MasterRussian) The Armenianized version and the original version do not share the same definition from the same glance but at some point they have the same meaning. “Panyat” means **understanding** the way of living and acting and “понять” means **to understand**. In Armenian society “panyat” is over any law and during times Kargin Hagordoum was shot, a person could even be bullied if mostly he preferred the law above “panyat”. For example, even when someone reported to the police about his or her wrongdoings they would not be looked at with a good eye. However, this case came from the distrust towards the police. Going back to the explanation of the word “կարգիւն” and define it. In Armenian society “կարգիւն” is the person who lives with principles, notion and ideology of unwritten laws or “panyat” ignoring the law accepted by the state. Thus, Kargin Haghordoum is about the above mentioned kargin people, their environment and notion of life.

Comparison with other Armenian pop-culture pieces

However, Kargin Haghordoum is not the first of this type of shows or movies. Mer Bak is the other famous and mostly recognizable media item of this kind after Armenia gained independence. Mer Bak is a trilogy talking about an Armenian neighborhood where different kinds of people live with their daily problems. The movie is full of typical jokes only relatable to Armenians and is mostly about how neighbors interact with each other and how good of a thing is the Armenian, particularly Yerevan neighborhood. If Mer Bak has a positive note and

does not have negative connotations about the reality Armenians lived in, Kargin Haghordoum is satirical and talks about the problems in Armenia sometimes in a very grotesque and unpleasant way. The period of 1997-2009 was a space for Armenian pop-culture freely and without the supervising of the former Soviet government to present the Armenian society in a way they know the best. Mer Bak was probably the first comedy of post-war Armenia and was first broadcasted in 1997 at New Year night on Armenian Public Television (government funded). Thus, it shows this is a happy, kind and family movie.

Whereas, Kargin Haghordoum was a daily show, broadcasted on prime time, around 9PM in the evening on Armenia TV (a private TV). Despite the fact that Kargin Haghordoum was a family show as it gathered the whole family to watch it, it was not the type of good, happy and kind alike Mer Bak. Rather it concentrated on the criminal and more realistic part of the Armenian society, sometimes in an exaggerated way to make more impression on the viewer. However, the criminal and the “panyat” is not only outside, but inside, at home as well. With the “panyat” of the dominant male of the family, the female is submissive and obeys the male. This is the ideology in Armenian society about man and woman relations.

“The trickster”, army issues and nationalism in Kargin Haghordoum

Kargin Haghordoum is so diverse it can touch on many different topics in one sketch. For example, in the sketch 112 there are three young men hanging out in the sitting room and talking about how one of them is going to recruit to the Armenian army. The other two men are scaring the one going to army by saying how horrible it is to be in the army. The sketch starts by the scene when the future soldier is saying he neither has the money, nor network or connections. In a post-Soviet country either money or network and connections are important to find the way in life. Because during Soviet era there was no opportunity for self-

development, self-expression and progression, most of the people had the same skills which neglected the competitiveness in society. Thus, the only way to get ahead in life in case of the absence of competitiveness was the network and money. Thus, in a post-Soviet country everything is decided on the level of family. Even the leaders of the country used to make decisions in the frames of the family as everything in the country was centralized in the hands of the leader's families. The statement might be vague but it is quite common in post-Soviet countries like in his report "Corruption in the Former Soviet Union and the New EU Member" Walker states, "Generalized property rights, the sanctity of contracts, and other free market principles are similarly frowned upon in settings where all strategic economic assets are divided among the leader's family members or associates. In countries like Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan, major business activity of any kind tends to be off limits to those who are not prepared to give a sufficient financial tribute to the leadership. This approach nevertheless reflects a major change from the Soviet period" (p. 9).

The practice of using family ties and network reminds of nepotism which is "favoritism (as in appointment to a job) based on kinship", according to Merriam Webster. Ironically, nepotism set its roots in Europe, but now it is more common in post-Soviet areas. Because several popes were unable to have a male descendent, they appointed their nephews as cardinals so later they could become popes. The word "nepotism" comes from Latin "nepos". (New Catholic Dictionary) Thus, nepotism is the Post-Colonial aspect of Soviet Union on Armenia.

The mentioned scene may remind the viewer of the mythological creature called trickster. Tricksters are the characters in stories (they can be gods, spirits, men and women) who use their intelligence to disobey normal life rules. In other words, trickster or the homo trickster is the person who has skills and with the help of these particular skills he or she gets through life by following the unwritten rules or the exceptions, rather than the legal law. Trickster is the one always looking for ways to survive in this life. Tricksters have been

considered as a cultural phenomenon in many societies. If one thinks deeper he or she would come up with the idea that human society is a group of tricksters. Humans always try to find their way in life with the help of their skills. Thus, the characters in Kargin Haghordoum are tricksters as well, “the skilled people”. It only depends how much of a trickster the person is; one trickster can find his or her way very smoothly in this world, while the other one cannot. Thus, the trickster or the homo trickster is the basis of the criminal figures in the society; they are cunning, deceptive and manipulative (Voskanian, 2012).

Likewise, criminal characters or characters living by criminal ideology are seen in Kargin Haghordoum. In the sketch mentioned above the two men giving advice about army to the other man are more skilled tricksters; they know the way of life, they are teaching him how that life is. Meanwhile, the man going to army is a less skilled trickster because as he says he cannot get away from army because he neither has money nor network or connections. The other tricksters are using their cunning skills to make up stories or maybe tell real stories about army with a scaring tone to make the man panic. Those kind of “tricksters” are common in Armenian society. They usually make up these conspiracy theories and stories about being “a good guy”, “a decent man” and they “feed” the other unskilled people with those ideas convincing that it is the only true way to live. For example, one of the tricksters says, “Do you know what’s happening in the army? You enter the military unit and taken to a room where they cut your hair. Then they give you a broom to clean up your hair from the floor. If you clean up, you’re broken. If you don’t clean up, you’re beaten until you clean up.” Even if this conspiracy theory is a part of a comedy show it does not use its validity in real life. When the perception of “լավ տղա”, “a good guy” transmits into the Armenian army life, it becomes disastrous.

Many soldiers are bullied and humiliated because they are not “a skilled trickster” and do not know the accepted way of the living, the notion and the ideology. Thus, these cases

usually end up with murders and suicides. During the years of 2010-2015 the number of murders and suicides in Armenian army almost equals to the deaths caused by the opponent. There were 48 suicides and 43 murders in the arm during 2010-2015 (Safesoldiers.am). The heroes of the sketch in a very normal tone tell how soldiers get beaten up in the army like it is an accepted method. Thus, everyone knows about violence in the army but there is not awareness risen about it.

Speaking of army, the sketch also emphasizes the problems of administrative sides of army. According to a 2002 survey by Transparency International Armenia, one of the most corrupt spheres in Armenia is the Military. Out of almost 1000 people asked, 466 of which think military is extremely corrupt, 186 think it is very corrupt, 160 think it is corrupt, 40 think it is somewhat corrupt, 36 think it is not corrupt and 111 do not know. The results show it is obvious that the military is corrupt in Armenia and the population is well aware of it. 608 people think that the cause of corruption is that there is no other way to get things done. From the way the answer is formatted, it seems people cannot get something legal done. Thus, it is an interesting observation because in case of corruption in military people give bribes to get rid of compulsory military service which is illegal. As a result, people justify their illegal act by making it look like a necessary thing. However, because to each influence, there is an anti-influence. Military is not only corrupt from the outer, but also inside. More precisely, because of inner corruption (stealing utensils provided for soldiers, also fuels for cars, weapons and so on) military does not provide minimal conditions for a soldier and also does not secure the soldier's life, in an outer corruption people, usually parents try to bribe the military officials to get their sons out of army. Thus, this is an endless circle. 316 respondents out of 1000 people think that corruption formed in Armenia after the formation of the Soviet Union. Thus, this leads to Postcolonial aspect on Armenia and which reflects in Kargin Haghordoum.

On contrast to this, the older man in the sketch has a different perception of army because he served in the Soviet army. He did not know about the so accepted unwritten rules of Independent Armenia's army, but rather he said that there was no such thing in the Soviet army and Armenians were like a "spayka" during those times. Again, "spayka" is an example of influence of Russian language on Armenia. Literally, "spayka" means "adhesion", "solder", "conglutination". However, in everyday language "spayka" has the same nation as "panyat" presented in the first paragraph. When people say they are "spayka", it means they support each other and are always united to a general opponent. In the case of the older man in the sketch he was said during the Soviet army time Armenians were always a "spayka" and bullied the so-called "onions". In Armenian everyday language "onion" is a nickname either for Russians, or "a person with an empty head". One of the versions of the origin of the expression is that Russian churches have Byzantine style domes which resemble onions. There are also references in Armenian literature of calling Russians onions. For example, in Yeghishe Charents' "Country of Nairi", the author writes, "Բերդը շինել են նաիրցիները, բայց, դժբախտաբար, այդ նույն բերդն է հիմա եկվոր սրիկաներին -սոխերին -պաշտպանում թե մեզնից, բերդի եւ քաղաքի իսկական տերերից -եւ թե ամեն մի թշնամուց:" (para. 5) The English version of it can be, "The Nairians are the ones who built the fortress, but, unfortunately, it is the same fortress which protects the newcomer bastards, *the onions*, both from us, the rightful owners of the fortress and the city, and from every single enemy." The novel "Country of Nairi" is based on the city of Kars and its historical-political condition during World War I. In the example brought from the novel, *the newcomers* are the Russians as in the midst of World War I, Kars was an apple of distort between Soviet Russia and Turkey, *enemy*. As a result of Kars agreement, Soviet Russia passed Kars to Turkey.

Going back to the conversation between an older man and the younger guys, one can say that during Soviet times there was a collective notion of Armenian nation, though the idea

of Soviet Union was of one nation, the citizens of the Union. Thus, even in Soviet Union there was an understanding of ethnic identity and nationalistic attitude towards other 14 nations in the Union. After the collapse of the Soviet Union there was already no one inside the country against whom Armenians could be “spayka” or united, so the identity and perception of belonging to a group minimized into individualistic level, “the good”, “the homo trickster” guy against “the loser”, “the unskilled” guy. As a conclusion, one can say the nationalistic and ethnic identity collectiveness which was typical to Soviet Union altered into individualistic and self-centered notion rather typical to a capitalist society into direction of which Armenian was heading after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Perception of men in Kargin Haghordoum and Armenian society

Another interesting aspect of the sketch is how the men are represented. The man who is going to army and does not have a lot of life experience has a weaker voice and posture. As mentioned before he is not so skilled in life which in Armenian society defines masculinity. The easier the man gets through life; the more man he is. In contrast to him, the other two men have deeper voices, “more traditional” posture and gestures. Like in her article “Masculinity and the acceptance of violence: a study of social construction” Omar states, “A male may also enact masculinity and outwardly portray the gender identity of „man“ by engaging in the behaviors associated with manliness. This includes how he interacts with his boss, sports buddies, and potential partners; how he cuts his hair; how he walks; the car he drives; and the cadence of his speech and vocabulary.” (p. 2) Though Omar is a representative of a non-Armenian culture she perfectly covers the analysis of the man further described in the paragraph. To be more descriptive about the perception of “a good guy” in Armenia during the times Kargin Haghordoum was shot, an example from before mentioned Mer Bak can be

useful. In the scene from Mer Bak about “a good guy” also features one of the actors of Kargin Haghordoum, Hayk Maroutyan. Mer Bak is a musical and the mentioned scene is a song which called “Ես Լուվ Տղա եմ”, “I am a Good Guy”. The guy in the song wears typical black jacket, black sunglasses and walks in “a fake” way. He mentions he is a good guy because he has a good surrounding of friends.

It is interesting to mention that lately Armenian news agency Panarmenian.net posted a comical survey which identified “Who would you be in 90s qucha (neighbourhood)”. Even if the survey is comical, it has serious connotation. This ideology of “a good guy” dominated in Armenia’s society for over a decade since 90s. For example, one of the questions asks, “Are you a good guy?” and the correct answer is “Ask from my surrounding of friends.” The same notion is visible in the song as the man thinks he is “a good guy” because his surrounding of friends thinks so. Thus, it is evident that society’s opinion is crucial for Armenians which is a mentality coming from decades. Another example of a factor he is a “good guy” is that he has a cell phone, a rare thing during 90s. The cell phone here has a symbolic character as it characterizes the wealth of the person. Nowadays, the cell phone can be an expensive car or the latest released iPhone and in Armenian society of that time it was something to be proud of. In other words, the society was materialistic in a sense and did not concentrate on individualistic progress, but rather materialistic belongings. There is a similar example in Kargin Haghordoum sketch 252 where two students felt proud of their cell phones with camera, a luxury at a time. Those guys were typically the non-working type, living with their parents’ finances. Also, the only way they could get a good grade on the exam was through the acquaintances of their fathers’.

In another sketch, a guy is asked to describe the crime he had witnessed. The guy is similar to the perception of a “good guy” described before; dark clothing, muscular voice and posture. He then refuses to give testimony because he says, “I am not a guy who writes”

meaning that he will not help to reveal the crime because it is against his principles. This example is a typical homo trickster, the kargin guy who avoids the law because apparently it will not be accepted by the society.

The difference between the rural and the urban

The sketch 178 touches upon the topic of the difference between urban and rural people. In Kargin Haghordoum urban and rural people are more of social classes, than people living in different areas of Armenia. Urban people are usually characterized as high-class and rural people as lower-class. This fact shows how the conspiracy theory works in Armenia. Rural people are usually thought to be uncivilized, uneducated and rude. Also, rural people are presented as more talkative and sociable, thus more empathetic. As Manstead states in his article, “If lower-class individuals are more empathic than their higher-class counterparts, and are therefore better at recognizing the distress or need of others, this is likely to influence their behaviour in settings where people are distressed and/or in need” (p. 11). Considering rural people as the lower class, from this description it is obvious why men in the sketch are so open to the urban people of the sketch. The first indicator of the rural person in the sketch is the appearance of the characters. They are dressed in a ridiculous way, like hats which are typical to a rural area and which is not very common in urban areas or they both have mustaches which are not so “fashionable” and they are also not shaven which shows the conspiracy theory common among urban people about rural people not being hygienically clean. Afterwards, both men are surprised how everything is so full in the city, like the clubs while they only have one club in the rural area. This part shows how everything in Armenia is centralized in the cities, mostly in the capital Yerevan and how the regions lack development which influences the living standards in rural areas and becomes a reason for creating people like the uncivilized,

uneducated and rude characters represented in the sketch. This gap between urban and rural people can be described through Marxist theory. Urban people can be considered the bourgeoisie and the rural people are the proletariats. The industry in Armenia cannot be successful without the agriculture which is the product of the rural people's work, thus they are the proletariats. The urban areas are using more of the product of rural people and this makes them the bourgeoisie, the high-class. This economic gap between two classes creates social and cultural gap and this fact again proves Marx's theory that history is the story of class struggles.

Another example in the sketch of social and economic difference is the perception of personal growth and respect among rural people. When the waiter approaches the two men, one of them asks the waiter, "Do you know who is he? People feel very proud of him in our area because there is no one like him there who can butcher a sheep". The area a person lives defines himself or herself. Thus, one can say it is not quite about the person but the surrounding and its aspects of the person's development. The regions of Armenia are so underdeveloped that the notion of personal development limits for example with how a man is good at butchering a sheep. Another example can be how the man was proud of that he could talk to the urban girl and that the man says his father would have been proud. Thus, the maximal level of self-appreciation limits with the ability to talk to an urban girl.

In conclusion, once the rural person gets out of his or her familiar environment, the village, "the harmony" breaks. He or she is the product of the village and it is not possible to imagine him or her outside of that domain. It will be the same if the urban person appears in a rural domain. This theory is well represented by the writer Hrant Matevosyan and the film "We and Our Mountains" shot based on his novella. Matevosyan's characters are usually rural people who do not get out of the village and are very harmonic and natural in their area. However, once they encounter the urban and the bureaucracy, they become ridiculous and out of context. The men from the movie "We and Our Mountains" are to face the authorities

because they are thought to have committed a crime by only butchering the sheep which belonged to them and eating it. Because they had never before “met” the bureaucracy it was hard for them “to win” it just as the characters of Kargin Haghordoum had not met the urban before they became “a victim” of it because they did not belong there. Thus, the distancing between the classes of society has always existed and still exists.

Russia and post-colonialism

The other social problems Armenia has faced after the Independence is the abroad work, mostly in Russia which is called “խոսսան”. The dictionary Nayiri defines “խոսսան” as “Բոլորովին չհերկված՝ չմշակված հող”. In modern Armenian lexicon “խոսսան” is the place or more precisely the country where mostly Armenian men go to do a low-level work because it is more profitable compared to the jobs in Armenia or that Armenia does not provide a high-level labor market. In the sketch 686 two men are talking about their working life in Russia and the other is complaining about how one Russian criminal had exiled all the Armenians from there. This is not the only time one encounters about how working Armenians are treated by Russians. Armenian contemporary writer Mher Beyleryan touches upon this topic in his novella “Սկյուրների Ստվերները” where he describes how was the life in Russia as an Armenian. If Kargin Haghordoum gives a comic touch about this topic, then Beyleryan is quite realistic and serious in describing the situation. As a young man he goes to Russia for work and is forced to follow some code to be able continue living there. To blend in with the Russian society, he has to wear a brown leather jacket, always have his passport with him, otherwise, he would be taken to the police station. The author also describes how different people of different nationalities are classified here. Armenians were the second best and the Georgians were the first.

This is an example of how the periphery looks at the center, in this case Armenia looks at Russia. Hrant Matevosyan uses this trick as well. If looking deeply, the sketches of Kargin Haghordoum about working in Russia use the same technique as these writers; the colonized has a glimpse at the colonizer somehow. Armenia as periphery has always been the orient for the colonizer Soviet Union and now, Russia as it was in control of Soviet Union. According to Said, “The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (p. 1) In other words for Europeans the Orient was the different, as the Orient spoke differently and lived differently. Having 14 other nations in its control, Soviet Union or its dominating country Russia, looked at the 14 nations as the exotic; they spoke Russian with an accent, they had different ideologies and cultures, and the Orientalist, the colonialist always thought of itself higher than the Orient. Now, in the show, Russia is considered as the Orient, someone with different language, different appearance and different mentality like the Armenian man’s Russian wife in the sketch 686.

Sociological, sexual issues and stereotypes about women

It is interesting how women are represented in the sketches and see whether it is the reality or the mere perception of women’s role in Armenian society. Women are the weak in Kargin Haghordoum and men are the strongest. The women in Kargin Haghordoum are usually found in the kitchen or doing housework. The other perception of women is they should always be lovers. Thus, women in Kargin Haghordoum are either a source of free labor or a satisfaction for men’s sexual needs. For example, in the sketch 465 devastated by her husband’s tricks the wife finds nothing else to entertain her but the housework. Her appearance here is quite interesting. She is not seen as a woman who has been taking care of herself. Her hair is messy,

her makeup is not so good and she is in bathing robes. So much little attention is paid to the woman or so much little she has learned before, the only entertaining thing is doing the housework.

A good comprehension of the problem can be proved by Osipov and Sargizova's 2016 report "Men and Gender Equality in Armenia". There were 1617 respondents, 767 of which were men and 850 were women and the age gap was 18-59. Table 23 of the page 173 shows the results of the question, "If you disregard the outside help you receive from others, how do you and your partner divide the following tasks". 87.3% of the asked women said they are the ones doing laundry and only 3.2% of men do it themselves. 89.1% of women are obliged to clean the house while only 3.2% of men agree on doing that. Almost all the work related to the inside of the house is done by women, like cooking and cleaning. However, what comes to the work connected to strength and finances, it is the man who takes charge. For example, 68.2% of men respondents answered they are the ones repairing something in the house. Men tend to pay the bills more than women do, 36.5% compared to 28.5%. Thus, while women are perceived to be mothers and housekeepers, men are the "breadbringers". These statistics and also the representation of women in Kargin Haghordoum show how much of an unpaid work women do in Armenia every day. Being engaged in an unpaid work does not let the women enough time to engage in paid labor, working longer hours, full time jobs or other activities. As a result, the Armenian labor market loses female workers, having men dominating there. Because of this women's labor is not valued as men's is. This remains of the class conflict and patriarchy in labor market as Giddens suggested. "Women were excluded to participation in the industries in which they had assisted men as they no longer took place at home, where married women apparently tended to remain to carry on their domestic work." (p. 458)

Another famous scenario of women in Kargin Haghordoum is women in bed as lovers. In those scenarios women are very seductive and trying to attract the male. Thus, there is the

stereotype of a woman being a source for satisfaction for men and nothing else. However, there is an extreme in this. The women as lovers are mostly married women. Thus, for an unmarried woman it is not acceptable in Armenia to be involved in a sexual intercourse. An indicator of this can be Osipov and Sargizova's survey where 85,9% of 1617 respondents agreed that a woman should remain a virgin until marriage. (p. 207) .

Professions and their social representations

Besides the gender roles, urban, rural and post-colonial issues, Kargin Haghordoum also represents many people from different social classes and professions. The main target for specific professions is the policemen and doctors. Policemen, mostly traffic police are portrayed as the ones demanding bribes or taking bribes easily. Transparency International Survey shows that 335 of 1400 respondents believe the police in Armenia is extremely corrupt, 219 believe it is very corrupt, 270 think it is corrupt and 33 think it is somewhat corrupt. The traffic police have a different opinion section which suggests 515 people think it is extremely corrupt, 174 think it is very corrupt, 153 believe it is corrupt and 47 think it is somewhat corrupt. The doctors in the show are presented the same as policemen and traffic policemen in a corrupt way. The same survey also proves this point as 899 of 1400 asked think the health sphere in Armenia is extremely corrupt, very corrupt, corrupt and somewhat corrupt.

Survey Results

For having a thorough look at the show's influence on Armenian society and how it represents Armenian society, a survey was conducted.



Out of 195 asked, 98.5% have watched Kargin Haghordoum. As it is seen most of the people watching Kargin Haghordoum are the 18-25 age group. This shows the fact people watching it are the millennials the ones born in 90s and growing up in 2000s. This is the reason why most of the respondents answered they have the feeling of nostalgia and a flashback to their childhood. It is nostalgic and childhood like for most of the respondents because they started watching the show when they were 5-10 years old in average and it is interesting that still 81.5% of them watch it. Kargin Haghordoum such a large part of Armenian everyday culture that people make references to the show in everyday speech very often. 81.5% of the asked agree that they use Kargin Haghordoum expressions in everyday life. However, those expressions are mostly comic and do not represent the social issues and stereotypes. The same percentage of respondents thinks the show reflects the problems of Armenian society like domestic violence, social inequality and discrimination. When asked which phrases in Kargin Haghordoum express the social issues, one of the respondents answered, “Woman, go to your environment” meaning the kitchen. This expression exactly shows how accurate the show represents discrimination in Armenian society. Another participant said, “There are sketches about sexual minorities which actually form the public opinion about them; they dress up like

women, they move like women, when they speak it is obvious they are a sexual minority. There is also something about gender as mostly the women are represented as a mistress, a woman with not adequate behavior, housewife or a secretary”. Thus, Kargin Haghordoum has vice versa influence on the society; it shows the problems of Armenian culture, while at the same time becoming a part of that very culture.

Conclusion

Thus, after a thorough research and analysis, it is seen pop-culture pieces like Kargin Haghordoum can arise awareness about social issues and stereotypes present in the society. The analysis showed that Kargin Haghordoum is “an encyclopedia” for Armenian society, representing the types of people Armenian society has. Meanwhile, all this people are tricksters or homo tricksters, the creatures who try getting through life with the help of their cunning abilities. The whole essence of the show is present in the title. The word “kargin” is quite widespread in Armenia meaning a lawful person or a thing while in reality it is the person or the thing avoiding the law. With its comic context the show touches upon many serious issues in Armenia, starting from problems in the military ending with gender inequality. Kargin Haghordoum is the visual proof of the facts and data provided about corruption, gender equality and nationalism issues in Armenia.

As a show which started in the beginning of the decade, it has shaped the people growing up during this era. The results of the conducted survey show that Kargin Haghordoum has indeed shaped a generation as most of the people who watch it have started when they were kids and now they are mostly the 18-25 age group people. Thus, the show was both a reflection of problems in Armenia and an opinion-maker and shaper about Armenian society.

Limitations & Avenues for Future Research

One of the limitations during the research was the lack of information and data about the pop-culture in Armenia. The problem of this is the non-serious attitude towards mass and pop-culture pieces in Armenian as they are merely seen as sources of entertainment, nothing more. It was also hard to find data on corruption, gender and social inequality in Armenia and if found most of those are by non-Armenian researchers. The research found was also mostly about post-Soviet countries, not just only about Armenia. As much as post-Soviet countries are alike, they have their differences and the research about the whole post-Soviet countries does not give a clear insight about a single case of one country.

An avenue for the research could be doing a thorough analysis and studies not only on pop-culture, but also the media of Independent Armenia. There is a huge lack of research here as the media items created during almost 28 years of Independence have not had a proper research and analysis. Media and pop-culture is somehow the documentation of the nation's history and it would not be right to leave those items of media non-analyzed as it can help to understand the nation better. Another avenue for the research can be an insight study on corruption, gender and social inequality of Armenia. Thus, the limitations are only about the lack of research about the country probably because of lack of scholars, researchers and interest.

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