“UNCHOSEN”:

SEX-SELECTIVE ABORTIONS IN ARMENIA

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**Introduction:**

            Sex-selective practices still take part in our world. Sex-selective abortions, being one of the most prevalent practices, are apparent in many countries. The reason for that is that many families prefer having boys rather than girls. One consequence of that violation is known as the "missing" girls phenomenon, which refers to the girls not born due to sex-selective practices. The prioritization of the boys has social-economic, psychological, and cultural-historic bases. Boys are seen as superior to girls due to several reasons, such as the continuation of the family's lineage, inheritance of property, economic security, and so on.

Armenia is not an exception - here, a huge role pays the Armenian mentality and mindset. It is predicted that by 2060, Armenia will lose about 93.000 women due to sex-selective abortions. Considering that Armenia is not a big country, those numbers are tremendous. In Armenia, the fact of having sex-based abortion practices is mostly seen if the family has three or more children. That is, the sex ratio at birth is not in line with the biologically set statistical average, and it tends to increase after having the third child.

Certainly, there are several factors that influence the family's decision to have an induced abortion. That includes women's residence, level of education, family income, migration, etc. However, in Armenia, more impact has to do with the perception of the assigned gender roles and established norms. Sons are often seen as "connecting links" between the mother and her husband/partner. That is all due to society's imposed norms, the Armenian mindset, and firmly established traditions. Due to that, based on the conducted survey by the UNPFA, son preference in the surveyed families is six times higher than daughter preference.

It is also important to mention how the cultural practice of having a boy affects women's status and authority since not having a boy is perceived to be the woman's fault. Although we know that biologically such an assumption seems absurd, still, in the Armenian discourse, it is the norm to guilt women in not having male fetuses. Such tension caused by society and even family members highly pressures a woman into thinking that it is a must to have at least one boy in a family. Therefore, women lack the choice and are often deprived of it in the context of self-making decisions.

Several law regulations were taken to minimalize the practice of sex-selective abortions in Armenia. One of them prohibits to have an abortion after 12 weeks of pregnancy. Since the sex determination of the fetus becomes available after 12 weeks of gestation, the law aimed to reduce the threat of having abortion practices to regulate the desired sex of the child. From the theoretical perspective, the plan sounded reasonable. However, in practice, it was not. That led to law violations, and as a result, many abortions were performed at home. The law not only led to the underreporting of abortions, which in its turn led to the misrepresentation of the reality but also provided a considerable risk for a woman since abortion is a dangerous procedure to do at home.

Therefore, even if, statistically, it is evident that sex-selective practices reduced dramatically in numbers, the data probably does not represent the reality to the precise extent. On the other hand, such practices are still taking place in our modern world, and the established gender roles and imposed mindsets have to do a lot with it.

**Literature Review:**

Sex-based abortions are not a new phenomenon in our world. In many countries, the preference is given to boys. There are numerous factors that influence the decision to make an abortion to secure the desired gender of the child, varying from the socio-economic practices to the established gender "roles." In Armenia particularly, a huge role plays the mentality and the "Armenian" mindset. Many studies have been conducted to reveal the reasons behind that decision-making and dig deeper into the psychological aspect of the phenomenon.

           In a variety of resources, different authors use various terms to refer to abortions based on the sex/gender of the child. Most of them use the term sex-selective when talking about abortions. However, the term gender is used when referring to gender-based discrimination/violence and gender-biased sex selection. Since gender has a socially-constructed meaning, and I argue that abortions are based on the biological and physiological characteristics of a child, I will use the terms sex-selective and sex-based abortions further in the paper.

Nowadays, about 140 million women are believed to be "missing" worldwide because of sex-selective practices. The expression "missing girls" was first used by Noble Prize winner Amartya Sen to describe those girls who were not born due to the sex selection before the birth of the child or interventions during pregnancy (Shahnazaryan & Hovhannisyan). Son preference usually reflects discriminatory socio-economic practices and traditions, which place huge pressure on women to give birth to sons (United Nations Population Fund). Traditional kinship systems that disrupt the value of daughters are seen in all countries that have substantial sex selection (Kumar & Sinha). Therefore, the issue of sex-selective abortions is most common in Asian countries, as well as in the South Caucasus. In those countries, favoring boys has deep cultural roots. It is predicted that by 2060, Armenia will lose about 93.000 women due to sex-selective abortions. Strikingly, in Aragatsotn and Gegharkunik regions, the following sex rate at birth was recorded - 124 boys to 100 girls (ratio 1.24), which even exceeds the highest rate in the world recorded in China (Shahnazaryan & Hovhannisyan).

When analyzing the statistics made by United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA), it is apparent that in the framework of 1990-2010, there was a dramatic decline in the fertility rate of the population (from 2.62 children per woman to 1.56). Although biologically more boys are born than girls (about 102-106 boys are born per 100 girls), since 1993, the sex ratio at birth has been higher (110-120 boys per 100 girls). That implies the preference for a son rather than a girl during the pregnancy stage. However, in the case of the first child, the sex ratio at birth matches the biological norm. Therefore, no sex-selective abortion takes place. However, after the second child, the ratio increases, which means induced abortions are taking place to control the desired sex of the child (Abrahamyan et al.). The sex ratio at birth is also highly dependent on several factors (such as residence, education, family income). According to the research, there is a significant difference in the interviewed women's preferences depending on whether they were from rural or urban communities. For example, the number of respondents with a daughter preference is about three times greater in urban communities than in rural communities (20.3% in urban and 7.3% in rural communities). In the case of a son preference, the difference is 1.9 percent (40.6% in urban and 42.5% in rural communities.

The key findings also include additional results that give a solid basis for examining the Armenian mentality regarding gender-based abortions. It is important to note that 19 (or 82.6%) out of 23 interviewed women who made a decision to have abortion made that decision themselves. The decision was made by husbands/partners in 18.4% of cases (Abrahamyan et al.). Women mentioned that the important reason for having a son was their wish "not to let down" their husbands (Shahnazaryan & Hovhannisyan). The data clearly shows that women have significant leverage in terms of decision-making in their families. Crucially, son preference in the respondents' families is six times higher than daughter preference. 41.5% of the women participating in the quantitative survey stated that during their first pregnancy they wanted to have a son, while only every seventh respondent (15.5%) noted that she wanted to have a daughter (Abrahamyan et al.).

That brings us back to the reasons for son preference. According to the same research, 6 of interviewed women (or 54.5%) stated that the reason is that sons continue the family lineage, while five women (or 45.5%) believe that the reason is that sons are inheritors of property. Additionally, the participants of focus groups and in-depth interviews believe that today, sons are valued more in society (Abrahamyan et al.). The reasons for sex-selective abortions have social-economic, psychological, and cultural-historic bases. In our society, a child is often viewed as a means of economic security, a continuation of the nation, or the high self-esteem and "masculine" self-satisfaction of fathers (Shahnazaryan & Hovhannisyan). In addition, families state that the son is the main breadwinner for the parents in the future, and it is the main guarantee of being protected and supported in the future. Importantly, in Armenian discourse, the opinion exists that the fact for a man to be a man depends mostly on the fact of whether he has a son or not. Therefore, the traditional Armenian mentality implies the existence of the son (Voskanyan). In fact, sex-selective abortions are an inevitable consequence of the Armenian mindset and the strong, established traditions we have in our society. This mentality can be seen as something obscure from the point of view of sociology, and that seems to be aimed at justification of the somewhat marginal position of women in Armenia (Shahnazaryan & Hovhannisyan). When discussing the reasons for son preference, it is also important to mention the phenomenon of migration. Fathers who migrated to work abroad want to have a son to be sure that their families are safe and protected (Voskanyan).

In the context of gender inequalities in Armenia, son preference is a result of inadequate appraisal of girls and women. That is, the cultural practice of having a boy is so important that it undoubtedly affects perceptions of women's status, authority and opportunities - not having a boy is perceived to be the fault of the woman. That is why women strive to have boys - it is an opportunity to strengthen their position in the family, gain higher status, and ensure a stable future. Also, having a boy allows women to expect that the husband will not leave the family to form another one or will not stop sending money home (Tsaturyan). We can see that gender dynamics in Armenia are deeply patriarchal. The Armenian culture's commitment to the "nation as a family" creates the perception of an indestructible unit and that any threat to this identity is met with great fear and disdain. As a result, strict gender roles are assigned. Sex-selective abortion proves that connections to family values are the strongest markers of Armenian identity. Since boys are the carriers of the family name, they are given much more value than their female counterparts (Pirinjian).

We would have assumed that in our modern world, there is no place for such mindsets that directly lead to sex-based abortions and that no sex selection is taking place. Nevertheless, different researches show the opposite. Population-based surveys monitor the dynamics of induced abortion, but survey data may not be representative of the entire population and are also subject to substantial underreporting. As a result, reported trends in induced abortion may misrepresent reality. The considerable decline in abortion (monitored by the medical institutions) appears to be inconsistent with the modest increase in contraceptive use and stability in levels of fertility. Possible explanations for this inconsistency include the underreporting of contraceptive use, abortion, or both. Since abortions are illegal in Armenia after 12 weeks of gestation when sex determination becomes possible, sex-selective abortions are performed in violation of the law and, therefore, are not reported (Jilozian & Agadjanian). According to the beforementioned survey, the majority (83.7%) of women who had an induced abortion had it in a maternity hospital. However, four women terminated their pregnancies through drug-induced abortions without doctor involvement (Abrahamyan et al.).

To conclude everything mentioned, it is apparent that sex-selective abortions are still taking place in Armenia and a huge role in it plays the Armenia mentality and mindset of having a son. Women, in their turn, are often pressured by their partners, families, and society and, therefore, are somewhat deprived of the choice of making a self-made decision.

**Research questions:**

Therefore, the central question that this project aims to examine and analyze is the reasons behind son preference in Armenian society. Since Armenian mentality and mindset play a crucial role in that issue, the research touches upon a psychological side of the phenomenon, giving possible explanations for the son preference, which directly leads to sex-based abortions. In addition, the research covers various factors (such as residence, migration, income, and marital status) and analyzes the connection between those factors and the decision to make a sex-based abortion. The creative part of the project summarizes all the points made in the theoretical part and presents them visually. As a result, the primary research question is: What are the reasons behind son preference in Armenian society that lead to sex-selective abortions?The secondary question is: What are the different factors that influence the decision to make a sex-based abortion?

**Methodology:**

Not to repeat the data and research that already has been done, I made a short docudrama film about sex-selective abortions as a creative constituent for my capstone research. The choice of the format takes into account that docudramas rely on facts and reports and provide an educational and informational purpose. I believe that such delivery of the content can not only assure the emotional attachment of viewers to the problem, that is, appeal to pathos, but also provide them with the historical record of the sex-based abortions phenomenon and, as a result, educate viewers about the problem. The genre of the movie is a psychological drama. That is, a strong emphasis is made on the psychological elements of people, more precisely on the Armenian mentality. Since it is a delicate and sensitive topic, the film is scripted and has actors. It is based on the facts stated in the research.

I used a digital camera and a phone to shoot the film. I decided to make it silent to avoid the problems that may appear because of having no professional sound recording equipment. However, the film has a child girl voiceover that gives background and a deeper understanding of the problem. The film is five minutes long, and it gives a quick peek at the existing problem, which is analyzed more profoundly in the research itself.

The film itself is based on the research data. Therefore, it mostly concentrates on the reasons behind son preference in our society and how it affects our perception of girls and gender roles in general. I believe that by giving it a psychological context, the short film might have more of a persuasive and provoking effect. That is, viewers will be able to see that gender-based violence is taking place in our society and that it can have destructive consequences in terms of gender discourse. To do that, I tried to show the stereotypical thinking of parents and how it led to their decision to have an abortion. Therefore, the film aims to show the existing problem by presenting the key questions of the research (the reasons and factors behind son preference in Armenian society that lead to sex-selective abortions). To edit the film, I used Movavi software.

The following reflection part of the paper aims to connect the creative component of the project with the scholarly research, which is used in the literature review section.

**Creative component – film: *Unchosen*:**

Background of the film:

Characters: three daughters (2 years old; 8 years old; 18 years old); parents; extras.

Settings: int. (house); ext. (backyard).

The idea: Two sisters (Oryna and Anahit) live carelessly with their parents. One day they find out their mother is pregnant with a third child. Happy news? It could be; however, the mother is having another girl. Pressed and stressed by the surrounding people, the family cannot decide if they want an abortion or not.

The overall plot: Oryna and Anahit have a good time together when the former hears her mother coming home. Not suspecting anything, she cluelessly runs to her parent to meet and hug her. The mother has ultrasound results in her hands – she is having a girl. As soon as she departs to another room, where her husband is waiting for her, Oryna overhears the parents’ conversation – they are arguing regarding the decision to make an abortion. Oryna is too young to understand the terms they are using fully, so she quickly runs to her room to google the meaning of unfamiliar to her phrases – girl abortion. The character is devastated by her findings and overwhelmed with the new information. She closes the laptop, as well as her eyes.

We transit to the new setting – the dream of the girl. She sees her unborn sister – Adelina. There is a voiceover of the youngest child. She informs us about all the injustices regarding the gendercide that is happening in our society.

After her long, plausible dream, Oryna runs toward her mother and asks her not to do the abortion. The film ends with an open ending, so the choice of the mother is unknown.

*The Script:* [Attached in the appendix section].

Reflection:

 “Unchosen” is not about the problem of sex-selective practices itself; rather, it is about the problem of our mentality, our upbringing, and our mindset. Having the context and research of the problem, I tried to take into consideration most of the reasons and factors of this sex-selective practice and include them in the film. The goal of the creative component of my research was to have both the theoretical part that would thoroughly introduce us to the problem and the creative constituent in the form of film that would ensure the emotional attachment to the film and assure viewers’ compassion and involvement with the problem of gendercide. To do that, I had a few methods and creative choices that aimed to fulfill my idea and vision of the film.

 First of all, the genre of the film – docudrama- entirely fits into the project's initial goal since it highly relies on reports, statistics, and facts I researched on. Moreover, the psychological part of the film connects us with the theoretical one to a greater extent and serves as a link between the real issue and the fictional plot. The further analysis of the movie's components takes into consideration all of the above-mentioned and reveals the interconnection of the scholarly research and the creative component of the project.

 The “foundation” of each film is its inspiration, the upcoming idea, and its characters. Undoubtedly, each of them was highly influenced by the scholarly part to better transmit the idea and the serious issue of sex-selective abortions. The inspiration to make such a film was caused by the fact that it is a relevant topic in our Armenian society, which is not discussed a lot. After finding out that in some Armenian regions, the difference in the sex rate even exceeds the highest rate in the world recorded in China (Shahnazaryan & Hovhannisyan), I understood how neglected this serious problem is. In addition, it was interesting for me to analyze the issue from a psychological level and see the factors that cause the discrimination toward girls. As I found out, societies with traditional kinship systems often disrupt the value of daughters and have substantial sex selection (Kumar & Sinha). Our society is not an exception. Therefore, the idea to make a movie was born. I did not want to make a mere documentary film by only stating the facts of the issue, but I also wanted to have a fictional note in it to have some freedom in my creative choices that would for sure imbue the film with a “soul”. Moreover, the fact that there are three girl actors is not for nothing. According to Abrahamyan’s research, families tend to have induced abortions after they have already had their first child (Abrahamyan et al.). That means that after the second child, the difference in the birth of girls and boys is even higher. Therefore, by already having two daughters, families are more instigated to have an abortion in the case they are having a third girl again. That is why Unchosen features three girls.

 Going deeper into the format of the film (having theoretical and fictional components), numerous parallels can be made between the scholarly research and the movie itself. The first part of the film depicts two sisters talking. This fictitious part was used as a "symbolic one" to transfer the carefree mood of the setting and bring the needed contrast to the following shots. It was important to show two sisters at the beginning of the movie so the audience knows the family already has two daughters before seeing the ultrasound results in the next shots. Zooming in on the "girl" on the ultrasound result was also essential to emphasize its fact and set the main idea of the movie straight. Further, there is a big contrast with the first scene – both in the mood and the sound since in the upcoming scene, we can hear voices, whereas the previous part of the movie was silent. It highly emphasizes the sentences we are to hear. Hence, we have parents arguing with several words and phrases outlined: "girl, again?", "we do not need her," "abortion," "how could you have another one," and "it is your fault" – each has its place and plays an important role in introducing several issues connected to girl abortions. Consequently, "girl, again?" shows the father's concern with the fact he is having a third girl. The mother does not seem to care much about the child's sex, but she is concerned with her husband's reaction. Indeed, according to the research, several women stated that one reason for having a son was their wish "not to let down" their husbands (Shahnazaryan & Hovhannisyan). "We do not need her," "abortion," "– straightforwardly show the man's attitude towards the news. The reason why the wife does not explicitly share her opinion regarding the ultrasound results has to do with the fact that having a boy is sometimes a way to make sure that the husband will not leave the family to form another one or will not stop sending money home (Tsaturyan). "How could you have another one," "it is your fault," aim to depict that the fault of having daughters is mostly blamed on women. It also goes back to the theoretical part, stating that having a boy affects women's status and authority; that is, not having a boy is perceived to be the fault of the woman (Tsaturyan).

The next scene, where Oryna runs to her room to google the meaning of certain words, gives the opportunity to highlight some essential ideas about girl abortion. We see titles appearing: "sex-selective abortions," "missing girls," "less girls born due to sex-selective practices," and "Armenia will lose about 93.000 women due to sex-selective abortions" – all of which refer to the scholarly research. "Missing girls" phenomenon represents the fact that nowadays, about 140 million women are believed to be "missing" around the world because of sex-selective practices and describes those girls who were not born due to the sex selection before the birth of the child or interventions during pregnancy (Shahnazaryan & Hovhannisyan)." "Armenia will lose about 93.000 women due to sex-selective abortions" – the prediction that by 2060, Armenia will lose that number of girls because of the gendercide (Shahnazaryan & Hovhannisyan). Therefore, this part of the film tries to connect the theoretical background with the fictional narrative and quickly introduces us to the bases of the problem.

The next part of the movie is mainly a theoretical one where the voiceover of the youngest unborn child – Adelina is used. Oryna dreams about her unborn sister. In the dream, the three sisters are having a good time together. Although the scene’s primary role is to inform viewers about the abortions more profoundly, it also is the strongest one in terms of emotions. The use of informative sound and emotion-provoking picture is the mix that perfectly transmits the initial objective of the film. The depiction of the unborn child being alone in the dark setting is a metaphor for girls not being chosen. We see several shots with three sisters together – they seem to have happy moments with each other. However, it is all not real. This “imagined” reality shows what they could have if Adelina was born. Moreover, there are several shots with two older siblings together, while the youngest one is left out. Recalling, son preference sometimes reflects discriminatory socio-economic practices and traditions (United Nations Population Fund). It seems like the imagined, “perfect” narrative intersects with the real-life condition.

The scene with the swings again symbolizes the phenomenon of missing girls. Sisters play outside in the backyard, swinging, when we see empty swings without the siblings the next second. It all corresponds with the voiceover explaining how many missing girls Armenia is going to have in the future. After this shot, we see boys playing. There is a symbolic meaning in having this scene right after “the empty swings” one. It highlights the idea of boys “replacing” girls and being superior to them in terms of boy preference in families. It considers the statement that since boys are the carriers of the family name, they are given much more value than their female counterparts (Pirinjian). Right after that, all children gather and play together outside. However, one girl is still missing. Adelina sadly looks at them from the window. Her fictional existence comes to an end. She cannot join them since society’s norms do not let her do so. The next shots feature the character alone again. She stares directly at the camera, trying to make an impact, when the voiceover says, “Now, it is your time to change the reality.” It was important to hold eye contact with the viewer to attach to the character’s story emotionally and to induce action. Theoretical support has to do with our modern situation. Although there were some laws adopted aiming to regulate sex-selective practices, the reality is that there is no real representation of the authentic situation in our country. That is, population-based surveys are subject to substantial underreporting of sex-based abortions. (Jilozian & Agadjanian). “Now, it is your time to change the reality” – aims to fight both the unwarranted abortions and the misrepresentations that take place even at the state level. The theoretical part ends with the character closing the camera with the cap by herself as if she is closing the imagined chapter in her life.

We come back to real life. The last scene is with Oryna and her mother again. The former runs to the latter and hugs her, just like she did in the opening scene, and, unlike in the first scene where she was happy to see the mother, this time, Oryna is more serious and is highly concerned with her sibling not being born. She persuasively says: “don’t,” implying not to do the abortion. Although it is just two words, they seem to have a tremendous impact on the perception of the film since those are the only words Oryna says throughout the whole film. It also shows the unbiased opinion of the child towards the fact that their family is having a girl again. In the Armenian discourse, the notion of the "nation as a family" builds up during a lifetime and directly leads to the assigned gender roles. Sex-selective abortions prove that connections to such family values are the strongest markers of Armenian identity (Pirinjian). Since Oryna was not yet exposed to such an ideology, she did not develop the notion of a “nation as a family”, and, therefore, had another understanding of family values.

The last scene leaves us wondering whether the mother did an abortion or not. I chose to have an open ending to give choice and freedom to the viewers. The future is unpredictable, and we cannot know for sure whether our society accepts girls on the same terms as it accepts boys. “Now it is our time to change the reality.”

The voiceover is worth analyzing separately. First of all, it is said from the perspective of the unborn child herself – Adelina. I believe it is effective this way since the problem is presented and voiced through the lens of the firsthand "victim." It is also more thought-provoking in such a way. The voiceover part is fully based on scholarly research and synthesizes the main ideas of it. The first passage aims to show what life they would have had if the third child was born, and it pictures some ordinary, trivial situations they could witness, e.g., "fighting for the last cookie on the table or arguing about whose favorite carton they were going to watch." Such a light-hearted part is further opposed to the straightforward and devastating line, "we never witnessed such insignificant disputes since life had other plans for me. I was not born. Our parents decided to abort me." This part shows the decision to have an abortion but does not state the reason behind that. The next lines clear out all the understatements: "their only concern was regarding my sex," "I, being a girl, did not fit into their plans" – they already imply the phenomenon of sex-based abortions and take into account that only every seventh respondent (15.5%) noted that they wanted to have a daughter (Abrahamyan et al.). The part where she states that society can be cruel sometimes reflects the role society plays in the prolonging of the issue. Society's imposed norms pressure families to make such decisions. The description of the factors behind boy preference is taken from the in-depth interviews with women: "sons are valued more in society and are perceived to be the inheritors of property, successors of the family, breadwinners for the parents, and the main guarantee of the family being protected and supported in the future" (Abrahamyan et al.). The statistics depicting that boy preference is six times higher than daughter preference is taken from Abrahamyan’s research as well. The voiceover also takes into the consideration the role of parents and how they are criticized for having daughters: "It is his wife's fault." As mentioned in the research, in the Armenian discourse, it is the norm to blame women for not having male fetuses. In addition, as mentioned before, women have significant leverage in terms of decision-making in their families. Fathers are attacked as well. The opinion that for a man to be a man, he necessarily needs to have a son rotates in our society (Voskanyan). The sentence "the choice was made before them" hints at the fact that it is not necessarily parents who make the decision of abortion, but rather the pressure from society, the established gender roles in our society, and, of course, the patriarchal mindset. The upcoming sentence, “Is it silly to believe that such practices and discriminations should not take place in our modern world? As you see, they progressively do”, represents population-based surveys that monitor the dynamics of induced abortions nowadays, implying that they are not decreasing. Lastly, the finishing line "now it is your time to change the reality" is targeted at our modern generation who still can make a difference by challenging the gender roles we have.

The discourse of sound plays an essential role in the movie as well. Regardless of the voiceover, the choice of music and melodies was careful as well. It was important for me to choose something in the right mood for the movie but not overload it at the same time. In the opening title scene, the first thing we hear is the overlap of the melody with the conversation and laughter of the two sisters. Obviously, it is to set the happy mood in the beginning so the next shots will have more of a contradicting feeling. As soon as we hear the knock on the door, the melody changes to a more dramatic and tense one. When Oryna searches for the “girl abortion” on the Internet, a sad, penetrating female voice starts singing. The voice is there to symbolize the struggle of “missing girls,” as if it echoes through the devastating findings of Oryna. When the second theoretical part of the movie starts, the melody again changes to the calmer but sorrowful one. It does not intervene with the voiceover but adds up to it, making the statement and stance stronger. Therefore, the music mirrors the visual part and satiates it, highlighting the crucial ideas of the film and bringing it all together.

**Conclusion:**

 To conclude, the goal of this project was to synthesize the existing research on the issue of sex-selective abortions and supplement it with a creative constituent – a docudrama film in particular. Such a tandem can have more of an impact on our society and be thought-provoking.

 Therefore, the main findings of the research showed that many countries practice sex-selective abortions. Approximately 140 million women are “missing” all around the world due to these practices. Each country has its own justifications and reasons behind the issue, mostly being socio-economic phenomena or a psychological one. It is believed that such a gendercide is mostly common in Asian countries and in South Caucasus, where traditional kinship systems prevail. In Armenia particularly, psychological traits dominate the society’s established norms and control society’s mindset. Only there, it is predicted that 93.000 women will go missing by 2060. The prediction is supported by the fact that in several Armenian regions (particularly in Aragatsotn and Gegharkunik), the highest rates of sex rate at birth were recorded. Therefore, according to Abrahamyan’s research, son preference is six times higher than daughter preference.

 Several nuances are important to consider when analyzing this issue. First of all, the sex ratio at birth tends to increase after the second child is born. That is, families incline to have abortions if they already have children. Secondly, such factors as family’s residence, income, education also play a role in deciding to make an abortion. Lastly, the dynamics of the Armenian mentality offer an idea that women are often belittled when making choices regarding this issue. Also, wives are explicitly exposed to stereotypical thinking of our society and do everything they can to satisfy its needs. Importantly, reasons for son preference highly differ, but the main ones are the following: sons are seen as a continuation of the family lineage, property inheritors, economic security, nation continuation, masculine self-satisfaction for fathers, breadwinners for the parents.

 In addition, parents’ status in society depends on the fact whether they have a son or not. Fathers are subordinated to this issue in a way that they can prove their masculinity through the birth of a son. Mothers also strengthen their position in the family when giving birth to sons. However, if a family does not have a son – it is believed to be the fault of the woman. Several law regulations took place aiming to control selective practices, but they were not successful. As a result, in Armenia, such a gendercide has a cultural background and is deeply rooted in our mindset.

The creative constituent, docudrama film, has a fact-based background and aims to be emotional and thought-provoking. Its narrative, fictional part aimed to add up to the theoretical one in such a way that it does not disturb the valid existing information but rather completes it to the fullest. Therefore, the primary idea, the music, the setting, and the choice of the actors – all were considered when writing the screenplay. Having a dream-like theoretical part allowed more freedom in creative choices and conveyed a feeling of something being imagined and invented. By doing so, a comparison of the real situation in our country and the imagined version of the character was put side to side, patently revealing the differences and prevailed similarities between the two conditions. The choice of actors, titles, dialogues, voiceover, music – all aimed to represent the information as authentically as possible.

 The voiceover is the key element since it summarizes all the important findings of the scholarly research, and it was extremely beneficial for the film. The choice of whose voiceover it was going to be was also crucial to think about since it could have had a completely other discourse would it be narrated by another character. However, being told from the perspective of an unborn child lets us not only have a first face perspective but also allows us to sympathize with her to a greater extent. Lastly, the music and ambient melodies were there to fill up the gaps and transmit the mood of the film to the fullest.

Therefore, coinciding the scholarly part with a creative one gave a more wholesome look at the problem and helped to study and show it from a different perspective.

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**Appendix:**

Script:

Mother

Father

Girl 1 (the main character, 8 years old - Oryna)

Girl 2 (her sister, 18 years old - Anahit)

Girl 3 (unborn sister - Adelina)

Scene 1, int.

Opening scene: two sisters (Oryna and Anahit) are talking to each other happily and carelessly.

The sound of the door opening; the youngest sister (Oryna) runs over to the sound and sees her mother there. She looks at her belly and hugs her.

The mother has ultrasound results in her hands. Close-up of the “sex” of the child.

The mother carefully departs Girl 1, sadly smiles at her, and goes to the other room, where her husband waits for her.

Scene 2, int.

Oryna eardrops the parents’ conversation. She hears remote sounds and phrases: “girl…AGAIN?”, “we do not need her”, “abortion”, “how could you have another one”, “it is your fault”…

The character, suspecting something is wrong, runs to her laptop to google the meaning of the unfamiliar for her terms.

Scene 3, int.

She opens the laptop, writes “girl abortion”, and shockingly looks at the screen.

Showing some statistics, (how many “missing girls” there are because of the sex-based abortions).

Oryna quickly closes the laptop, and overwhelmingly closes her eyes.

We distinctly hear unborn’s child (Adelina) laughter/cries.

Fade in: Opens the eyes in the other setting with two sisters.

Scene 4, documentary. Videos of three sisters.

Voiceover of Adelina. She narrates why she was aborted, the theoretical background, why parents prefer boys, different factors and reasons of that:

“Hi…It could be us – three sisters living together happily and carelessly. Of course, we could have had our quarrels and arguments, like fighting for the last cookie on the table or arguing about whose favorite carton we were going to watch.

But all siblings do that, right?

Unfortunately, we never witnessed such insignificant disputes since life had other plans for me. I was not born. Our parents decided to abort me. You could have thought they were not ready for another child, but their only concern was regarding my sex. I mean, they already have two wonderful daughters, and they deeply desired to have a boy. And, I, being a girl, did not fit into their plans. Long story short, that is why I do not exist and do not share all your happy and sad moments by your side.

I am not in any way blaming our parents. Society can be cruel sometimes. Unfortunately, girls are not paid enough attention in our patriarchal Armenian world. Thanks to those society’s norms and mindset, son preference is six times higher than daughter preference…

Did you know it is predicted that by 2060, Armenia will lose about 93.000 women due to these sex-selective practices? I know, shocking numbers!

Sadly, it is our reality – sons are valued more in society and are perceived to be the inheritors of property, successors of the family, breadwinners for the parents, and the main guarantee of the family being protected and supported in the future.

Society is pressuring families to have a certain established viewpoint: for a man to be a man – he necessarily needs to have a son. He does not have one? It is his wife’s fault. Sounds familiar? That is what happened in our case. Our parents could not deal with such tension – the choice was made before them.

Is it silly to believe that such practices and discriminations should not take place in our modern world? As you see, they progressively do.

Now it is your time to change the reality.”

Fade out:

Scene 5, int.

Oryna runs to the mother. Approaches her, looks at her.

Oryna: “Don’t”.

Black screen.