

Chapter 13

The Voice of Women and Challenges of Gender Equality in Georgian Media

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the media landscape in Georgia from a gender equality perspective to identify the existing stereotypes dominant in Georgian media organizations. Georgia (country) faces the challenges related to femicide, domestic violence, employment of women, early or forced marriages, sexual harassment, blackmailing of female journalists, and there is a lack of awareness regarding gender equality. The study answers research questions: What sociocultural context and basic psychological motivators drive females to choose journalism as a profession? Is there any gender inequality regarding the workplace and positions in Georgian media (TV, print, radio, and online media) and if ‘yes’ how does it present? Are there any predefined topics/themes covered specifically by the male or female journalists? What gender-related stereotypes (if any) dominate/take over in Georgian media?

INTRODUCTION

Georgia is a country with ancient culture and the first female king – Tamar (reigned in the XII century) is still recognized as a symbol of power. In the medieval epic poem ‘The Knight in the Panther’s Skin’ (XII century) by Shota Rustaveli, the idea of equality between men and women is taken to the highest level.

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In general, the visible struggle for women's rights began in Georgia in the XIX century. In 1871 the famous Georgian publicist Sergei Meskhi in his letter 'What have women lost and what are they looking for?' emphasized the need for women's education and wrote:

'Even those whose mind is not obsessed with ancestral thoughts and superstition, it is clearly proven that woman is born equal to man, that her enslavement, deprivation of different rights, hurts humanity instead of goodness... It has been proven that a woman is not born only for childbearing, for sweet feelings and to adorn the world.'(1971, Kvali).

In the XIX century a sharp critique of conservative attitudes towards women's roles began in Georgian media. Iliia Chavchavadze - a progressive Georgian public figure, recognized the equal rights of women in all fields of public activity and culture. Gender scholars (Kiknadze & Donadze, 2006) note that Iliia saw in the women's liberation movement the rudiments that would lead to the equalization of women with men. As Chavchavadze is cited in 'Gender- social and political studies': 'The time is not far when women's affairs will succeed and this whole half of humanity will be invited to the world table to take their rightful place' (Kiknadze & Donadze, 2006).

Naturally, the issues of women's equality were also covered in the Georgian media and forced the society to ponder. The first Georgian newspaper - 'The Georgian Newspaper' - was published in 1819. Since then, a number of Georgian printed, broadcasting radio and TV-media have been established, and it can be said that women's rights have been in the spotlight of Georgian journalists from the very beginning. Women journalists have made a significant contribution to the actualization of this issue. For example, one of the first women actively writing and publishing critical articles in the Georgian press of the XIX century was Barbare Jorjadze. She was distinguished with her steadfastness and support for progressive ideas, actively fighting for women's rights. Here is what she wrote in the article 'A Few Words for attention of Young Men' published in 1893 in the magazine 'Kvali': 'Our men must give up their arrogance and jealousy, give their sisters equal education and guidance, that they may even follow in the footsteps of modern women.' (Kvali, 1893).

Women editors were also at the forefront of Georgian journalism. One of them was Kato Mikeladze - editor of the newspaper 'Voice of a Georgian Woman' (1917-1918). This newspaper consolidated the Western experience and values needed for the women's liberation movement and the whole palette of Georgian problems. Kato Mikeladze was one of the first Georgian women educated in Europe who brought to Georgia progressive values and ideas (Gaprindashvili, 2014).

In 1918-1921, Georgia gained independence from the Russian Empire. Female journalists became especially active during this period, but this freedom did not last long - in 1921 the country was annexed by Russian Soviet troops and the Georgian press became part of Soviet ideology and propaganda.

As mentioned by researchers 'development of Georgian media stalled but the media managed to survive under omnipresent Soviet propaganda, the legacy of which still looms large on the country's media landscape' (Gersamia and Freedman, 2017). Even then, some female journalists confronted Soviet terror and strongly unmasked the dark sides of the communist regime. For example, a journalist Nazi Shamanauri, who had been publishing critical articles, was punished for her professional activities. On June 7, 1974, she published another article in the newspaper 'Village Life', after which her harassment and prosecution as a journalist, began. As the sources have evidenced, on August 14, 1982, she delivered a speech at one of the festivities and unmasked certain officials for arbitrariness and crime. She was immediately arrested. The court sentenced Nazi Shamanauri, as an unreliable Soviet person, to forced

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