

MANIFESTATION OF WOMEN'S
MOVEMENT IN ARMENIA

at the end of 20th Beginning of 21st Century



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A collection of articles ***Manifestation of Women's Movement in Armenia at the end of 20th Beginning of 21st Century*** is an outcome of the project implemented by the Women's Resource Center in Armenia. The project was implemented with the financial support of the South Caucasus office of Heinrich Böll Foundation, and had the aim of raising the awareness of Armenian society on the issues of the feminist movement, women's rights, and gender equality. During the period of September through November of 2015, a series of public lectures on the issues of women's rights and women's participation was discussed through various scientific concepts and approaches. All of the lectures that were delivered had data that had undergone a theoretical analyses based upon the respective presenter's researches.

In the public lectures, pertinent topics such as myths and stereotypes surrounding feminism, socio-economic status of Armenian women in Ottoman Empire, the history of Armenian women's movement, and questions regarding the representation of women in the on-going Armenian political discourse were addressed. The way in which these topics and concerns are presented in the mainstream media were presented and discussed. Special attention was also given to the topic of feminist art and its various manifestations and representations through the medium of found in the Armenian culture.

It was a unique opportunity to talk about feminism and women's rights in Armenia. Furthermore, it was also an opportunity to break the deeply rooted stereotypes around these topics through the medium of public lectures and open discussions. Lastly, it was also an attempt to discuss the various forms of manipulation that surround the issue of women's rights at different stages of cultural and political developments in Armenian society. Based on the great interest displayed, and the involvement of more than forty participants—for which we express our deep gratitude to all participants involved—we have chosen a specific format to speak about women's rights. In the future, the surrounding issue of gender equality can assist in changing the misinformation that surrounds these topics. While at the same time, the public lectures created a space for scientifically proven insights, and healthy discussions with respect to the topics of feminism and women's rights.

*Project Coordinator
Gohar Shahnazaryan*

MYTHS ABOUT “DANGERS” OF FEMINISM IN ARMENIAN SOCIETY

As an ideology feminism is almost two-centuries old. It has played an important role both in changing societies and individuals. The myths and stereotypes of feminism prevalent in the third-wave feminism are a proof to the long road women’s right advocates have traversed. The presentation of myths about feminism circulated in the Armenian society should start from the study of stereotypes in countries where feminist approaches have received extensive legal and cultural legitimization. To this effect, scholarly research and web publications¹ have been studied which allow for the understanding of most common myths circulating about feminism and feminists.²

Let us start from the existing myths about feminism:

- **Feminism is based on misandry (or feminists hate men);**



¹Robin E. Roy, Kristin S. Weibust and Carol T. Miller, “Effects of Stereotypes About Feminists on Feminist Self-Identification,” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* (June 2007) 31: 2, pp. 146-56;

Andrea Cornwall, Elizabeth Harrison and Ann Whitehead, *Feminisms in Development: Contradictions, Contestations and Challenges* (Zed Books: 2007);

Laurie A. Rudman and Kimberly Fairchild, “The F Word: Is Feminism Incompatible With Beauty And Romance?” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* (June 2007), 31:2, pp. 125–36.

²<http://mic.com/articles/96292/the-10-worst-myths-about-feminism-debunked>,

http://www.berry.edu/womens_studies/myths/,

<http://shsrattler.com/2808/opinion/the-f-word-common-misconceptions-of-feminism/>

This myth has been rightfully categorized as an oxymoron because one cannot hate those with whom she wants to be on equal status.

- **Because of feminism, women gain at the expense of men.**

This myth is a result of distorted perception of the meaning of feminism. The goal of feminism is to liberate both men and women from the social norms that affect both sexes. In patriarchal societies, men are taught to be emotionally detached as much as possible, because that state is associated with strength and power. Not only are these standards harmful for health, but also restrictive in social and emotional terms which are clearly manifested in the case of elderly men's isolation from their families. It is obvious that feminism pursues support, not alienation.

- **Feminism is only for the middle-class women (especially white women). It is a means of entertainment for them.**

Clearly this myth is very unfair because it views feminism not as an urgent need, but rather, as an "entertainment" for the rich. At the same time, this myth is most easily refutable because a simple statistical analysis of feminist activists worldwide represents wide engagement of various races, nationalities, social and cultural groups.

- **Feminism is only for women.**

There are male feminists. Perhaps they are outnumbered by women, but the number of black anti-racist activists also exceeds the number of white anti-racists. This is natural because the violation of rights is intolerable first of all for the victims themselves.

According to feminist scholar Noah Berlatsky³,

"[s]ometimes male feminists, myself not excluded, imagine we're brave allies, altruistically saving women by standing up for them. ... But dreams about "men saving women" are just another version of misogyny — and, in this case in particular, totally backwards. Misogyny is a cage for everyone. When I call myself a male feminist, I'm not doing it because I think I'm going to save women. I'm doing it because I think it's important for men to acknowledge that as long as women aren't free, men won't be either."

In addition to legends describing feminism, feminists in general are regarded to be *devoid of femininity, haters of motherhood and marriage, and emotionally unstable women*. The discussion and negation of these legends is superfluous since a simple observation will prove them wrong.

By and large, these myths are more descriptive in nature. It is noteworthy that despite all the stereotypes, basic feminist ideas are not questioned among the Europeans and Americans. An exception is religious fundamentalists who see "dark forces" in feminism, a belief expressed by Path Robinson, a Christian fundamentalist: "The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians."

In western societies, the mentioned approach is considered to be extremely marginal and is not taken seriously. Rather, it reflects the fear and insecurity of a traditional man. By contrast,

³Katie McDonough, "Men Can Be Feminists But It's Actually Really Hard Work" (June 9, 2014), [HTTP://WWW.SALON.COM/
http://www.salon.com/2014/06/09/men_can_be_feminists_but_its_actually_really_hard_work/](http://www.salon.com/2014/06/09/men_can_be_feminists_but_its_actually_really_hard_work/)

this kind of opinions is quite widely spread in the Armenian society and, as my research shows, accepted its members.

A number of methods and approaches have been applied to mark out perceptions of feminism in Armenia:

- Content analysis of internet and media publications including blogs and social media publications (over 120 publications).
- Analysis of data collected through eight focus group interviews to detect attitudes towards feminism. The interviews were conducted in Yerevan and Vanadzor. Four interviews were held in each city of which two with women - one group with higher education and the other with secondary, and two with men, with the same educational parameters.
- Observations and conclusions made as an outcome of teaching and practicing social work.

First of all, it should be noted that during the past three-four years the discourse on women's rights employed by state officials has somewhat changed in its character. The officials are more cautious and positive in their remarks about feminist movement as a result of international commitments that our country has taken on the international legal level (one should consider the fact that international and intergovernmental organizations are funding a number of projects and this money is important for Armenia's budget). However, in media ideas about feminism are more radical and more aggressive in nature. In addition, this radical rejection is frequently expressed in everyday life situations, and is often emitted into social media.

The first thing that struck out during the focus group interviews was the revelation that the majority of participating women and men in Yerevan and Vanadzor, both with higher and secondary education backgrounds, have no idea about feminism. They found it difficult to define "feminism" and were unable to speak about its impact. Clearly, in a situation like this it is easier to create false perceptions among people.

Both in the researched publications and public speeches, and the focus group discussion, the terms "danger" and "threat" are frequently used to describe feminism, and this is common for the Armenian society.

The "dangers" of feminism can be categorized as follows:

- **Feminists want to corrupt the Armenian family. Because of feminism, the number of divorces has increased and women have become "immoral." Feminism is against motherhood, and has caused birth rate decline which puts the future of the nation under threat.**

This approach is best exemplified in blogs posted on the Internet "statistics:"

*"It is necessary to recall the consequences of the 30 years of triumphant march of feminism in Europe and the United States. First of all, the birth rate fell dramatically. In Europe it became twice less than the required minimum for national preservation. At the same time, the number of immigrants to Europe increased. The number of divorces significantly increased, and in post-World War II period, fatherlessness became a natural thing. Women became freer than ever, but their security significantly decreased."*⁴

⁴<https://hakhunts.wordpress.com/2012/01/28/thoughts-about-feminism/#more-1342>



This is only one example in publication of this type. It is noteworthy though that the authors of these publications do not bring any reliable statistical data or facts. Furthermore, they eschew real support. The supporters of these views are greatly surprised to find out about the positive impact of feminism on child rearing and birth rate of the Swedish model. Moreover, those in view of feminism as a threat to the national preservation are often very badly informed about the scale of problems of sex-selective abortions or the problem of neglected and abandoned children.

The focus groups once again confirmed the fact that "immoral" normally means "sexual freedom" and is used only in reference to women. No clear answers were received to the question if men also became immoral after divorce.

- **Another myth prescribed to feminism is that it encourages and promotes homosexuality, which threatens the future of the nation. Feminists hate men, and they are all homosexual.**

Although the mentioned myth is globally spread, it has obtained some particular “features” in the Armenian context. Firstly, being a feminist is directly linked to women's sexual dissatisfaction and failure in private life. That is, a woman who is "normal," has a family, and a man that satisfies her sexual and financial needs, cannot be a feminist.

Thus, feminism is regarded to be a defensive reaction of wretched women who are unable to form a happy "feminine" life with a "real man." They begin to propagate homosexuality to take revenge on men, and are overwhelmed by hatred. This in turn creates another trend. Men are held responsible for the “emergence” and spread of feminism with their deficient masculinity and “weaknesses.” This approach is more striking in a web publication cited below:

"We have to admit that reality dictates its own rules, and these rules can sometimes be more than cruel. To survive, women had to deal with the reality. An Armenian woman, preserving her traditional role of “guardian of the hearth”, is also changing. She is

*more educated, more self-confident and stronger. Sometimes she is forced to take on not only the role of a guardian, but also the roles of protector and maker of the hearth. Examples are many, and ignoring them is stupid and absurd. But all this takes place not in the name of freedom and feminism, but under the pressures of reality. Naturally, in the near future this will lead to the emergence of a new generation of women who are confident and self-reliant. And this should not be blamed on "underground dark forces that want to destroy the country," but ourselves, and above all, the men. Recently our men are broken. I am brave enough to admit this. The generation of our fathers and grandfathers with true masculine perceptions, is unfortunately, a history."*⁵

And, lastly, the myth that holds feminism as a major "threat" is as follows:

- **Feminists are agents of foreign countries whose aim is to destroy the Armenian culture, which is based on "natural" and "moral" gender division of roles.** This myth is clearly not far from Robinson's view. However, while Robinson believed that feminists had emerged to destroy the capitalist way of life, the Armenian anti-feminists blame feminists for being US agents who spread "American" and "European" lifestyles, fight against and aim at destroying the "real, natural Armenian way of being."

During a focus group interview, a participant asked the moderator: "What, you want the American reality for us?" When asked how it was in America, and what was "bad and dangerous," no clear answer was received.

This approach is very well expressed in the following statements:

*"On many occasions we have talked about the fascination of our nation by foreign cultures, and the many manifestations of this fascination. This time, however, I want to talk about one of the biggest harms of 21st century, that is, feminism."*⁶

*"An Armenian feminists. This expression in itself sounds strange to ears. It seems absurd and even ridiculous. The concepts of "feminism" and "an Armenian Woman" do not fit into the perceptions of an "average Armenian man"."*⁷

At that time, an interesting tendency was observed during the analysis. In media and web publications, as well as during the focus group interviews, most of those considering feminism as "evil" emphasize that they are not against equality between men and women, but are against feminism. That is to say, the term "feminism" itself is perceived to be a dangerous phenomenon, because it is a foreign, and not a national phenomenon.

The considerations of feminism as foreign, non-Armenian and dangerous are closely related to the anti-Western mood and are vividly expressed with the growth of pro-Russian sentiments. It should be noted that the myth of "feminists as foreign agents" is in full compliance with the prevailing moods in Russian society.⁸

The attribution of feminism to "foreign roots" is surprising because still back in 12th century Mkhitar Gosh paid great attention to gender issues in his *Datastanagirk (The Code)*. He discussed in detail gender issues that were related to organization of relations between women and men (mostly marriage), starting from marriage agreements to terms and consequences of

⁵<http://style.news.am/arm/news/11908/hay-feministuhi-araspel-te-arden-irakanutyun.html>

⁶<http://blognews.am/arm/news/14748/20-rd-dari-chariqy-feminizm.html>

⁷<http://style.news.am/arm/news/11908/hay-feministuhi-araspel-te-arden-irakanutyun.html>

⁸<http://zn.ua/WORLD/patriarh-kirill-rasskazal-pravoslavnyim-zhenschinam-ukrainy-ob-opasnosti-feminizma-120381.html>

divorce.⁹ Other thinkers followed Gosh, including Shahamir Shahamirian. His pamphlet entitled “Trap of Glory” (*Vorogayt Parats*) published in 1773 and considered to be the first Armenian Constitution, clearly reflects the non-discriminatory, feminist and tolerant attitude of the author to issues of equality between women and men. According to Shahamirian, all human beings, whether women or men, Armenian or a foreigner, must have equal rights and receive equal pay for work, as well as enjoy equal attitude toward themselves.¹⁰

As a matter of fact, this was a different stage in the Armenian legal consciousness in which men and women were perceived as equal. Added to these views could be a series of reflections on the role of Armenian queens, heroines, scholars and artists. Overall, it is obvious that the myths of “feminism as a foreign element” is not only a sign of poor knowledge of one’s own national history, but it also directly reflects attempts to discredit the political and ideological movement, the so-called “elitist” movement, which is aimed at the reinforcement of equal rights.

In conclusion it can be said that in Armenia myths of feminism and its “dangers” first of all stem from ignorance and basic social illiteracy, which is put to use by the conservative groups to protect their own power and resources.

Discrediting feminism in a very convenient position for all men and misogynist women who are exploiting the Armenian women not only through nurturing endless self-sacrifice and perseverance in them since early childhood, but also by forcing them to be grateful for the opportunity of self-sacrifice and self-destruction.

The only solution to the situation is raising awareness and educating not only by talking about the problem, but also by familiarizing the public with the good that feminism has already brought about for them. A lot of Armenians today do not realize that many of the opportunities that are taken for granted have been in fact achieved as a result of feminist struggles, starting from women’s access to education and ending with voting rights.

As feminists we must realize that our actions should not take the shape of club activities. Rather, our actions should be directed at the citizens with the goal of educating them and giving them the opportunity to change their lives for the better.

Let us now respond to the question if feminism is dangerous for the Armenian society. For a society to which family and institutional violence is common, that considers human rights as important, and rejects democracy and progress, feminism is without doubt dangerous because it disturbs the “nice” and “comfortable” authoritarian and patriarchal status quo. For the Armenian society, however, it is a necessary and remedying factor.

⁹ Gohar Shahnazaryan, *Social Construction of Gender: Macro and Micro Theories* (Yerevan: 2007), p. 152 :

¹⁰Ibid.

NVARD MANASYAN

**NOT YET, NOT YET...
HOW DIVERGENT CONCEPTS AND ECONOMIC
INTERESTS CREATED A DISABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR
THE EMANCIPATION OF ARMENIAN WOMEN**

In front of the TV, Ani recalled the countless occasions, when people would condescendingly question her peculiar taste for a traditionally male dominated profession. Wasting youth and beauty in an office on tough questions of programming and coming home unacceptably late was not expected of herself. She was not aware that unlike her, young women traditionally chose subjects that related to social sciences, education and health. Instead, Ani had taken a male path. Like 28 percent of other young girls, she had the naivety of choosing to her own liking a major in a technology related field. She would read about it years later, as studies of that type did not exist, when she was explaining her odd choice to the others around her.

A graduate from an Ivy League University with a Magna Cum Laude, specialized in applied mathematics and a successful career, she had herself overcome a myriad of obstacles on her way to being an independent and celebrated woman, but now the official discourse was telling her that she should have foregone all those sleepless nights in the high school and beyond.

Independence, that apparently have had the ambition of having solved the liberation of nations from the Soviet rule, discarded March 8. Instead, April 7 now was the Day of Motherhood unobstructed introduced to the calendar. The linguistic entropy of the discourse around March 8 had created a fertile ground for the religious overtone taking over the holiday that celebrated the struggle for the liberation of women. For now 29-year-old Ani, listening to the debates in National Assembly ten years after the independence, the commotion was not clear. One of the parliamentarians, a woman very much associated with the soviet era rule, was arguing for the reinstatement of March 8 as an International Day of Women. The decibels were running high, some of the opposing parliamentarians were questioning the adequacy of the day, as they thought it was a relic from old times and women in Armenia had a more nationally attuned holiday to be celebrated around it. At the end they gave in, but the discourse around the Women's Month (as it is now called in Armenia stretching from March 8 to April 7) did not change from eulogizing the institution of Motherhood. Ani was still out and quite annoyed that she was not going to get her rite of passage until she delivers a baby.

A beautiful lady with lots of success in college and at social gatherings, especially when traveling to other countries, she was perplexed why it did not work out for her back home. On top of that, as if in a conspiracy, on a personal front, she scored low in her office. Men would respect and awe her for the exceptional brightness, but choose to chitchat with other office girls. She wanted to settle down. If not a rational being, she would have believed that some kind of unknown spell had ruined it. It should have been her age. At 29, she was late by almost five years. According to the Chief Statistician average marriage for women in Armenia was



24.5. But then her mental ledger went on acting as Devil’s advocate, listing a number of her acquaintances that defied the statistics. She didn’t know that on top of choosing a “male” profession, with her recent promotion, she was now among 14 percent of female CEOs in the country and incidentally in the world for a medium sized IT company, she worked for with no balance in life. Sharp and social, smart and good looking, surrounded with all these men (most of whom were on their way to settled life), she was dreadfully lonely. A butterfly in an armor, that is how it felt to her.

Munching chips in unison with the screen noise, she started ruminating about her extended family lives scattered all over the world. Her cousin Mariam, now 32 and happily married with 3 kids, worked for a tech company in Silicon Valley. They were so alike in tastes and thoughts, books that they shared during her student days when living with them. They were the grandchildren of two brothers that chose to go their ways. Baghdasar, her grandfather, decided to return to Soviet Armenia. Mushegh, decided to take the boat to the USA. Descendants of survivors were so alike, even in their looks that many thought they were siblings. Well with one major difference they would fight over was Ani’s intensely socialistic outlook on social justice and equality. Mariam was more of a laissez-faire type person, who thought that all the evils were because of lazy crowd not working hard enough to earn a decent life and status. The debates would further escalate if their other cousin from London would come over for the summer. Emma - a 27-year-old intellectual with a sky rocketing career in a publishing house, was a classical Tory hardliner infatuated with Britain’s role in history and modernization. Her latest favorite was Margaret Thatcher - another hardliner that embodied the work ethics of many in that country.

Seated in the garden of aunty’ s villa they would cool down their heated debates, sipping Leal Vineyard’s 2012 Chardonnay from nearby Fresno. A birthplace of American literary classic Saroyan. To these girls he had another special meaning with his stories of immigrants that once lost their homes in the Ottoman Empire. They all felt the connection of lost and rebuilt lives, told around them like a recurrent lullaby with sad undertones. The Fog Horn Teabags, Ani

called the British, knowing well how outraged Emma would become. And then she would go on blaming the British Empire for the hardships their ancestors endured at the hands of the Turks. A recital that was common among Armenians, who came back to the USSR. This time around, as if preempting the arguments of Emma from previous battles on how other nations under the Ottoman Empire got their share and Russians were to be blamed for the losses, Ani had done her part of the homework on how the Britain was to be incriminated. After all Emma was a tough brain to hack.

The 1838 Anglo-Turkish Commercial Convention was a one-way free-trade agreement that later contributed to the de-industrialization process of the Ottoman Empire, risking the minorities and particularly Armenians. It eliminated all the local monopolies and allowed foreign merchants to buy goods without any extra custom duty. Emma, did not see what was wrong in expanding the exports and markets. Instead she reminded about the wrong economic policy of the Empire that had granted duty free trade to foreigners, in the meantime heavily taxing its domestic producers and exporters. Ani, instead thought that this deliberate policy had made the Turks heavily indebted, forcing them to seek loans in the financial markets of London. The Sublime Port in Istanbul then went on borrowing in 1877, 1888, 1896, 1905, 1913 and 1914. Britain was ensuring its foreign markets by making sure that the economies did not default and could maintain the business as usual to increase the industrial might, overlooking the minority policy of the “Sick Men of Europe” as they were known at the time. Emma, instead, went on stating that the collapse was due to the whimsical bureaucracy and the powerful military. For heavy borrowing, Emma argued that Russia was to be held accountable starting from the Crimean War (1854-56) and later on with its attempts to destabilize the periphery of the Empire. She was quick to remind that instead the “Armenian economic supremacy” was largely due to Britain’s signed treaty that opened up the country for trade with European powers. She had read in some article recently, that 90 percent of the trade and the businesses carried out through the banks belonged to Armenians. The Armenians and Greeks now were the intermediaries between Europe and the Sublime Port, increasingly building the bourgeois class of the Empire. Armenians from Istanbul, Ankara, Trabzon and Kayseri, Harput, as well as Tokat were intensively linked with London and Manchester among other European trading centers. She also reminded that her grandfather Dikran Kalustian, by then Manchester based merchant, traded silk products and to mind Ani, paid the education of her grandfather Baghdasar in Geneva, hoping that he would then join in helping to expand his business on mainland Europe. Instead, Dikran was so disappointed to learn that his younger brother had chosen to join the ranks of some kind of Armenian revolutionaries that were thinking of liberating the Armenians and also bringing justice to the exploited populace. Nonsense, Armenians held the reins of economy in their hands, why was his brother mingling with this shady crowd in the taverns, discussing Marx, Engels and Bakunin? These individuals were talking about the abolition of property and capital, advocating for workers to get rid of the shackles.

Mariam was silent, she knew what was coming next. Emma was now going to say that these revolutionaries actually provoked the Turks to deprive Armenians of their property. Ani, jumped off the chair and pointing her finger at Emma, hushed her by telling not to even dare to incriminate these revolutionaries for lost capital, property, land and finally lives. In the second half of the 19th century, despite the open free trade and taxation of domestic production

and exports, the decline of manufacturing was slowed down. In some industries, it even experienced a reversed pattern. So it were not the actions of revolutionaries that were being used to explain the anxiety of the Turks, but the growing power of the industrial capital in the Armenian hands, that made them a cherished prey in the hands of an indebted and almost insolvent bureaucracy, which started the process of massive destruction of Armenian businesses and confiscation of the property. The Ottoman Empire by then was on the verge of losing most of its periphery and now with the growingly powerful Armenian capital both abroad and in the core of the country made it clear to the bureaucrats that they were going to lose everything. The blame is not on the revolutionaries, Ani proclaimed putting for Emma's notice. And these revolutionaries, as if wanting to get done with it irreversibly, were the ones that negotiated reform and land restitution, not your wealthy chaps, in a way pointing at grandfather Dikran. At least, the Russians to Ani were advocating for the protection of Orthodox Christians in the Empire, when the countless Catholic and Protestant Missionaries were using the pretext of *Tanzimat* to successfully introduce 'a higher and more perfect development of Christianity'. Concerning the British, they somehow started talking about the need to prosecute the responsables for "crimes against humanity" after the World War I, after the extermination of the Armenians along with the other minorities. How sincere these intentions are to be considered, if it seems that now Britain was faced with a Bolshevik Russia and sympathizing Young Turk government? A long silence burdened the sisters. It was already the dawn, but somehow they could not let it there.

Mariam thought that maybe a broker could calm the currents and alleviate the rancid rivalry of hundred years of isolation. Their levelheaded cousin Christine, the eldest one was the ultimate authority. Mariam looked at the iPad, it must be 8pm in Paris, perfect time to call her. Ani was exited now, her beloved cousin with whom she grew up in Soviet Armenia before they emigrated to France to reunite with the rest of their countless relatives, was going to connect the dots. Emma, nodded saying laughingly that now Christine was going to get into the scene with her feminist schemes. The sisters placed the screen on the table, meantime greeting their whizmind. Christine's sharp look in an instant gave her an idea of what was going on. She said that it was nice to see them without pulled out hair and eye bruises. So they've pondered over the losses again with no final resolution, what a waste of time! Emma's inquiries of her welfare, placed Christine on a cussword tour, complaining about her baggard boss that was paying her, the co-manager of a huge construction project, less than her male peer. Not that she was not a breadwinner for her family of two growing boys and a husband. Hundred years were seemingly not enough for these 'phallogocentrics' to get over the housewife's stereotype. No matter what you do, somehow the pattern persists. Hopeless! Even the March 8 events and talks do not help to undo the rupture with many women suffering the consequences until now.

Ani, reminded her that Soviet women were an exception. Christine laughed and told her that it was all the propaganda machine of the state, creating an impression, but for most of them it was just a day for a celebration of motherhood. Christine reminded Ani how like many children of the late 80's living in the Soviet Armenia, she was making a gift card for her mother during her art class in the elementary school. As it was explained the card was to be given to her mom on the Mother's Day. Celebrated on March 8th, by then it seemed miles away from what it was and used to be for many around the world. While growing up, even in the higher grades of the school that day for Ani was always an occasion to say nice words to her mom and the other

women. At times she would also bring flowers to her teachers, dreaming of her turn, when she would get her doze of flowers and perfume, as if to signal her initiation into the circle of womanhood.

The Soviet history book extensively celebrated the efforts of revolutionaries that had brought about the liberation of the working class, but she never quite clearly came to grasp the role and the place of Clara Zetkin or Krupskaya in the advancement of the humankind, except for latter being the companion of the great leader Vladimir Lenin. Ani vaguely recalled television programs that talked about the achievements of women under the Soviet rule aired on that particular day, but as it was with the other news through the official news channels, she, through the talks of the grownups, never took them too seriously. The propaganda! Well, she was not quite aware of what it was, but definitely something to be overlooked at all costs.

The titles of some of the print media articles on that day of the late 80s were a far cry from the topics covered before the World War II. “The mood starts from the moment you dress up”, “The beauties in sportswear” and similar semantic structures took the front pages of the papers greeting readers and instilling ideas. The woman was no longer the equal partner in building the communism. After the war and further down the road the C-word was a far cry, almost like an echo in the minds of the young that craved a sip of Pepsi Cola (the twin brother of Coca Cola) and a pair of jeans, patiently collecting money to be later exchanged in the undergrounds of the Soviet network – the Blat.

Despite the fact that March 8 was not celebrated before the war, women broke the stereotypes in life and made it to the front pages of the news under the watchful eye of the Glavlit - the censor guarding the secrets of the state. After 1960s, thanks to women and their great contribution, all got a day-off, but at least the titles and the content went back to the “normal”. Marquez, a young journalist working for newspaper “El Espectador” in Bogota, visited the USSR in 1957. A man, who at the time was believed to be a “pro-Cuba propaganda agent” and an anarchist to Uncle Sam, shared his observations on the ground, documenting the magnetism of Soviet realism. He was shocked at the masculine women working in the fields that as he describes explained the rapid industrialization despite the fact of repressions and the massive loss of human life during the wartime. It didn’t miss his eye, that in Moscow, which to him was a world away from the unembraceable mainland he toured on the train, to the great disappointment of the dwellers, young female students of the foreign languages department had picked up unacceptably bourgeois fashion styles along with the readings from the foreign journals allowed by the state for the improvement of their linguistic skills. Little they knew that these garments would come across as far more impressive than the irresistibly enticing idea of the Communism.

Emma was getting annoyed by recollections from times that were thankfully gone with the collapse of the Evil Empire. Mariam, interrupted the interlocution of longtime buddies and said that they had a far more important issue to settle. Not more important that the equality of sexes to Christine, but she was ready to hear it. The sisters went on briefing her about the topic and disagreements around it, even though Christine fathomed the themes around the table. After all her whole life was around immigrant people with similar reflections and kaleidoscopically resembling anecdotal stories.

To Christine cousins’ standoff was due to an absent framework for understanding what was happening at the time. To her it was clear that Armenians in the Ottoman Empire were destined

to build a nation-state at least hundred years later than most of the European states did with an exception of Germany and Italy that emerged after the Napoleonic Wars. It would then explain why Kaser's Germany was a latecomer in dividing what was left of the Ottoman market, morally supporting Turks in ending the economic supremacy of Armenians. While Armenian ideological framework, driven by the parties that came to the fore at the end of the 19th century, was overwhelmed with the need to demarcate a space for the Armenian nation, Europe was already burning with the class-delineation rhetoric. Labor movements in Europe created a rift between capital and labor, conceptualizing the Industrial Revolution, modernization and setting the stage for class struggle and liberation of women. In the same time, Armenians were on the other side of the fence, mostly wealth owners helping Western powers to feed on cheaper markets of the Ottoman Empire with a liberal economic and despotic political regime at the same time. The further ideological shift in Russia with the rise of Bolsheviks and the Young Turk government desperately trying to carve a space for Turks, working class rhetoric was going to play to the hands of the two in putting an end to the capitalists that mostly happened to be Armenians. Christine lamented the fact that Armenians were dangerously behind the economic-political developments and conceptualizations taking place at a global stage. Therefore, feminism and social justice was to be transmuted into ethnic struggle. An antiquated momentum that left Armenians without a land.

Emmy could not get the idea, what was feminism to do with all of this, even though that working class formation part was also something she could not connect with quite well. Christine went on explaining how all that started in Britain. Emmy was tired of hearing that the country she called home was recurrently being implicated. For her the enlightened liberal environment that they enjoyed until now, coupled with free entrepreneurial spirit of the time had brought about one of the most breath-taking transformations of human history. She in a way, represented the civilizing force that had helped to create the realities of modern life with affluence and literacy that all of the sisters enjoyed along with so many others.

After a long period of deprivation, inconceivably hard life conditions of many and mostly women and children, added Christine. To Emmy it was all reverberations of a life in communist country for those two ladies that was reverting such a wealth creation period into a class struggle and exploitation story. Christine, then, brought up the analytical framework of Toynbee, whose thoughts actually not only helped to understand the major shift in Britain, but also within this understanding, try and to make a sense of the future. In his lectures on Industrial Revolution, Toynbee discusses the political economy, the conflict between capital and labor, that had gone astray and needed urgent attention, as the forgone economic and social relations had to be restored.

British commentators of the time saw the Industrial Revolution as an abrupt technological change that had had a major impact on the lives of ordinary people. The period was inordinately disastrous, unprecedented in its scale, leading to the degradation of a large body of producers. The accounts of eye witnesses later published in a report spoke of the disruption and distress among women workers brought about the industrialization.

The deterioration of countryside economy, which was mostly cottage based and even in textile industry employed hand-powered spinning and weaving tools, forced many workers to migrate from rural areas to industrialized towns further limiting the choices of non-skilled working class women. This large scale technological production with a divided labor force participation

that was separated from their residence led to the changes in reproduction and labor division within the household along with the proletarianization of the labor force.

Women were mostly hired for labor intensive and low paid jobs with no advancement paths, which for a capitalist efficiency driven economy was a way of maximizing the output by minimizing the costs of production. The demand of cheap labor for shifting jobs did not require much of skills and was easily downsized if needed. The rapid economic growth and technological advancement with a lagging societal norms mostly underpinning the patriarchal values forced women into low paid, part time jobs with virtually no perspective for advancement.

Unlike the continent, where the more centralized governance models tended to bring the conflict to the national level, in Britain with a liberal political regime, conflicts arose and mostly got solved at local or regional levels. This led to the cooptation of male workers by the industrialists. That rift was actually catalytic for the evolution of the identity of the working-class women. Emmy, then, recalled, as if echoing Christine's theoretical explanations, that she had read a researcher's work, claiming that patriarchal norms in a capitalist economy led to the co-optation of male workers by the owners to the detriment of women. She could not make sense out of it at the time, but now she was stating that the guy was talking about company records showing how jobs were elaborately segregated based on sex with men having more opportunities for vertical mobility unlike women. The latter were mostly granted horizontal mobility along with absenteeism for rearing and caring purposes.

Christine grinned, as if saying she knows what it means and mentioned that whatever women do they are still perceived as housewives. The roots of this was there, in the Industrial Revolution period, when with the division of labor and segregation of supervisory functions, women were caught in the most volatile and insecure positions within the industrializing economy. All of a sudden, then Ani said that a friend of hers was talking about some guy named Andersen, a researcher, that was arguing how the division of labor and the more stable labor paths for men gave rise to the new definition of men as the family wage-earners, in a way legitimizing the irregular employment and subsistence wages for females. Now she could see how this man-to-man agreement was beneficial for capitalists that were exploiting the cheap labor and the female wage earners, reinforcing their power position within patriarchal norms. Christine, then described how women were caught in limbo, as not only they were on the bottom of the labor ladder, but they also lost their feet in the household economy by not being able to draw on the commons and bring back additional income to the family budget. The Industrial Revolution limited the employment opportunities of women, locking them in a secondary labor market both in agriculture and industry. When studying the heights of women of the time, it showed that for women born in rural areas it fell more rapidly as compared to their urban counterparts due to limited job opportunities available to them. The deterioration of heights among women in Britain only was reversed around early twentieth century, which coincided with working-class women's identity shift. The working women coming mostly from textile mills, cooperatives and unions joint their forces with more educated middle-class women to campaign for vote and full-blown citizenship.

Mariam now chimed in, reminding the sisters of the New York shirtwaist strike of mostly poor immigrant women that led to the better working conditions, favorable hours and higher wages. So for her and the others now it made sense that there was a need to have an organized struggle

and self-identity that defines itself from within. March 8 made much more sense to them. Christine nodded, saying that it was all a matter of setting a framework for conceptualization, which did not occur in the case of Armenian women, as they were busy acting upon the nationalistic sentiments with the hope to have their own nation-state. She also said that Toynbee failed to give an impetus to this self-identification process of working-class women. Instead, he believed that the solution lied in the further development of the industrial society itself, where through a rather deliberate intervention some of its faults could be overcome.

Engels took the argument further and stated that the Industrial Revolution completed the cycle of dehumanization, which was already in place before that, when human beings served as mere “toiling machines” for a few select groups, namely the aristocrats. The machines that were introduced with rapid industrialization were catalytic to the pernicious trends. To Emmy’s great disappointment, Christine mentioned Marx, who was the one that actually gave most of the framing ideas for a feminist struggle.

Marx argued that the position of women was an accurate indication of the development of a given society. He argued that for the transformation beyond the capitalist form was only possible if social relations shifted away from their current form. The alteration in identity had to bear a form of absolute value, when gender roles were not defined by mutually utilitarian value, but the self-worth. Hence, women had a specific significance in this transformation, as in almost all societies they continually had marginalized roles. Marx also argued that through labor the individual changed. This implied that the inferior roles in the labor market that were assumed by women could change, thus, also impacting their identity. On one hand women and children with their cheap labor contributed to the productivity gains of British industrialists, minimizing costs and maximizing profits, thus, in a way, forcing these industries to look for more markets outside their country, on the other hand, Marx acknowledged how the entry into the labor market gave a bargaining power in the household politics, diminishing the role of the husbands. Besides, he also stated how the long working hours had masculinized women, but that was the way to bringing them to the same level with men.

Mariam, now could see how the stories reverberated with the industrial development model in the US, as an off-spring of a mother, it had quite similar trends. She now could see, how the increased bargaining power with employment transformed the identity of women in the US. By 1940s and 50s, female labor supply in her country was more elastic driving more women into the labor market and making it more acceptable after the marriage. With cheap female labor supply and good export prospects when trying to rebuild Europe after the World War II explained this shift to Mariam. However, married women made their labor related decisions complementary to that of their husbands. Only in the 60s young women started carefully planning for their future work lives unlike the other generations that saw it as a compliment to their husband’s work. These revised expectations brought to the extension of college life and graduate studies among them.

This was another moment, when the identity shifted. Women started marrying later, meanwhile continuing their college education. Unlike their peers before that, they would in a way “make a name” before marriage and opt to retain their surname after it. It is in this period, when surveyed, women displayed more interest in coworker recognition and career success. Overall,

women exhibited more similarity in their preferences with male counterparts entering college. By 1980s, both men and women gave equal emphasis to recognition and family.

To Mariam this was in a way a 'silent revolution'. Indeed, it was. Women started choosing college programs that were more competitive in the labor market, invested more in their education and took it more seriously than their female predecessors of early 50s and 60s. These alterations brought about changes in their household centered identities, intertwining it with their career choices. With a delay in marriage and child bearing women had significantly increased their participation in the labor market, reaching a level of 77 percent unlike the 40 percent in 1965.

Ani was now totally lost. She could not get why then as a kid, she was making gift cards to celebrate the Motherhood? Where did March 8 go? Where these strong ladies that Marquez saw on his visit to the Soviet Union vanish? Why there was no silent or any other revolution there for her mother and others like her to transform the dynamics Mariam was talking about? Why she would still get the comments that would urge her to find a husband and not waste her time with the education she had chosen? So expensive, why would a girl need that? And Marx was such a big name in the countries of the Soviet Block, why this framework did not help them?

Emmy, smirked, saying that Ani was now paying for the stupid choices his revolutionary grandfather took. They should have emigrated to Britain as her grandfather Dikran was suggesting, even though the two were bitterly at odds with each other. Christine, though, suggested that not everything was so great in terms of equality in Britain anyway, but nothing to be compared with the path Russia took and others in the Caucasus were forced to take after the Crimean War.

Capitalism and state making determined the formation of the working class in Europe, breaking the vertical solidarity of former times. Unlike the enlightened government of Britain of the time with self-organization and conflict resolution left to the local and regional levels, much of the European Powers had a tighter grip on the process of industrialization, changing mode of response to it in terms of trying to resolve conflicts. The state structures and types of solidarity and organization were key factors. The rates of proletarianization increased when conflicts approached national scale, bringing the society to class division. In extreme cases of authoritarian rule, most importantly under fascist and communist state structure deprived or ideologically high jacked the autonomous formation of organizations at national level.

Russia, was a case in itself. Being late with the industrialization, made the Tsarist Government of 1890s to keep an extremely tight grip on the process of capital formation in order to avoid social instability in the country. This was an Empire that was eyeing a big piece of the Ottoman Empire for itself and had already annexed the Caucasus as a strategically important location. It is interesting that by the beginning of the 20th century most of the labor in Russia was to be found in the countryside, but the strikes and political activity interestingly occurred in urban centers and mostly in Saint Petersburg. The self-organization of the working class mostly took illegal or tacitly government-sponsored form. This was a totally different case and the Red Revolution actually deprived the working class of an autonomous decision-making in terms of organization. It all became a propaganda!

Ah, the Propaganda! Ani, knew from her childhood days that it was something bad, so now she could see why. Only the state could decide what should be allowed, what should be filtered

out. Who would be a model women, who should be shot for being a ‘bourgeois relic’! It is not surprising that nobody speaks of Zapel Yesayan as a feminist. Even after the death of Stalin. During the *Great Purge* she was accused of “nationalism”, arrested, then totally forgotten. Now it is not surprising that she was also persecuted by the Young Turk Government. And did Ani know that Shushanik Kurghinyan, a prominent Soviet Armenian literary figure, was a feminist herself! Ugh! Ani could not contain her feelings. She despised this poet of Bolsheviks. Christine said that she knew how it felt. She herself, had the same outlook when in the Soviet Union, but retrospectively she had revisited the poet’s life and work. A feminist put on hold! No one knew her like that. Even worse. Independent Armenia had fully erased her from the books and minds of the people.

Mariam now could not get the idea of Independence not bringing the equality so longed for and deserved. Turning to Ani, she expected some sort of an explanation, she was the only one to have come from the Dream Land of their fathers. Now the state building was accomplished, the sufferings and losses must have borne fruits. No answer. Christine asked Ani, what was the economy like and how well the self-organization was occurring? Was the state inhibitive and centralized or it could be compared with the one of the enlightened epoch? Most of country’s population was involved in the low productive agricultural sector. The growth of the economy was dependent on the construction and remittances. Christine, then theorized that some kind of a working class formation was not possible with most of them being employed in volatile and seasonal cottage-style agriculture with highly elastic prices of products could not have been inductive to feminist discourse. With the privatization of the land, big landowners were introducing industrial machinery into the sector, but that was driving away the workforce into construction and mining. To Christine it resonated well with the initial stages of industrialization in Europe. So now apparently with the deterioration of the village commons and a boost of a more male dominated sectors of construction and emerging mining, women did not have any options, but to sell their labor to these landlords at a lower price and have lesser bargaining power in their households. Ani’s briefing on the political situation and self-organization did not add any optimism to the rest. A grim picture for any feminist identification. No wonder nobody cared about the poetry of Kurghinyan.

Emmy, Mariam and Ani were now desperate, the history could repeat itself after hundred years of isolation. Ani turned the TV off, trying hard to come out of the time lapse she was in. It was Yerevan, her apartment and 2015, she reminded herself. That feeling of a ‘butterfly in an armor’ still tormented her. Now with a renewed force. She went to the bookshelf and picked the Soviet printed Shushanik Kurghinyan. A random passage stroke her, it was not the poet she knew without knowing her:

*I want to eat comfortably—as you do,
from that same fair bread—for which
I gave my share of holy work;
in the struggle for existence—humble and meek,
without feeling shame—let me
shed sweat and tears for a blessed earning,
let scarlet blood flow from my worker’s hands
and let my back tire in pain!*

She devoured all the pieces. Somehow an urgent need to call Christine bogged her. Or well, in a couple of days, she was going to indulge in late and extended night talks with all of her cousins. Paris during Christmas with their family reunions was already a custom, but this time around, some of their talks were going to have a purpose with action. She meditated on how their self-identification could be done. This world is not linear anymore. Things can go different ways. The Internet has added a dimension that was not there hundred years ago. Maybe a feminist insurgency could solve it. A burning idea that she wanted to share with the rest of them. Maybe Emmy would get on board with her heart as well as her large pocket? This was not a Soviet Armenia anymore. It was their own country, it belonged to all sisters equally. Ani was thinking of using the situation on the ground to their advantage. If women were in agriculture, oh, and luckily close to nature, that is where they could go with their frameworks, ideas and money. They could help them to organize their female-operated nature friendly production with a pledge to fund back the other newcomers. It could work! She would give some of her time and finances to the '*sweat and tears for a blessed earning*'. "*Shoes of Cinderella*" would be a perfect name of the charity venture. Money, self-organization and broken stereotypes would help the butterflies to come out of armor and 'princesses' have a chance for a remake. What a plan! She could not wait for the Christmas to come!

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LESSONS OF HISTORY: PUBLIC ACTIVISM OF ARMENIAN WOMEN IN 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

EMERGENCE OF WOMAN'S QUESTION IN ARMENIAN SOCIETY: 19TH TO AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

19th century was marked by the phenomenon of women public activism, and the emergence and development of women's social organizations. Women entered the public sphere in a triumphal procession, and the impact they left on the Armenian culture is undeniable. In 19th and early 20th centuries Armenian women established dozens of schools in the capital cities and provinces, supported many other schools, trained teachers, founded libraries, put the foundation of preschool education, provided shelter and care to hundreds of orphans, supported the destitute children, provided help to the hungry, the sick and the poor, assisted the refugees and soldiers, created jobs for poor women, laid the foundation of women's periodical publication and contributed to the development of children's journals.

A number of factors triggered these events. The national identity and need for consolidation, the national liberation movement, the economic development, the growing cultural relations between the two parts of Armenia, the spread of European culture and ideas, the development of means of communication and humanitarian traditions all played an essential role for these events. However, two of the most important and crucial factors were the national mentality and the public demand informed by national ideology.

Scholars, including historians, archeologists, specialists of folklore, ethnographers, legal experts, etc., have arrived at the conclusion that from ancient to medieval times, women enjoyed high status in the Armenian society and the principle of gender solidarity was accepted among Armenians.¹¹

The Armenian women took part in significant public events, celebrations, festivities and funeral ceremonies. They organized banquets and receptions in their castles and sat at the heads of the tables as hostesses. They were honored with the same titles as their husbands. The Armenian women were depicted with their husbands in high relieves at temples and in manuscript illustrations. They concluded transactions, made donations, issued tax exemptions, became members of monastic orders, purchased manuscripts and donated them to churches, ordered new manuscripts and engaged in upbringing and education of children. The Armenian

¹¹ See, V. Hatsuni, *The Armenian Woman in History* [Հայ ու հին սարուն թղ սն սղղ], (Venice: St. Lazar, 1936), p. 471; S. G. Barghudarian, "The Armenian Woman in Middle Ages" ([<<Հայ կնոջ իրական և ինքնազգի իրավունքները>>], *Patma-banasirakan Handes* 2 (1966), A. Nikoghossian, "Gender Discourse of History: A Special Course (Yerevan, 2003); S. Tumanyan, "Issues of Men's and Women's Equality in Legends 'David of Sasoun' Epic." *Gender Studies* 3 (Yerevan, 2001), p. 79-86; A. Sahakyan, "Women in Mythological System of Thinking." *Gender Studies* 3 (Yerevan, 2001) pp. 86 – 117; G. Grigoryan, "Issues of Gender Culture in History of Armenian Legal-Political Thought." *Gender Studies* 6 (Yerevan, 2001), pp. 52-55, etc.

women provided humanitarian aid and shelter to the needy and treated the sick. They especially beamed with their patronage to the foundation and construction of churches, hotels, hospitals, libraries, bridges, water channels, fortresses and towers, as well as in writing, arts and crafts. In the event the throne was vacant they ruled the country, handled foreign relations through participating and concluding treaties with other countries, diplomatic missions, surrendering hostages, etc.

However, in the early 19th century, the Armenian woman was isolated from the public life and was shut away in the houses. Several decades later she found herself at the center of social and political life and was actively engaged in public and educational activism. This fact allows for the conclusion that the isolation of Armenian woman during the preceding several centuries had not affected the Armenian mentality, and the harmony in gender relations, women's freedom and high social status that were common to the Armenian society, reached 19th century through intergenerational transmission.

WOMAN'S QUESTION AS COMPONENT OF NATIONAL AGENDA

Armenian women's movement of the 19th century has a number of peculiarities. Firstly, notable is that the movement was brought to life not by women, but rather, men. At the initial phase and almost up to the end of the century, men raised the Woman's Question and consistently advanced it. Secondly, as much as the movement was inspired by women's movements and ideology in the West, the feminist ideology did not find grounds in the Armenian society because Armenian women's movement did not emerge as women's struggle for political and civil rights. Rather, it was women's participation in the national agenda, for common national goals, and as such, it was a prolific participation. Women's right to education, paid labor, a worthy place in social life and participation in public were not gained in a fierce struggle. It was men, with few exceptions, that pushed women into the public sphere. This was not a manifestation of men's chivalry or magnanimity, but, more precisely, their invitation to women to share responsibility. The responsibilities reserved for women were to lead to the recognition of women's rights.

It should be recalled that Armenia did not have statehood at the time under discussion, and the Armenian nation had a crucially important goal of identity preservation and liberation. Under the circumstances, the women's movement apparently could not manifest itself in the political arena but was to anchor in the spiritual and moral values. The freedom and rights were to emerge with the national liberation and establishment of an independent state. Women's rights were perceived in the general context of independence and rights of the whole nation.

The Woman's Question emerged in the Armenian society concurrently with the conception and development of the national agenda. The time and problems that the nation faced required national consolidation, and the consolidation in turn required national self-awareness and self-consciousness. These goals were impossible to achieve due to widespread illiteracy. This gave rise to the idea of universal enlightenment. Regardless of their political affiliation, whether conservatives, liberals, democrats or revolutionaries, the 19th century Armenian thinkers and activists were ardent advocates of education. Education was dictated by longing for consolidation, and education became the focal point for solidarity among all groups.

The task of education presupposed the adoption of *ashkharabar* (vernacular Armenian), and establishment of a national school and education. This was the dictate of the time, and this was the strategy that the reformers adopted. Moreover, the national agenda was not limited to liberation only. Liberation was to be a starting point for development and the need for education was further emphasized in this picture.

The second important issue was the Woman's Question, particularly the question of their education and public activism. This approach rested pragmatically on the logic that women were to ensure the upbringing of their nationals. Therefore, the establishment of schools for girls was of priority for national upbringing and education. This required strenuous advocacy efforts as the ingrained prejudices and stereotypes were to be broken down for everyone to be convinced of the urgency of women's rights for education. This was not an easy task. It is practically impossible to find any 19th century periodical or public figure that did not address this issue.

Time proved the beliefs of the national public figures to be realistic. The growing advocacy and discursive quest resulted in practical undertakings. Very few girls' schools existed prior to 1860-70s, among them the Hripsimiats School in Yerevan (1850), Hripsimiats School in Smyrna (1840) and Nuneh School in Tiflis. However, starting 1970s, women's education started to grow which was marked not only by quantity of schools, but also by the fact that many of the existing schools were upgraded to higher levels, thus turning into incomplete secondary or secondary schools.

Why women's education? What role and responsibility and what scope of action did that right entail? Were women to be education merely to be good mothers and housewives or were they to also enter the public sphere and contribute to the national progress? These inescapable questions brought about divergences in opinions. The conservatives continued to limit women's sphere to the domain of family. The liberals and democrats, on the other hand, could not envision a future without women in the public sphere. Mikael Nalbandian wrote, "Armenian women! Gone are the times when men looked down upon women as slaves... In this humanistic age, the enlightened world regards women as human beings."¹² Thus, in their studies Nalbandian and thinkers like him did not confine themselves to women's functions in the family and matters of education. They dwelt on the questions of women's equal legal status, of their being full-fledged members of the society and effective participants in the struggle for liberation. This issue required more extensive and enthusiastic efforts which gradually drew these thinkers into a never-ending dispute and resulted in the formation of a distinctive segment in the Armenian journalistic writing on social and political issues. There is no doubt that at no time in the history of Armenia were so much efforts and energy dedicated to the discussion of women's rights and opportunities, to the scrutiny of women's problems and to the search of ways for their solution as it was the case in the mid-19th and early 20th centuries.

The Armenian literati carefully studied the situation and inner life of women of different social groups and locations. Women became an object of research for cultural anthropologists, historians, economists, psychologists, as well as reporters in provinces. In the periodical press of the time information and stories of various characters related to women's lives became an

¹² Mikael Nalbandian, *Complete Works. Volume 1.* (Yerevan, 1945), p. 457.

indispensable part of the chronicles. The columns on social and political issues covered profound and extensive discussions of issues related to women. Raffi's study entitled "The Armenian Woman" and published in *Mshak* newspaper (volumes 34-39 and 42-43, 1879)¹³ undoubtedly stands out among other publications of this character for its comprehensiveness, depth, sharpness, detailed observations and insightful generalizations.

Raffi studied women of all social classes in villages, provincial towns and Tiflis, and gave descriptions of their lifestyles, customs, psychology and intellectual development. With unmatched insightfulness he identified the national/traditional and socio-economic factors that accounted for a grave situation of women. He arrived at a conclusion that women's basic education and development informed with national values was the solution.

The issue of national values was of worry to other literati as well. Earlier, Stephan Voskan voiced his concern in his newspaper *Arevmutk* (*The West*) writing that European influences could not be absorbed without basic education about them, and their external splendor should not be adopted without awareness of its significance.¹⁴

Thus, the task of the Armenian literati was to let in those influences that were necessary for the Armenian society, and that could merge with the national traditions. In other words, there was an imperative to create one's own philosophy. This was why the public figures and literati of the time paid close attention to European women's movement and its ideology. Literature in foreign languages was studied, assessed, discussed and translated with an undivided attention and at an amazing speed. This material was later not only published in the periodical press, but also printed as separate volumes. Almost no information on European women's progress was left out from the chronicles of Armenian periodical press. This information was skillfully used as a tool for building up and sustaining advocacy.

From this perspective noteworthy is the article by Avetik Araskhanian, editor of *Murj* (*Hammer*) newspaper, entitled "Woman in Society" which due to its fairly accurate emphasis and cognate arguments has not lost its validity even today.¹⁵

Avetik Araskhanian was one of the rare thinkers that transferred the issue of women's emancipation, or so-called Woman's Question, to the human rights plane. He regarded Woman's Question as an individual's right to development rather than a gender issue. Secondly, he considered women's advancement as a vital precondition for the progress of the nation, state, public and humanity at large. This was a very significant stance. In Araskhanian's view, it boiled down to the country's development, not to the availability of women's potential or the effectiveness of their struggle. If the country and society had future, were forward-oriented and pursued the goal of progress, then women's potential would by default come to the forefront and their rights would be recognized. The author noted that it was not incidental that in societies where women were deprived of mobility and rights, the nation and state at large were static too. The Armenian society, as shown above, proves this conclusion true. The society set an objective of elevation and progress, and those in pursuit of these objectives raised the issue of women's advancement.

¹³ Raffi, "The Armenian Woman." *Collection of Works. V. 11* (Yerevan: 1990), pp. 99-199:

¹⁴ "Arevmutk," (1859), p. 141.

¹⁵ «Murj», (1891):2, pp. 677-87.



Grigor Artsruni and Srбуhi Dussap, both of who have left a deep and unique trace in the discussion of Woman’s Question, are the two figures that allow for getting a holistic picture of the Armenian society in the 19th century.

Grigor Artsruni and his newspaper *Mshak* remain unsurpassed in the history of Armenian periodical press as far as Woman’s Question is concerned by pioneering the field, by quantity, content, depth and comprehensiveness of the material published, and by consistency with which the cause was advanced.

Grigor Artsruni took an interest in women’s issues at an early stage in his literary career when his first articles started to appear on the pages of *Meghu (Bee)* and *Haykakan Ashkhar (Armenian World)* during his university years in St. Petersburg. In his first article Artsruni criticized the educational system of the time, namely, the school and the family. By examining the contemporary family with all its vulnerable features, he stressed that women were deprived of rights. The very first demand that he naturally put forth was women’s right to education.¹⁶ His second article was dedicated to advocacy of women’s education. He analyzed the inadequate level of women’s education, examined girls’ upbringing and women’s situation in the family in detail. He boldly published his convictions on the matter and stood by his beliefs over years, namely, that a society could not develop and prosper as long as women remained uneducated or received foreign education.¹⁷

According to Artsruni, justice and equality could prevail only in a civilized society because the more enlightened the society was, the more it strived for justice and equal rights for all. The fate of enlightenment depended on women’s right for education. This belief was one of the main pillars of his paper *Mshak*.

Mshak periodically published leading articles on the Woman’s Question, essays, reports on women’s situation in provinces, news, enlightening information on women’s movements in the

¹⁶ “Significance of National Sciences for Education.” *Meghu* (1865): 13-14.

¹⁷ “Two Words on Girls’ Education.” *Meghu* (1865): 23.

West, reprints from Russian and European press, book reviews, translation of accounts of foreign scholars and travelers on Armenian women, etc. Thanks to Grigor Artsruni, *Mshak* became the rallying point for literati that took interest in the Woman's Question. Serious and large-scale studies were conducted. Most notably, articles written by women started to appear on the pages of *Mshak*. Scanning through the pages of the paper, one can form an idea about the progress made by the Armenian women in that particular period.

Women's education, women and politics, women's emancipation, women's rights, women's public activities, women's impact on enlightenment, women's paid employment were among the topics regularly published on the pages of *Mshak*. Both Artsruni and the reporters of *Mshak* considered education as the first precondition for women's emancipation and continuously put forth arguments for women's basic education, acquisition of professional skills, and need for university education abroad. The authors considered earning independently, financial independence and foundation of organizations and associations as the second precondition for women's progress.

"Women are a tremendous power in a society," Artsruni stated. "History shows that if a woman is opposed to an idea, that idea is a lost case. If women are indifferent to a cause, an idea, a phenomenon, that cause, that idea, and that phenomenon will remain frozen. And, on the contrary, when women declare themselves as supporter and advocates of an idea, it can be stated undoubtedly that that idea will by all means will overcome all obstacles on its way..." This statement was followed by an address to Armenian women. "Armenian women, we are appealing to you, and reiterating that we expect you to lead the cause of moral and intellectual renewal of the Armenian nation... Without you we are nothing."¹⁸

Clear logic tempered with emotions and passion which was typical of Artsruni's writings in general, was particularly expressive in publications devoted to the Woman's Question. These statements were very contagious. And indeed they were affecting people. The public activism of Armenian women in Tiflis was an ample proof for that. Artsruni did not just urge, stimulate and encourage. He recorded with satisfaction Armenian women's success and progress.

The situation was different in the case of Western Armenians. Under the Turkish rule, liberal thoughts in general and women's emancipation in particular had no grounds. In addition, opposition of conservatives was much stronger. Therefore, raising the issue of women's emancipation by women themselves took tremendous courage. Srбуhi Dussap was to take the lead in this story of courage. In the initial phase, similar to other thinkers, she reviewed women's issues in the context of national progress limiting her arguments to the adoption of vernacular language and women's education. However, later on women's right to paid labor became the pillar of her public discussions and literary works. Dussap believed that women's independence and all other rights would come with women's right to paid employment.

She urged women to shatter prejudices, and start to work, first of all, to save their families from poverty and destruction, and secondly, to live a dignified and independent life, fully using their own moral and intellectual capacity.¹⁹

Thus, the preparatory stage outlined by Raffi had become a reality. Efforts to organize women's education had yielded results. A generation of educated women had emerged that

¹⁸ Grigor Artsruni, "Women are with us." *Mshak* (1877):29

¹⁹ "A Few Words on Unemployment of Women." *Arevelian Mamul* (Smyrna, 1881), pp. 345-50.

was taking a lead in the search for ways to solve women's issues, and in the process, through their own actions confirming the validity of ideas for women's space and role in society.

WOMEN'S PUBLIC ACTIVISM IN WESTERN ARMENIAN SOCIETY

In 19th century Constantinople was the largest cultural center for Western Armenians. The greater part of writers, publicists, publishers, educators and artists lived and worked here. This is where the Armenian women's public activism emerged and matured.

In 1860s, dozens of organizations were founded in various neighborhoods of Constantinople. This can be described as an absolute ignition or sudden rise of women's public activism. Although the first women's organization in Constantinople was founded in 1847, women's collective activism emerged and developed in 1860s. Organizations founded in this period were predominantly of educational and cultural character and aimed at supporting women's schools in various neighborhoods of the capital city. These were small organizations with a limited scope of operation and existed as an auxiliary to a larger organization. For the most part they were short-lived. However, these very organizations consolidated the existing forces and shaped an environment of healthy competition that brought about self-improvement and development, accumulation of experience and a higher starting point for future endeavors. These were the initiatives that paved the way for nationwide activities in their scope and goals. These organizations pursued either educational and cultural or charitable goals. In fact, it is not always easy to see a clear divide between the two types of activities.

By late 1870s, the time was ripe for enthusiastic women in Constantinople to engage in national wide undertakings. A generation had emerged that felt prepared, and especially obliged to carry out the mission of national revival in all Armenian provinces. The idea of educating all Western Armenians had circulated for some time already among the educated young men and



women. This was the demand of society because a generation of enthusiastic and educated young women had emerged which did not want and could not refrain from the implementation of nationally important issues.

In 1879 almost simultaneously two organizations were founded, Azganver Hayouhats Enkeroutioun (Armenian Patriotic Women's Society) and Dprotsaser Tiknants Enkeroutioun (School-Loving Ladies' Society), April 11, and May 1 respectively, which were to become the largest and longest-lived female organizations among the Western Armenians and which were to have a tremendous impact on the Armenian history of late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Patriotic Women's Society was founded in Uskudar, Constantinople, by 16-year-old Zabel Khanjian (later Zabel Asatur, Sybil) and her eight classmates, with the support of her mother and aunt on the father's side. 150 women and girls participated in the second meeting of the Society.

The firstling of the Patriotic Women's Society was a middle school for girls that opened with the funding from the United Society on December 1, 1880, in the small town of Gassapa in Kghie Province. At the time of opening the school had 93 female students. The school gave its first two graduates in 1884. In 1885, the Society opened its fifth school in the small town of Berrie in Charsanchag Province. The middle schools provided three or four years of instruction in subjects such as Armenian (reading and writing), religion, history, geography, home economics, arithmetic, ethics, needlework, drawing, physical training and singing. The students that excelled in their studies were awarded silver crosses, and the graduates were hired by the local schools, or schools of the Society.

Fr. Yeprem Poghossian, referring to *Zhanamak* newspaper (*Time*, #1796, 1914), provides evidence that during the first phase of its operation, 1879-1894, the Society founded ten schools in the provinces. In the second phase falling between 1908-1914, 39 schools were opened. M. Adanalyan, citing the study entitled "Temoignages Inedits Sur les Atrocites Turques Commises en Arménie" (Paris, 1920), illustrates that in 1908 the Society had 50 schools with 3,000 students. In 1912, the teacher-training school in Karin gave its first graduates, 21 in number. Eight of them the same year were hired by the schools of the Society. This productive operation of the Society, however, was interrupted in 1915.

The School-Loving Ladies' Society that was to become the second largest and long-lived women's organization among the Western Armenians, was founded in another district of Constantinople, Mijagyough (Ortakoy). The founders of the Society were again graduates of a girl's middle school, the Hripsimiats Girls' School in Ortakoy, among them Nourik Simonian, Tagouhi Baltazarian and Armaveni Minassian (nee Sahakian). The goal of the Society was to promote education of girls and train teachers for the provinces. To that end, a task was set to open private schools where Armenian girls could get tuition-free education. As we can see, founded at the same time with the Armenian Patriotic Women's Society, the School-Loving Ladies' Society did not replicate the latter's functions, but rather, came to complement it. If the former strived to open schools in the provinces, the latter aimed at securing a smooth and effective operation for those schools by staffing them with qualified teachers. This fact accounts for the co-existence and longevity of the two large Societies.

At the initial years the Society's reputation was greatly boosted by the active involvement of venerable Nazleh Vahan, and later of her daughter Srбуhi Dussap who held the position of a

Chairperson of the General Meeting for several years and played a particularly important role in raising funds for the Society's activities.

By 1892, the number of students at the Society had reached 110 of whom 60 studied tuition free. Twelve of the 60 students were in the boarding school and all their costs were covered by the Society. The Society had trained 22 female teachers that taught at schools in Constantinople, Kghie, Balu, Adana, Hachen, Ruschak, Mush, Van, Filipeh, Varna, Brussia, Karin, Akn, Yerznka and elsewhere.

During the calamitous massacres by Sultan Abdulhamid in 1895-1896, the School-Loving Armenian Ladies' Society terminated its operation along with other organizations. The Society resumed operation in 1908, after 13 years of interruption. Those were extremely hard years. The number of students went up dramatically owing to the tragic events. The middle school had to provide shelter to orphans that had barely escaped the massacres and harems, and "orphans that had miraculously survived on their sisters' corpses, had been thrown into the desert Der Zor and into wells..." After the war, the Care-Giving Council of Constantinople (*Khnamatarakan handznazhoghov*) placed 350 orphans under the care of the Society some of whom had even forgotten their mother tongue.

On March 30, 1919, the Society solemnly launched its orphanage where 250 orphans were sheltered. In 1923, they transferred the orphans to Salonika, Greece, and later to Marseille, France. In 1927, the Society permanently moved to Le Raincy, Paris. The middle school changed its status to a lycee in 1948.

In 1880s many small-sized organizations were founded along with the Armenian Patriotic Women's Society and School-Loving Ladies' Society. The main focus of their operation was similarly education and charity. In 1890s, during the hard years of Abdulhamid's massacres, the development of women's organizations was interrupted for obvious reasons, and revived after the restoration of Constitution.

It should be noted that in early 20th century, in parallel to the course of traditional charity and educational/cultural concerns, new trends, new goals and objectives were emerging. For example, the aim of the Union of Armenian Alumnae (*Hay Sanouhineri Mioutioun*) founded in 1918, was to establish contact with the American and the British civic groups and "familiarize them with the [Armenian] nation with honor and all sides of it." It is also notable that attempts were made by the youth organizations to create mixed-gender organizations. The Armenian women were no longer pleased with occasional membership to male organizations and sought to co-establish unions with them, and thus emphasize their equal status in the organization's name. A youth organization founded in 1919, for example, adopted the name Young Women's and Men's Union (*Aghjkats yev yeritasardats mioutioun*) to carry out orphan-relief activities.

Established in 1919, the Armenian Women's Association or Armenian Women's League (*Hay kanants enkeraktsioutioun* or *Hay kanants Liga*) was perhaps the largest and most productive among organizations founded in this period. It aimed at contributing to Armenian women's moral, intellectual, material and physical development, establish collaboration among all Armenian women and to be the mouthpiece of Armenian women's social and political aspirations, defend their rights, use the potential of Armenian women for the Armenian Cause, and contribute to the restoration of the Motherland.



In the postwar years, women were involved not only in orphan-care, but also founded workshops to help Armenian women earn their living and support the orphaned girls to get on their feet. Notable in this respect is the Girls' Workshop of Pera (Berayi Hay Aghjkats Arhestanots, Chair Marie Stambolian and Inspector Satenik Beylikchian) where hundreds of orphans learned crafts and were able to earn their living. Significant was also the Meghu (Bee) workshop established in 1920.

The new tendencies that emerged in the second decade of 20th century could have brought about interesting developments had the public life evolved in a natural way. However, the course of history had been irreversibly changed. Constantinople stopped being the cultural center for Western Armenians and the center of Western Armenian women's social activities moved to the Diaspora.

The public activism of Armenian women in Constantinople was massive enough to be defined as women's movement. Women's public activism was real. It had grown into a component of the Armenian culture, and it could not confine itself to the capital city only. The enthusiasm displayed in Constantinople triggered a feeling of competition and spread onto Armenian-populated provinces and towns. Organizations were mushrooming in the locations where Armenian schools existed and Armenian periodical press was published, pursuing the same objectives as their counterparts in Constantinople. These organizations were established either for educational purposes to benefit the local girls' school, or for charity purposes to care for the local poor. This was the logic of the time. There seemed to be an unwritten agreement between the individual and the society, according to which the society was obliged to take care of the education of an individual, and the individual had to pay back through the only means possible, that is contribution to the education of the next generation. This was how education was reproduced and continuity ensured.

Overall, 100 organizations were founded and operated between 19th and early 20th centuries among the Western Armenians.

WOMEN'S PUBLIC ACTIVISM AMONG EASTERN ARMENIANS

Among Eastern Armenians, the first girls' school with solid foundation was the Mariamian Girl's School established in 1864 in the town of Shushi. The first women's organizations also appeared in Shushi. These facts are explained by the presence of Perj Proshian in Shushi who worked there during these years. He inspired Mariam Hakhoumian, the wife of wealthy local Armenian Hambartsoum Hakhoumian, to establish a women's organization for the purpose of opening a girls' school.

Nonetheless, among Eastern Armenians Tiflis, the largest Armenian-populated cultural centers in the South Caucasus, was the host of main public activities of women. Moreover, in quantitative terms the Western Eastern experience greatly differs from Eastern Armenian experience. In the Western Armenian case, dozens of small organizations were founded whose experience later was used to establish one or two large organizations. In case of Eastern Armenians, a total of seven or eight organizations operated, usually with great impact. These organizations, in fact, based their experience on the large mix-gender organization of the time, and were greatly inspired by the endeavors and success of Western Armenian women's organizations, and learned from their experience.

Year 1880 should be regarded as the beginning of formation of women's public organizations among Eastern Armenians. The year marked the foundation of the Froebel Society which was to initiate and spread pre-school education among Eastern Armenians, and Armenian Women's Charitable Society of Tiflis (*Tiflisi hayouhyats baregortsakan enkeroutioun*).

The Armenian Women's Charitable Society of Tiflis was the largest and longest-lived organization among Eastern Armenians. According to the Charter of the Society, which after many rounds of editing was finally approved in 1881 by Duke Loris-Meklikov, Acting Viceroy and General, the organization's goal was to promote women's education (a) by opening and sustaining female private schools and (b) by supporting parochial schools for females with its own funds, as well as those who wanted to be trained as teachers for these schools. The average annual constituency of the Society was 140-150 members. Apart from Tiflis, the Society had members in Baku, Moscow, Yerevan, Vladikavkaz, Tabriz, Batumi, Kars and many other places. In addition to membership fees, donations and proceeds from various events, revenues from the Society's school also added to the Society's capital.

On December 11, 1883, the Society initiated the opening of St. Nshan parochial school for girls in a private home near the St. Nshan Church. The school opened with 22 female students and eight teachers. The operation of the school was suspended in spring of 1885, along with other Armenian schools. The school reopened in October 1886 in a one-and-a-half storied building with comfortable and bright classrooms which was built with the funds of the Society and parishioners, as well as donations received. The St. Nshan Girl's parochial school was a four-year elementary school with three sections. Forty to sixty students studied there per year. On May 29, 1888, the school held the first graduate ceremony for its eleven female graduates.

In 1888 the Armenian Women's Charitable Society of Tiflis opened a crafts school.

The Society financially supported the First Conference of Armenian Teachers, Mariamian Girls' School in Havlabar, and Mariamian Schools in Tsghnet village (Tiflis Province), Kars, and Norashen, as well as parochial schools in Tskhinvali (Gori Province) and Chekhar (Koutaisi Province) villages.

The new state regulations of 1899 banned public organizations from engaging in educational activities, and the operation of the Charitable Society was terminated. However, it is evident from the Society's reports of 1900s that the former Sewing School was presented under the name of a workshop. In these workshops intended to teach dress-making, stocking-making and hat-making, female students took a four-year educational program to acquire basic knowledge in addition to mastering one of the crafts.

In 1906 two other women's organizations were established in Tiflis. The first one, Tiflis (the South Caucasus) Armenian Women's Society for Orphan Care (*Tiflisi hayouhats vorbakhnam enkeroutioun*), had education and care of orphaned and semi-orphaned children as its goal. The second organization, Meghu Society (Bee) had a unique role and place in the history of women's public activism in late and 19th and early 20th centuries in that it dedicated itself to solving women's unemployment issues. All women's organizations that had been established earlier focused primarily on two issues, education and poor relief. Meghu set it as its goal not to merely eliminate the consequences of poverty like its predecessors, but to eradicate it by fighting women's unemployment. According to the Society's leaders, the real charity was eradication of poverty. "Work, not mercy" motto was the cornerstone of the company.

The charter of the Society was approved on August 24, 1906. The same year, in the month of November, the Society opened Meghu House of Work.

The Committee of Armenian Women of Tiflis (*Tiflisi hay kanants komite*) was founded in response to an emergency situation. It was hastily established in 1914 with the outbreak of World War I when wartime calamities befell the Armenian nation. The war gave rise to a new huge wave of refugees. Many families found themselves in a grave economic situation as their breadwinners joined voluntary units. In addition, the volunteers and the wounded needed care. The situation required strenuous efforts and consolidation, as well as flexible and prompt action. The Armenian women demonstrated that they were experienced enough to deal with the situation.

Other small organizations or groups with narrower focus of activities also operated in Tiflis. Among them were the Mutual Aid Society of Female Teachers and Instructors of Tiflis (*Tiflisi varzhouhineri yev usoutschouhineri pokhadardz ognoutian enkeroutioun*), a group organizing the soup kitchens in Sololak, Women's Printing House and School named Cheknagh (Marvelous), and a Children's World Club. However, only vague assumptions could be made about the nature, duration of operation and accomplishments of these groups and organizations as scanty information from the press is the only available source.

It should be noted that Armenian women's public activism was not limited to women's organizations only. Many women were involved in non-gendered social groups and many others became prominent as individuals through their independent initiatives. Among them were Srбуhi Yeritsian and Sophia Arghoutian who were also members of the Armenian Charitable Society of the Caucasus; Katarineh Yevangulian was also a member of the Publishing Society; Haykanush Martirosian was a member of Ethnographic Society, etc.. In this respect, Princess Mariam Toumanian was exceptional. Even today, one hundred years later, she arouses admiration for her enthusiasm and entrepreneurial spirit, free-thinking, broad-mindedness and other virtues.

Women's organizations were not established in other cities and towns of Eastern Armenia. Women were either involved in mixed-gender organizations or they acted without rounding an organization.

WOMEN'S PUBLIC ACTIVISM IN COMMUNITIES OF ARMENIAN DIASPORA

Women's public organizations were founded almost in all large communities of the Armenian Diaspora. In 1881, in Nor Nakhijevan the Armenian Women's Care-Giving Society (*Nor Nakhijevani hayouhats khnamatar enkeroutioun*) was founded. In Astrakhan, the Armenian Women's Care-Giving Society of Astrakhan (*Astrakhani hayouhats khnamatar enkeroutioun*) operated since 1890. The Armenian Women's Union of Batumi (*Batoumi hay kanants mioutioun*) was founded in Batumi in 1917, and the Armenian Women's Committee of Simferopole (*Simferopoli hay kanants komite*) was established in Crimea in 1915.

In 1890, Women's Charitable Society was founded in Tabriz which supported the Girls' School, took care of refugees, provided relief to the poor, opened a kindergarten, and allocated allowances to local schools. The Society also established a carpet-weaving factory to provide jobs for women. It opened six schools in the villages where library work was also given a start. It should be noted that most of its honorable members were men who provided tremendous support to increase the Society's budget.

Almost within the same timeframe, the Women's Charitable Society of Atropatene carried out almost a similar program (1895).

In 1901, heeding the calls of society, these two organizations merged into the Armenian Women's United Charitable Society of Tabriz (*Tavrizi hayouhats baregortsakan miatsial enkeroutioun*). Thanks to this union, the Society had 12 institutions, among them two kindergartens, two dress-making workshop and eight schools in the villages. A latter addition was a library/reading hall in Tabriz which marked the emergence of the concept of "women's library." Between 1906 and 1907, the Society had 14 institutions, among them 11 school in provinces (girls' schools, boys' schools and mixed schools), and a library/reading hall.

In New Julfa, Armenian Women's Charitable Society (*Hayouhats baregortsakan enkeroutioun*), founded in 1892, aimed at taking care of moral and material needs of socially vulnerable female students by providing them with clothes and stationary. Eventually the Society's scope of activities expanded beyond the school, and it contributed to the cultural and humanitarian activities throughout the entire community.

In 1905 Women's Charitable Society of Tehran was founded in Tehran (*Tehrani kanants baregortsakan enkeroutioun*), Iran, which established the local Armenian kindergarten in 1918. In 1910 Care-Giving Society of Young Women (*Oriordats khnamatar enkeroutioun*) was founded with the purpose of opening dress-making workshops and orphanages for Armenian children. In 1915, the Red Cross Union of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (*Dashnaksutyun*) was founded which was later renamed to Armenian Women's Charitable Union of New Julfa (*Nor Joughayi hay kanants gtoutian mioutioun*).

Armenian women's societies operated in Suchava, Bukovina (Armenian Ladies' Union), London, England (Armenian Women's Union), Paris, France (Armenian Ladies' Union of Paris), in various communities in USA, Egypt (Armenian Women's Union of Cairo), Aleppo, Syria (Mariam Society of Women), Rangoon, Burma (Ladies' Union). The activities of these organizations mainly aimed at preserving the Armenian identity and supporting immigrating

Armenians. Prominent were the activities of Armenian Ladies Union of Paris (Parisi hay tiknants mioutioun) which was founded in 1913 and aimed at protecting the orphans, allocating financial aid to students, supporting needy refugees, and providing medical aid to the poor sick. Four branches functioned within the Union each carrying out one of the four mission.

LESSONS FROM WOMEN PUBLIC ACTIVISTS OF 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

Thus, in 19th and early 20th centuries, the Armenian women entered the public sphere silently, without having to fight for a place in society and they operated in an extremely favorable environment, in gender harmony, and with the feeling of being in demand. They entered the public with the mission to bring enlightenment and to mitigate the social pains. They never pursued narrow gender interests. They limited their concerns for women's rights to theoretical discussions and always responded to national problems and needs.

They adhered to the principles of healthy competition and were able to collaborate not only amongst themselves, but also with other organizations. Moreover, they included men in their programs when needed. They founded viable organizations, developed detailed charters, clearly defined their rights and obligations, regulated both external and internal relations and adhered to the rules of letters. The organizations were founded by outstanding women but they did not take possession of them. The democratic principles of formation of governing bodies, especially the principle of rotation, and correct organization of elections gave each member the opportunity for promotion, and self-realization. The transparent operation and system of publicizing reports greatly boosted confidence toward these organizations.

Finally, the flexibility of women's organizations and their ability to react to a situation and work within the defined timeframe, were particularly appealing. Tangible results of their initiatives became the warrantee of success of their future undertakings and growing public confidence and support.



WOMEN IN POLITICS AND POLITICAL TEXTS IN ARMENIA

More women than men live in Armenia. Women make up 52 percent of the population in Armenia. At the same time, women's political participation is low. Women are underrepresented in the political sphere. According to international reports, Armenia is on 103rd place among 142 countries by the index of women's political participation.²⁰

In democratic processes, women's political participation is one of the important indicators which establishes that every person regardless of gender, has equal rights and opportunities to participate in the political and civic life. In addition, various statistical comparisons allow for the conclusion that women's active participation in public and political life contributes to sustainable development, peace and other important achievements. Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN Women, who fought for women's rights and opportunities throughout her career and as President of Chile, notes:

“Evidence shows that countries with greater gender equality have higher gross national product (GNP) per capita, and women's leadership in the corporate sector results in improved business performance. Countries with better representation of women in the parliaments tend to have more unbiased and fair laws, as well as social programs aimed at women, children and families.”

Women's political participation is important in peace-building processes especially for countries in conflict. However, women's voices are silenced and ignored particularly in these countries. As a democratic country Armenia has joined a number of international conventions and has adopted national legislation, formally, thus defining that it excludes gender discrimination in all spheres of public and political life. At the same time, statistical information on social and political life indicates women's limited or marginal participation. Thus, out of 131 members of the Armenian National Assembly only 14 are women (10.7%) even though to promote women's political participation, an amendment was made to the Armenian Electoral Code through introduction of a system of quotas which even before the elections of 2012 was established at 20 percent.

This norm implies that the number of representatives of each gender must not exceed the 80 percent of each integer group of five candidates (2-6, 2-11, 2-16 and subsequently till the end of the list) starting from the second number of the electoral list of a political party, of an alliance of political parties and of each of the parties included in an alliance for the elections to the National Assembly under the proportional electoral system (Electoral Code, Article 108). As it was conferred in the analysis of women's participation in parliamentary elections of 2012: “The consequence was that only four women or 1,7 percent of the total number of women enrolled in the electoral lists was presented in the first quintet parties' lists, and only 15 women or 6,4 percent was presented in the first tens. Compared to the elections of 2007 the number of

²⁰ “The Global Gender Gap Report (The World Economic Forum),” // <http://www.weforum.org/reports>

women presented in the electoral lists of political parties is reduced by four times in the first quintet and two times in the first tens.”²¹

Even though with this amendment women were formally included in the party lists, in real parliamentary work their number remained to be extremely few. On the other hand, only eight out of 137 candidates running under the majoritarian voting system were women. Only 2.6 percent of parliamentarians elected through majoritarian voting system are women, a figure that in the past fluctuated between 0 to 4.7 percent.²² As a result, among the Republican Party representatives only nine are women. There are two women among 37 representatives of the Prosperous Armenia Party, one woman in five members of the Heritage Party, one woman in seven representatives of Armenian National Congress, and all representatives of the Armenian Revolutionary Party Dashnaktsutun are male. One of the Vice-Speakers of the National Assembly, Hermine Naghdalyan, and the heads of the Prosperous Armenia Party and Orinats Yerkir (Country of Law) parliamentary factions are women.

The picture is not encouraging in the spheres of executive and local self-governance either. Thus, only three out of 18 ministers are women, the Minister of Culture, Minister of Justice and Minister of Diaspora Affairs. There are 12 female deputy ministers against 51 male deputy ministers. There are no female governors (*marzpet*) and mayors. Only 2.2 percent of women are heads of rural communities. Only 8.6 percent of community council members (*avagani*) are women in the whole territory of Armenia (534 of 6,164 community council representatives).

In addition, a significant number or a higher percentage of women in these parties is not a proof for active political involvement and high status within these parties and/or influencing the strengthening of internal democracy. Women are often marginalized in political parties and some parties employ hidden discrimination against women.²³ Among women of political status, the family and women's status within the family are considered to be more preferable than political offices and or intentions to hold offices. For example, in the words of a representative of a ruling party, "My family has always helped and supported me, my husband has never opposed my political career."²⁴ Moreover, in public interviews female political figures prioritize their images as women which is only then complemented by the character of a political figure.

These approaches, along with the indicators are an evidence to the imperfections between the value system, social norms and existing order.

Local and international studies and discussions regularly reflect on the issue of why women in Armenia continue to be underrepresented in political and public spheres. On a general note it

²¹ Women's Participation in Armenian Parliamentary Elections 2012: An Analytical Review (Yerevan: Ashoghik, 2012), p. 16.

²² The Political Elite in Post-Soviet Armenia: Characteristics and Routes of Formation (Yerevan: Edit Print 2014), p. 50.

²³ Women's Participation in Armenian Parliamentary Elections of 2012...

²⁴ The Political Elite in Post-Soviet Armenia..., p. 87.

is admitted that that the prevalence of conservative and patriarchal stereotypes in public perceptions is one of the main obstacles to women's active political participation.²⁵

The question then is who promotes the constant reproduction of stereotypes and social perceptions. Or whether the state policy, apart from producing documentation, is capable or has set a goal to change the linguistic mentality on women or gender equality in general.

To address these questions, one needs to refer to the statutory and program documents of those who set the political agenda, as well as the very content of speech of these decision-makers. The difference between what is written (official documents) and what is articulated (public speech) is where one can see the real policy trends toward women.

Emblematic for this are especially the discussions that started out in August 2013²⁶ around the interpretation of term "gender" in the Law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities of Men and Women. The discussions about the law in a way filled the void in public discourse in Armenia on issues related to women. With the formal occasion, these discussions forced all visible political and civic actors to voice their thoughts and attitudes about gender equality. It should be noted that these thoughts, especially in the case of politicians, were not reflective of the logic of documents adopted and discussed as part of their legislative duties, and on some occasions, even contradicted them. One of the co-authors of the law, Hovhannes Margaryan, stated during a public interview that despite all laws adopted to date, it would be hard to equalize women's rights to the rights of men: "The rights of a Master (*ter*) and the Obedient (*hnazand*)²⁷ cannot be equal. The Master should possess one set of rights, and the Obedient another. We cannot change the traditions ingrained in ourselves. I, being born in Gyumri, am one of those who strongly preserve these traditions. There are many European values that are unacceptable for me, as well as for my family, my wife and my daughter. Being one of the co-authors, I could not allow that an acceptable-for-me law was adopted."²⁸

These seemingly innocent mistakes in public speaking eventually do create public speech metanarratives, which are then imported by the political elite to shape public attitudes and perceptions.

The public perceptions of political figures on the hierarchical relation norms between women and men as articulated in the public discourse create "truths" about these very norms, thus rendering any legislative reform into a formality.

These elite "truths" are especially freely traded in public life on days celebrating women. There are two holidays dedicated to women in the state calendar adopted on June 24, 2001. These are March 8, Women's Day, which is a non-working day, and April 7, Motherhood and Beauty day. The names of these holidays have been cut off the context that originally gave birth to the holiday. Thus, March 8 which in its origin was a holiday to celebrate the socialist struggle for women's rights over time began to contradict its own content and turned into a

²⁵ For more details, see Irina Ghaplanyan and Anna Melikyan, "Strengthening Women's Political Participation in the Republic of Armenia: Existing Efforts, Challenges and Opportunities."

<http://ysu.am/files/Anna%20Melikyan%20and%20Irina%20Ghaplanyan.pdf>

²⁶ For details, see <http://hanun.am/?p=71> . The document presents the public debates on this issue, the perceptions and formulas of most outspoken organizations in respect to gender issues.

²⁷ Vows taken during the wedding ceremony in the Armenian Apostolic Church. Translator's note.

²⁸ <http://newsbook.am/?p=3423&l=am>

platform that reproduces femininity within a patriarchal scope. Left out of the post-Soviet calendar as a remnant of the socialist past, it was restored back to the national calendar in 2001 this time not as an International Women's Day, but as Women's Day which substantially informs the content of holiday discourse.

Under the awakening of post-soviet nationalism and religious sentiments, April 7 was introduced into the national calendar as a holiday of Maternity and Beauty to replace March 8. Surely enough, this holiday also became informed with the content of viewing and treating the woman as an object of beauty. The period between March 8 and April 7 started to be perceived as a Women's Month with some political implications, such as women's health, education and other regulations.

The official names of the holidays, Women's Day and Maternity and Beauty Day, informed the speeches of politicians and statesmen on the occasions. All holiday messages are flooded with the discourse of femininity. Quantitative data further intensifies the image. Thus, in 50 speeches addressing the holidays the word "rights" was articulated only six times out of 6,093 words the speakers used of which the word appeared five times in the public rally speech by Maria Titizyan alone, a member of the Armenian Revolutionary Party and former Vice President of Socialist International.²⁹ The word "struggle" was used five times, of which three appeared again in Titizyan's mentioned speech.³⁰ The word "citizen" was used once, again in Titizyan's speech.

At the same time, some of the most frequently used words in the mentioned speeches were "beauty" (75 times), "happiness" (49 times), "warmth" (45 times), "care" (18 times), "kindness" (26 times) and "to glorify" (16 times). All these words indicate the general content of the texts. The congratulations are addressed to women, mothers, sisters, daughters and only in two speeches, to grandmothers.³¹

The actual definition of woman's desired roles is further expressed in formulas of women's happiness that are widely circulated in the statements of the political figures.

"I wish you family warmth and the happiness of being loved and appreciated by your children. (A.Nalbandyan, Governor of Lori, March 8, 2014)

or

"May you continue to serve for the wellbeing and strength of your noble families with your devotion. Armen Ghularyan, Governor of Tavush, March 8, April 7, 2013

As a rule, feminine desires prevail in masculine wishes, as does the preferred vision that women should have with a sexist content.

²⁹ The word "Right" is also used in the March 8th speech of Arthur Baghdasaryan, leader of the Country of Law party.

³⁰ Maria Titizyan, "This Movement Contains Hope, Light, Prospects for Future and Justice." <http://www.arfd.info/hy/?p=7143>

³¹ Armenian President Serge Sargsyan's Congratulatory note on April 7 <http://civilnet.am/2013/04/07/%D5%BD%D5%A5%D6%80%D5%AA-%D5%BD%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%A3%D5%BD%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%AB-%D5%B7%D5%B6%D5%B8%D6%80%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%BE%D5%B8%D6%80%D5%A1%D5%AF%D5%A1%D5%B6-%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B2%D5%A5%D6%80%D5%B1/>; March 8th speech of Hrachia Rostomyan, Armenian Minister for Sports and Youth issues <http://msy.am/news-1-494-page-2.html>

“I wish you endless charm, warm smiles and good mood in this spring. My sincere wish is that you are always surrounded with attention and care. May love and affection and feminine happiness follow you everywhere”. (Seyran Ohanyan, April 7, 2014).

or

“I wish you the freshness of spring, and women’s happiness ... (Aram Harutyunyan, Minister of Nature Protection, April 2013).

The feminine discourse is manifested in the congratulatory wishes inspired by the public mood, desirable perception of women’s role on one hand, and through constant reproduction on the government level on the other.

The theme of family is especially crucial in the address of politicians to women. Thus, in the studied congratulatory texts the word “family” and “familial” are articulated 65 times, very often used along with words such as “warmth,” “pillar,” “guardian” and “love.” By viewing women in the family environment, the political discourse positions the woman and defines her role in the private family environment and as reproducers, which is in fact at odds with content of state documents that aims at empowering women and creating equal opportunities for them. In these messages, the emphasis is especially on women’s role as family pillar, and guardian and guarantor of family happiness and harmony.

“You are the pillars and guardians of your family, the bearer and transmitter of the beauty.” (H. Abrahamyan, NA President, March 8)."

At the same time, by picturing women in a tight family circle, the politicians seemingly try to rationalize, justify and speak high about it by stressing the benefits of that position.

"Thanks to you, the family continues to be the warmest and most pleasant corner of the planet, and the world grows more and more harmonious, kind and tolerant. (Hovik Abrahamyan, NA President, March 8) "

Even the explicitly pro-democratic Zharangutiun (Heritage) Party leader supports the family-oriented mission of women: “You are the pillars of the Armenian family and deserve the highest appreciation. (Zharangutiun, April 7).

The government's texts tend to picture women’s universal and societal mission and usefulness, again, with family at the core: “The harmony of human relationships, strength and happiness of family depend on women’s attitudes.” (A. Ashotyan, April 7, 2014).

The social roles of women as they are defined in public speech of politicians perfectly fit within the perceptions of essentialist biological role-sharing. These public addresses formulate women’s and men’s “innate” missions, thus leaving the thesis of social construction and social norms of femininity and masculinity out of the public discourse: “As wives, sisters and daughters, you carry out your God-given mission which you have accepted with self-devotion and dignity” (Hovik Abrahamyan). Meanwhile, international scholarly research has established that gender-based division of responsibilities in societies is not natural, but rather, is shaped by the cultural and social environments that men and women live in a particular period of time. Moreover, these roles are not rigid and have changed over time, and continue to do so. Meanwhile, the assumption of gender roles as God-given in public addresses of the elite nullifies the Constitution, as well as other fundamental human rights documents which define all human beings as equal irrespective of their sex.

Woman's family roles are articulated with an emphasis on responsibilities that carry an ethnic specificity. Thus, in the congratulatory addresses, being an *Armenian* woman and an *Armenian*

mother are constantly emphasized: "The Armenian woman, the Armenian mother is the preserver and eternal transmitter of the Armenian gene" (Hranush Hakobyan, Minister of Diaspora Affairs, 2014).

The Armenian woman's identity is discussed in a broader historical context, thus excluding the possibility of synchronous and asynchronous diverse realities, and establishing a monotype and one-dimensional structure: "For centuries, the image of Armenian woman has been the most important factor for the national preservation, family stability and solidarity. (G.Tsarukyan, April 7, 2013).

It is interesting to observe how women's position in society and empowerment are pursued in the public speech of politicians who, as part of their work and professional activities, work toward legislation on women's rights and equality. The analysis of their speech illustrates that women's public role is rarely brought up in public statements. In general, concerns over women's rights and opportunities are never discussed in the context of the celebrations of women's days. The issues that women face in the Republic of Armenia do not get voiced, and goals to overcome these issues do not appear on the public agenda.

Under these circumstances, a simple question arises. Namely, if there are no issues in the field of women's rights and opportunities, why all the numerous state measures and initiatives toward this end? Or if these issues exist, why do public figures eschew voicing them and contributing to their solution?

The rare references to women's public role merely contribute to the discourse of femininity, and the plots of femininity and family: "All occasions of Armenia's success have been made possible due to strong family values and the most active involvement of women in all spheres of public life." Serzh Sargsyan, March 8, 2014

Or

"It's hard to imagine our success without your unique charm, beauty and wisdom. Your active participation in all spheres of public and political life strengthens the faith and confidence in the future (H. Abrahamyan, March 8, 2014).

Or

"Your role in the strength of Armenian families, in preservation of Armenian people and the values it has created is priceless. Your contribution to the social and political life of our country is immense. Your potential in education, science, culture, health and other fields is indispensable. / H. Abrahamyan, March 8, 2015 /

Women's supporting roles in the presence of masculine domination is emphasized even in observations on women's public and political roles. Women are discussed as an inspiration and empowerment to the masculine rulers through their feminine qualities, such as beauty, devotion, and prudence. These qualities cannot be a driving force in the improvement of women's rights, or actions or intentions toward this end.

As stated in Hovik Abrahamyan's congratulatory message, "[i]t is hard to imagine our success without your unique charm, beauty and wisdom. Your active participation in all spheres of public and political life strengthens the faith and confidence in the future." In this context it is difficult to imagine how women's active social and political participation that the political elite



so “strives for” is in fact possible. Even former Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan, who was quite an advocate of democratic values, presented women's agenda only in the context of femininity in his address: “You make it possible for us to be primed and overcome all the difficulties that exist in our country. Your beauty has always helped us to move forward, for which I thank you” (Tigran Sargsyan, March 8, 2014).

The renewal of patriarchal value system in the public speech of state authorities creates a platform for the reproduction and reinforcement of that system, as well as for the firmness of their own power, both masculine and political.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, a number of points can be singled out that describe the situation with women’s political participation in Armenia.

Gender equality and empowerment of women in the Republic of Armenia aimed at providing the tools are unable to change the conservative character of public discourse.

The content and indicators of low political participation of women are rooted deeply.

Those in charge of political agenda are locked up within the content of patriarchal discourse, and consequently, they are not capable to reshape women’s political agenda.

Contradictions and ambiguities are observed in the conservative texts of the political figures and the party or official documents they present on reform in the social order/norms.

In the political discourse women are viewed in reproductive roles typical for a patriarchal society. Their child-bearing and maternity functions are emphasized.

Women are presented in sexist and attributed feminine models in the texts of politicians.

The language/vocabulary of politicians produce new formulations for woman's reproductive auxiliary roles, and in the process, define the masculine power.

The transcribed texts of political addresses are very identical and one-dimensional.

Women’s agenda is still blank...

It is difficult to propose policy-directed concrete and visible tools on this topic. It is unrealistic to expect drastic change in the value system and linguistic thinking of policy-makers.

Under these circumstances, the role of representatives of civil field is important. The formation of women's agenda is equally a matter or priority both for the political field and the public at large.

The joining of efforts of all stakeholders, as well as the awareness of need for gender **mainstreaming** will necessarily raise the probability of influencing the process.

It is also important to propose a **new Armenian-language text** for political discourse against the existing patriarchal text. The international donor organizations and local stakeholders should create multi-dimensional research possibilities toward this end. Moreover, it is desirable that NGOs actively circulate these new texts on their web pages thus establishing a new environment for discussion in the native language in the native language and in the familiar linguistic thinking.

The next step should be **publication of alternative texts** through all possible mechanism, including media, academia and the public. The alternative texts should be aimed at the **deconstruction of patriarchal discourse**, and varying interpretation of concepts such as traditional national values and family norms.

Special attention should be paid to identifying and implementation of mechanisms of **awareness-raising** in issues of women's rights and gender equality among the speechwriters.

During the election campaign, **possible collaboration platforms should be discussed with opposition forces** with the goal of defining new possibilities for women's agenda.

Monitoring and accountability mechanisms should be established for women's discourse in the public speech of political figures using multiple platforms, such as media, monitoring, roundtables, etc.

ANNA GEVOGYAN

WOMEN AND MASS MEDIA

Building egalitarian societies is one of the priorities of modern democratic states. Mass media play a unique and important role in the shaping of a society where men and women enjoy equal rights. Raising women's legal awareness is important for the creation of an egalitarian society. This is reached through several means, including psychological, social, economic, philosophical, awareness of human rights, political and so on. The role of media is important for being successful in all the mentioned spheres. The media can promote and speed up the reforms in progress, or, on the contrary, it can hamper their implementation.

A number of international conferences and conventions have voiced and publicized the need to break public stereotypes through change in the media policy. Mass media, however, continue to reproduce discriminatory stereotypes about women and portray them in sexist ways. As a rule, women are portrayed in a narrow range of characters in mass media. If we were to divide mass media into two categories, such as fictional and news-reporting, then in the former, women are often associated with the household or sex-objects, and in the latter category, they lack roles.

Only in a limited number of news programs do women appear as main actors or experts. One of the reasons for this situation is the smaller number of women in these spheres, but even the existing number of women are underrepresented compared to their male counterparts.

In advertising and magazines, women are usually portrayed as young, slim and with beauty that meets the accepted standards. Women with this kind of appearance are often associated with sex objects.

Why do social scientists attribute importance to study of images and stereotypes of women in media? Femininity, as well as masculinity, are not biological, but rather, cultural constructs. Representations and manifestations of femininity differ across cultures, time and societies. Femininity is culturally and socially constructed by the family, education, the public, and to a larger extent, the media. In this respect, the long-term change in women's images in media could help change the perceptions and stereotypes women face in a society.

In the initial stage of its history, media were managed exclusively by men. The media images of men and **women were tailored to men's preferences**. In other words, men were creating media images of men and women they wished to see in reality.

Media images of women have become a subject of criticism in Feminist Media Studies since 1960s, when Betty Friedan in her book entitled *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) revealed and criticized the image of an ideal woman in post-war America. Friedan calls this image "the happy housewife heroine."³² Following her, numerous organizations, feminist groups and journals researched and revealed the discriminatory nature of women's images in advertisements and films. The troublesome findings of their research were behind the reason of UNESCO's statement on Mass Media in 1979, namely:

³² Sue Thornham, *Women, Feminism and Media* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 23.

*"Taking into consideration that TV programs give information and reflect on gender roles in real life, it must be stated that women's images are distorted and unrealistic in these programs. All kind of entertainment programs portray women in a dual image. On one hand, they are decorative objects. Yet, at the same time, they are passive individuals in the household and in marriage who are dependent on men for financial, emotional and physical support."*³³

Despite the fact that today media increasingly associate femininity with independent and powerful women, qualities informed by sexuality continue to play a dominant role in the shaping of femininity.

Fragmental display of the female body and fragmentation of women's body in advertisements promote the objectification of women's bodies. When the TV screen or a commercial poster displays only **slender long legs, prominent breasts or thighs**, it is difficult to perceive that body holistically and as possessing personality.

In addition, the portrayed female characters are largely influenced by **the beauty myth**. They have flawless skin, slender stature and embody all components of beauty as perceived in society. As a result of globalization this myth is increasingly generalized across cultures and societies. The standards of beauty as portrayed in media, however, are impossible to achieve, since the models have been transformed into these images through a number of technical means.

One of the reasons of discriminatory images of women in media is the fact that media products, as a rule, are created by men, in men's tastes and for men. In 2012 The International Women's Media Foundation carried out a study of world news agencies and corporations to determine the status of women in the news media. This first large-scale study illustrated that in all areas of media women were still facing problems in achieving equality.

The survey conducted in 59 countries, revealed that women make up only 33.3 percent of full time employees in 522 organizations that participated in the survey.³⁴ In almost all countries men occupy higher positions. Interestingly, Uganda and Russia are among the top countries where men and women almost equally appear in leading positions. Unfortunately, this has not changed the images of women in media. Social scientists and their research results illustrate that women's involvement in media work is not sufficient for bringing about change in how women are portrayed in media. Not only should women be represented in top management and have major impact on the decision-making process, but they should also undergo professional training. Otherwise, the female journalists and media executives, who have been educated with the media rules of patriarchal system, also often reproduces the sexist images of women.

With this in mind, a number of international organizations have concluded conventions and treaties with states through which they support the training of media employees by giving them the necessary tools and know-how to develop gender-sensitive policies.

Despite the tremendous change that has taken place in the sphere of media thanks to feminist criticism, the contemporary media are nowhere close to the standards they claim. Even in US and Europe, where feminist ideas are widely spread, and women have legally reached equal

³³ Margaret Gallagher, *The Portrayal and Participation of Women in the Media* (Paris: UNESCO, 1979), <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0003/000372/037267EB.pdf>, (08.07.2015).

³⁴ <http://www.iwmf.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/IWMF-Global-Report.pdf>, p. 6.

rights with men, media continue to have discriminatory attitudes towards women and rely on male worldview when portraying women. Many researchers and analysts have documented the fact that in these countries women are also poorly represented in media which in turn has had a negative impact on the formation of value system.

The image of women and the voicing of women's concern underwent a revolutionary change due to modern technology and emergence of new types of media. Today, all of us, in fact, are part of the media not only as consumers, but also as producers. And anyone, woman or man, can cover their problems and story by themselves, make it public, and turn it into media for consumption. These new possibilities, however, also bring about new challenges. In case of traditional media, it is possible to work with the leadership and staff to undergo training and achieve some results. In case of social media, not only groups in need of support voice their opinion, and publicize their perceptions freely, but also those people who threaten these groups and spread discriminatory and offensive comments about them. Thus, the quality of information disseminated in social media and the comments on these pieces of information are much more sexist and patriarchal. Change in this sphere can be achieved only through indirect impact.

In other words, the *sexist traditional media educates sexist citizens who spread their sexist perceptions through social media*. Change in the gender policy of traditional media and its compliance with international norms remain to be the most effective way for breaking this vicious circle.

WOMEN AND MEDIA IN ARMENIA

According to the Constitution of Republic of Armenia (RA), all citizens are equal and gender-based discrimination is reprehensible.³⁵ Rendering the change in the legal sphere and in public as important for gender equality, as well as in an effort to implement international and national treaty obligations, the Armenian Government has adopted a strategic plan for gender policy which is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2015.³⁶

This strategic program underlines the core activities which will help improve the issue of women's and men's equality, reduce gender stereotyping and promote gender equality in mass media. In particular, provisions 47 to 49 in section on "Strategy of Gender Policy Implementation in the Spheres of Culture and Public Information" include the following actions:

- **To strengthen cooperation between public authorities and media to achieve social equality between women and men;**
- **To raise gender-sensitivity of media and continue gender-awareness training for journalist;**
- **To support and encourage media that covers issues of gender equality.**

³⁵ Constitution, Republic of Armenia, Article 14.1, Chapter 2

<http://www.parliament.am/parliament.php?id=constitution&lang=arm&enc=utf8#2>, (07.06.2015)

³⁶ "Strategic Gender Program of 2011-2015, Republic of Armenia," http://www.gov.am/u_files/file/kananc-xorh/gender-strategic%20programm%202011-2015.pdf, (07.06.2015)

Among the solutions the program mentions the following steps:

- *Coverage of all efforts undertaken by the State aimed at ensuring equal rights and opportunities of women and men in the public, political and socio-economic spheres;*
- *Increased gender-sensitivity of mass media;*
- *Coverage of gender issues, and elimination of gender-based and gender-stereotype-informed discriminatory practices.*

Thus, the RA Government has undertaken the obligation to implement all these measures and achieve gender equality in media. The program is nearing its end, and the results are evident from a number of studies conducted in the sphere of media.

Several important studies have been conducted aimed at analyzing women's role and images in media. These studies concerned themselves with women's images in advertising, television, and women's inclusion in news. All studies confirm that women's images are stereotyped.

The study by Lilit Grigoryan, Arevik Ghalumyan and Mane Adamyan entitled "Women's Image in Armenian Advertisements" and funded by Open Society Foundation illustrates that

- 78 % of images of women in advertisements belong to the "young" age group (under 30)
- Only 10 % of women portrayed in magazines are medium-structured;
- Only 6 % of women in advertisement are portrayed at workplace.
- Women in advertisements tend to be cut off from real life and appear next to the product that is being advertised, with no real environment. In 50 % of 680 advertisements analyzed for the study, women are located in an unclear environment, and only in one case the woman is portrayed in an office, working.
- TV advertisements tend to include more middle-aged women than the magazines. However, their number is still quite small, with only 20 %.
- In Armenian TV advertisements 15 % of protagonists are portrayed at home, and only 12 % in the office.
- In 81 % of advertisements included in the study, the narrator is a male, and 81 % of protagonists do not talk at all.³⁷

Ani Kojoyan's and Anna Gevorgyan's study on "Masculinity and Gender Violence in Armenian Soap Operas" funded by YSU Center for Gender and Leadership Studies (CGLS) indicates that almost all female characters in soap operas are housewives. They are almost always unhappy, they continuously cry and complain, their families are in quarrel, they are often subjected to humiliation (publicly or privately), as well as to physical violence³⁸.

Again funded by CGLS, Lilit Sakaryan's study on "Image of Armenian Women in Mass Media (TV): From Gender Sensitivity to Gender Stereotypes" reveals that

- In addition to women's underrepresentation on TV, women are present only in 10 % of themes concerning women's issues, and the number of female experts on TV is very low (25%);

³⁷ Lilit Grigoryan, Arevik Ghalumyan, Mane Adamyan, "The Image of Women in Armenian Advertisements," http://www.osf.am/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Advertising_research.pdf (01.06.2015)

³⁸ Ani Kojoyan, "Masculinity and Gender Violence in Armenian Soap Operas," <http://www.y-su.am/files/Reserch%20paper%2003.09.2014..pdf>, (10.06.2015)

- TV circulates stereotypes peculiar to the patriarchal system, and women are portrayed as marginalized, and often immoral and materialist;
- 70 % of TV staff is men (directors, sound engineers, editors, camera people, producers, light engineers, computer designers, etc.) and only 30 % is female (apparel design, makeup, administrator, script writer) even in shows dedicated to women.³⁹

Thus, similar to the situation with international media, the Armenian media continue to reproduce stereotypical and sexist images of women. By assigning passive, secondary, and unimportant roles to women, media conveys incomplete picture of the Armenian reality. The objectification and fragmentation of the female body, as well as the scenes of violence against women, render discriminatory attitudes and gender-based violence against women as normative.

³⁹ Lilit Shakaryan, "Image of Armenian Women in Mass Media (TV): From Gender Sensitivity to Gender Stereotypes," <http://www.y-su.am/files/Lilit%20Shakaryan%20%20ARM.ENG%20Report.pdf>, (06.06.2015).

SUSANNA GYULAMIRYAN

WOMEN'S ART VERSUS FEMINIST ART: CATEGORIES AND CONTRADICTIONS IN PRACTICES OF ARMENIAN ART

As the officially promulgated top-to-bottom policy line of the Soviet Union endorsed the equality of all the strata of Soviet society, it also embraced the equality of the two sexes. A powerful and extensively popularized myth about women born in the Soviet Union was disseminated (and still seems to be in circulation). However, this supposedly universal respect for women's rights and freedoms was, in fact, a camouflage shrouding the reality of the suppression of women by society, by men, as well as by the double standards in the division of labor, which granted women access to all spheres of public life and professional employment, but which did not free women from the burdens of back-breaking commitments in their private lives.

In fact, as is highlighted in V. Aristov's research, Soviet women were often put to work on tough, low paid and low prestige jobs. A select few female candidates were granted access to positions of power by the male segment of society, but these female "islands" among the nation's political elite had tenuously little in common with the greater proportion of female society in the Soviet Union.

The women in the Soviet Union were considered emancipated (for the official policy line forced this image of women into public life), but this emancipation was an external mask that



covered, and even justified, the patriarchal economy of relations prevalent within society. This so-called equality was in no way indicative of an actual free competition between the two sexes. The leadership belonged to men and the overall sexist structure (i.e., the stereotypes and practices discriminating one sex in favor of the other) prevailed without even being noticed, with the great majority of Soviet people simply taking it for granted (1).

Of course, by virtue of the adopted policy of equality, Soviet Armenian women were not refused the opportunity to engage in artistic processes. However, the Academic School was established and led by men. The work of female Armenian artists was detached from gender and similar considerations. Their artwork, rooted in the traditions of classical academic school and “national fine arts,” was entitled to be a mere auxiliary to the “rightful trends” of male artists. As such, they were seen and perceived as women loyal to the “school” and as women skillful in their mastery of public crafts as opposed to needlework, crocheting, patchwork, and others, habitually viewed as the private domain of women’s activity.

It would not be superfluous to note that some women artists were the protagonists of a style characterized as strongman painting, one heavily invested with simulations of male artistic practices, and which adhered to the aesthetic models common to Armenian traditional painting and art. This does not mean, however, that the art of Soviet Armenian women was devoid of Western influences of, say, fauvist-style, cubism, or of “analytical structuring a-la-Cézanne.” Put it otherwise, in Soviet Armenia, and especially ever since the period of Stalin’s regime of “punishment and liquidation,” female artists stood completely disconnected from any participation in processes that involved the deconstruction of the traditional stereotypes on women – be it in art or in social life. Importantly, there are no preserved records on the earlier Soviet women artists. Their names have been almost or completely erased from the pages of representational historiography of Armenian Art. Yet, it is highly important that rigorous research is conducted on this particular period.

Since 1950s, as women artists came on the artistic scene through their active participation in various events, they also became visible to the public at large which learned the names of artists such as sisters Yeranuhi and Mariam Aslamazyans, Knarik Vardanyan, Armine Kalents, Lavina Bazhbeuk-Melikyan, Dekhdzanik Mkhitarian, Qnarik Hovhannisyanyan, and others. This notwithstanding, the pages of Soviet Armenian art historiography, and especially those of smaller-scale manuals, i.e. those that claim to present the select peaks of Armenian art history, usually “glare” with constellations of names comprised of male artists only. Such is the state of affairs also in the cases when those anthologies are authored or compiled by Soviet women art historians. Particularly exemplary is the active-in-the-late-Soviet-period art historian Nona Stepanyan’s book entitled *Survey of Fine Arts in Armenia*, where the author takes up the task of presenting the *selected* names of Soviet Armenian male artists, including Hakob Hovnatanian, Gevorg Bashindjaghian, Vardges Sureniantz, Hakob Kojoyan, Martiros Saryan, Ervand Kochar, Hovhannes Zardaryan, Haroutiun Kalents, Minas Avetisyan, Robert Elibekian, Hakob Hakobian, Sargis Muradian, and others. Surprisingly, the manual, which covers a time span as protracted as 1910 to 1980s, features not a single female artist. They stand outside the pecking order of “geniuses.” (2)

As Linda Nochlin, the leading expert on feminist art history, puts it in her seminal and by now paradigmatic article entitled “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” the “mythologies of the divine creator” – the artist as he-man, who sodden with his genius,

overcomes all possible hardships, do not correspond to our conceptions of the housewife, the mother, or that of a salon hostess. (3)

Nochlin concludes that the formation of generalized or traditional corpora of art is a “white” man’s monopoly. The pages of this history, saturated with male frivolities, have neglected, and do to date neglect, the “endowments” of the Other, those of the woman – she is absolutely incompatible with, nor can she have access to the concept of the Genius, and that of Great Art. These assertions, so firmly stigmatized in history, have traditionally been perceived as natural, as given truths of divine ordering not subject to a critical glance, which, as Nochlin has it, lead to an intellectual death.

Nochlin argues that “underlying the question about woman as artist, then, we find the myth of the Great Artist--subject of a hundred monographs, unique, godlike--bearing within his person since birth a mysterious essence...” Nochlin raises the question why have there been no great women artists as prominent as, say, Michelangelo, or Rafael, or Van Gogh, or Jackson Pollock, for despite their obvious artistic differences, they all fall under the rubric of “genial” note that no single woman has ever enjoyed. To provide an answer, Nochlin refers to the status quo in the fundamental social, political, cultural structures underlying societies, and to the ideologies guiding those structure which she claims create non-horizontal opportunities for men and women in art, education, and elsewhere. Even to date, stereotypes and expectations of male and female social roles, and of their behavioral tactics prevail. One of the examples Nochlin quotes is the state of affairs in the academic fine art schools throughout the first two decades of 20th century when women were even bereft of the opportunity to paint nude models – what was then considered the ABC of mastering fine arts:

“As late as 1893, "lady" students were not admitted to life drawing at the Royal Academy in London... A brief survey of representations of life-drawing sessions reveals: an all-male clientele drawing from the female nude in Rembrandt's studio... Far more believable, unfortunately, was the complete unavailability to the aspiring woman artist of any nude models at all, male or female.”(4)

All of it being equal, and along with various texts and problems on the presence/absence of women artists, feminist criticism also hones at yet another phenomenon – the emergence of the ever-increasing practice of depicting female nudity since 19th century which reveals a consummate dominance in numbers over male nudes. Here, I would like to make recourse back to Soviet Armenian art by quoting cultural critic Hrach Bayandyan’s observation:

“Nude bodies appear to be a very rare occurrence in the works of Armenian painters. At the dawn of 20th century their preferred medium for aesthetic expression was landscape painting.... Not only were they, the nude body and the landscape, set off against one another as opposites in Armenian painting, but also, under the imperative of the specific logic of constructing a contemporary cultural identity, the national landscape had somehow appropriated/absorbed the female body, wherein the latter, identified with

mother-nature, signified both woman's dispossessive nature subject to domination, and her motherhood entitled to breed and nurture a nation." (5)

In her programmatic postulates, Nochlin, along with several other feminist theorists and critics, calls for a feminist revision of "apprehensions" about women in art, and for the creation of a chain reaction which inspired by this example, would extend this highly important labor outward to embrace also literature, social, economic and political fields. This would be in an attempt to abandon women's and women artists' millennial feeling of guilt which accrues to the many indisputable hardships they undergo in their lives. For even at moments of most vigorous and unapologetic masculine protest, women tend to dedicate themselves to unabashed assertions of basic "femininity". (6)

An exemplary case in which the diversity of gender conflicts, intrinsic contradictions, and gender battles are particularly articulate, is the life and work of paintress Arminé Kalents, the wife of painter Haroutiun Kalents, "the acclaimed master with the brush," to put it in a parlance common in Soviet times. Arminé's case is notorious also because, unlike other Soviet Armenian artists, she took the plunge to put her life story in writing which was published in 1997 in the form of an autobiography – *Arminé on Haroutiun Kalents; Forgive Me, Haroutiun; Memories*. (7)

In a proliferate stream of recollections, where the sequential order of her chronological narrative is at times disjoined, re-narrated or disrupted (also suggestive of the author's emotional agitation), Arminé's memoirs reveal some "bits of feminism." This is not to say, however, that her work had lines of convergence with the feminist art, or a leaning for it since after all, this was unimaginable in the context of Stalinist ideological regime in post-1920s. In fact, throughout her text, she time and again labors the point that her artistic path has always been invested heavily with social tenets. Women, also women artists, feel the constant urge to justify themselves in the face of expectations springing from family, and society at large. This creates insurmountable obstacles for them for their complete dedication to their profession of the artist. On the other hand, her book is imbued with feelings of "guilt," and at times with the impasse of her feminine subjectivity. This drained her obviously and ruined her internal confidence as a woman and as an artist, her beliefs, her commitment to her professional and aesthetic mission – all so essential for an artist's ability to pursue work intensively and innovatively. On one occasion, she recalls, Yervand Kochar, who earned recognition as the prominent sculptor and artist in Soviet Armenia, came out with a reproving commentary that Arminé lacked "the femininity that makes a woman a woman:"

"[Arminé], you are ingenuous, candid, and also you have depth as a personality... Virtues acceptable in men, but not – in women. You are likely to feel sorry one day about having failed to be a real woman."(8)

Arminé, as she confesses, lingers over this "truth," so uttered by Kochar, only at a later point in her life, at a moment of depression, when, demurred and dispirited, she muses over the causes of her many defeats as a woman in her family and personal life. And was that not her passion for art, she posits.

Arminé Kalendz had an unadulterated belief in Haroutiun Kalents' extraordinary talent and his abilities:

“I loved Kalents, and I had no doubts whatsoever that he was a grand artist with exceptional abilities. Never did my eyes grow weary with watching his paintings – every stroke of his brush was no doubt a truth in art.” (9)

At the opening of Arminé's first solo show at the Union of Painters in Yerevan, Martiros Saryan, another prominent Soviet Armenian artist, murmurs to Arminé ear that she is superior to Haroutiun in art. She takes it as an insult: “I know it all too well what standing H. Kalents has in art, and this is a belief never to be shattered.” (10) In other words, it is beyond her to admit that a woman can have primacy, or else superiority, over a man in art. On the other hand, she makes an aggrieved mentioning that her husband, at moments of kind disposition, all too often asserted that Arminé, had she done his bidding, might have evolved into a really good artist. (11)

There are also sections in the book where, despite her admiration with Kalents, Arminé does not hesitate to characterize the domineering posture of masculinity and its methods of subjugating women, and she does so by quoting examples also from her husband's behavior.

“I don't know what I had within me. I was normally tender and soft in my temperament – a pensive girl who flied... This is perhaps what attracted him [Haroutiun Kalents], but a virile spirit dwelled deep inside him – rebellious, agonistic, freedom-loving. And the more he oppressed me, the more these features beefed up in him. And perhaps this poor girl, who would, like a schoolgirl, soundlessly retire into a secluded corner and burst out into tears, made him feel manlier. He manned up more when I was wretched, and less so, when I was cheerful and active... He liked to see me ruined. In a footnote, I have observed it throughout my life that men feel more attracted to ruined women... Yes, probably because they feel more of a man, in the position of the defender...”(12)

It is important to also note that another important feature in the work of the Kalents couple is the fact that they are repatriates who moved to Armenia from Syria in 1946. Their dramatic passage into Soviet Armenia and the fact of their “Otherness” did often contribute to their life in the margin (read the metaphor of the margin in its negative signification here). The Kalentses did their best to alienate themselves from the perceptions of art that followed Soviet ideologies – the figurativeness of socialist and party realism. In her book quoted above, Arminé labels “political Soviet” art as a “pot-boiler.” One can only imagine under what double oppression and what double “Otherness” Arminé led her life, both as a woman artist and as a repatriate, an alien.

The attempts of critiquing Soviet- Armenian and even Soviet women's art at large during 1960s, the so-called Khrushchev thaw era, and even up to 1980s, would also end up in associating and analogizing it with the practices of male artists: “like a man, her arms are strong and her strokes are powerful;” “she is not a paintress, but a genuine painter;” and so on. Many

female artists in those years were the wives of art critics and painters or representatives of artistic families, a crucial factor allowing them access into the artistic scene.

Female artists in those years were divested of their originality and self-sufficiency and were instead viewed as pale copies subordinate to the genius of he-man. Characteristic descriptions, in consonance with the typical generalizations unifying “femininity” in art under specific formal and stylistic insignia, identified the locus of female art inside categories such as “lyricism,” “lyric psychologism,” and so on.

The preeminence of male-chauvinist interpretations of female art endured for so many long years that it established a massive grip on the pages of Soviet-Armenian cultural historiography. In turn, Armenian women artists either believed in this, or in a passive non-action, and they ceded to the myth of the divine creator that the painter is a real he-man.

This “state of the art” perpetuated its unquestioned legitimacy up until approximately mid post-Soviet 1990s, a period that marked the abandonment of the grand Soviet narratives and prohibited topics, and saw the introduction of translations of Feminist/Gender Studies. These theories, in their lively and heterogeneous (albeit at times contradictory) conceptual insights, allowed deconstructions within the traditional apparatus of thought and in the methodological presuppositions underlying the prevailing art history discourses. This momentum also opened a door for some particularly interested and unfortunately only a few artists, curators, critics, and art historians in Armenia to pursue a new agenda of cultural and critical (self) analysis and (self) determination which, among other things, was also calibrated around the conceptual female and gender nexus.

The artistic scene in Armenia, especially the one that we call Contemporary Art scene, perhaps much in line with the other similar contexts in post-Soviet countries, welcomed those attempts as “exceptionally heretical.” And yet, those transitory years became the period when a newly emerging contemporary art scene in Armenia was quick to assert that: [...] art is not the free, autonomous activity of the super-endowed individual. Rather, the situations and the social field, in which the art work is evolving, is part and parcel of social structures and is mediated and defined by specific social institutions (13). In those years in Armenia the underlying theme in the works of men and women alike was the break with existing traditional art forms, and because those forms tended to preserve their status quo, breaking with them was itself viewed as a radical movement. The works of progressive Armenian women artists were often anchored on a single axis – the contraposition of the feminine to the masculine, in a kind of essentialist strategy.

Women artists did not make definite references to Feminism in their art. Instead, their growing self-awareness refused to respond to the “traditional” expectations of their audiences, and this act was revolutionary in itself. On the other hand, after the downfall of the Soviet Empire, women artists made active efforts to achieve a fully-fledged participation in the artistic life on the contemporary art scene. In those years the international art community had only started paying attention to the contemporary art in the post-Soviet space, and female artists tried actively to gain access to full participation and equal representation at local and international galleries and institutions. This process was, in one way or the other, positive in that it marked the beginning of women’s struggle in the field of art aimed at gaining equal rights with men in terms of overall creative legitimization, representation of artistic works, and engagement in broader artistic practices around the world.

Although the works of female artists were not particularly influenced by the classical feminist and gender theories (these texts attracted the interest of only a small proportion of Armenian curators and art critics, only few female artists, but never male artists), several women artists in Armenia were “visually” inspired by the experiences of some international feminist artists – of Valie Export (Austria); Guerilla Girls (and their famous slogan questioning the fact of unequal involvement and representation of women’s art in national, international museums, galleries and other art events: “Do Women have to be naked to get to the Museums?”), and others.

As mentioned in the introduction to the *Anthology of Gender Theory and Art, in the West*, feminist art emerged and developed hand in hand with Western feminist theories and Gender Studies. This then became the basis for numerous texts on gender and feminism, exerting a decisive influence on contemporary artistic practices. The term “politics of representations,” coined by Western feminist critique, stood for the non-optionality and high reflexivity of the aesthetic and political constellations within which women can potentially discern, constitute, and identify themselves. Self-representation is the next step in the politics of representation. “The personal is political” is an expression connoting that the coordinates of already established representational politics in the social, scientific, psychic, and artistic spheres arise from the personal, and which therefore can and should be rethought. Indeed, feminist art is developed through theoretical reflections about representation, about how the representation of women is carried out, how they are understood, and about the specific social conditions that come to shape them.(14)

In my opinion, the main part of more progressive women artists in Armenia position themselves not so much as producers of feminist art, but as producers of a specific category of art which refuses the works of traditional women artists as androcentric and patriarchal. My experience as a curator in the contemporary Armenian artistic context has allowed me to observe a phenomenon I find quite interesting – the existence of a kind of “uninformed or unconscious feminism” in the works of Armenian women artists who do not try to supply their work with feminist definitions or commentaries. The visual texts of the artists often repeat the kind of radical strategies of women’s art-making which Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis have grouped into a typology comprised of several categories – essentialist, separatist, feminist approaches which envision “a specific relation between strategy and action.” (15)

One type/category the authors have identified is the “glorification of an essential female art power.” This orientation finds expression in emphasizes of vagina forms. It can also be associated with the ritual and the postulation of a female mythology. Thus, instead of the male supremacy of patriarchal culture, the female (the essential female) is elevated to the primary status. The other category of women’s art making views the latter as a form of sub-cultural resistance through showing appreciation for crafts (sewing, ceramic, implications with fabric, etc.). The third category is divided into two groups or subcategories by Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis. The first group regards the dominant cultural order as a monolithic construction in which women’s cultural activity is either submerged or placed entirely outside its boundaries. For the second group or subcategory the feminist struggle is not necessary, since its more strident forms of artistic careerism make the assertion that women’s art has outgrown of its need for feminism. The final category of artistic practice emphasizes that meanings are

socially constructed and demonstrates the importance and functioning of discourse in the shaping of social reality...

Echoing certain feminist questions, one can then ask: is a work of art feminist when the artist sees it as such, or is it feminist when it is perceived to be such by a collector, a curator, an art critic, or an institutional arbiter?

I recall a conversation I once had with woman artist Mara Mirzoyan about a piece in her massive multimedia series (1996). Her work could well fit into those categories of feminist art which praise real feminine sexuality or which, through a strategy of reversal, replace phallogentrism with the symbol of female origin, the vagina. Mara's reaction to this observation was one of astonishment, while for me, as an art curator, the work was clearly invested with feminism as "glorification of an essential female power" was defined by Barry and Flitterman-Lewis. In fact, many female artists remained quite remote from feminist discourses, or else, they preferred to avoid the notion "feminism" or "feminist art" when defining their work. This is why it is probably more accurate to label these works as "congruent" with feminist strategies, than as being part of feminist art.

The works of two other female artists from Armenia, Karine Matsakyan and Astghik Melkonyan, are also congruent with feminist strategies – this time with the strategies of female representation and self-representation. In this type of art, woman's character is not perceived as a given, but is constructed in and through artwork, thereby emphasizing the socially constructed nature of meaning.

Another Armenian female artist, Diana Hakobyan, also avoids characterizing her work in term of feminism or gender, though her work, in my opinion, does indeed raise important questions on women's equal representation in the world of art, as well as other gender-specific problems. This notwithstanding, she simply mentions in her short bio that what she seeks in her artistic practices is "the formation of new visions, especially about the role of woman, and that of family, in contemporary society." Focusing mainly on new forms of art, she rejects the social and cultural values of the industrial era which she claims are based on exploitation. If the task were to draw a line of demarcation between "art by women" and "feminist art," one would situate the work of the above artists within the first category. It is therefore important to underline that there is indeed art by women that works within, in peace and in concord with the patriarchal society, and there is art that works against patriarchalism. The works of the latter artists are exactly such, although they may not verbalize their position in feminist terms. What is apparent in their work, however, is the articulation of a difference, the difference of the specifically female subjectivity and the subversion of the traditional representation of woman. I also want to make a special mentioning of the Queering Yerevan initiative, established in Yerevan several years ago (16). The topic of queer identities is an exceptional taboo in Armenia, and what they did required some courage, since their move went well beyond the universal concepts of woman's Otherness, which undermine other forms of female subjectivity, say, lesbianism. The move was also an attempt to overcome the separatism and individualism splitting lesbian identities on the Armenian art scene and, more broadly, female society as a whole.

One of the pioneering attempts in addressing the dilemma of queer identities and other gender issues in Armenia came in the form of monumental installation "Human Doors" performed by Raffie Davtian, an Armenian-Iranian male artist, exhibited first in Yerevan in 2007. In this

project, the artist creates a space of corporal figurativeness, which he arranges as a metaphoric “public space,” in which through artistic expression, he not only revitalizes the gender discourse, but also brings to the forefront the discourse of gender exclusion. The installation emerges as a scale model featuring a “multitude” of figure-objects, which are caught up in a “gender trouble” and in a spectacular outburst, and introduce the scene of their impregnation with their own subjectivity. Pictured in a “troubled” dynamic, each figure appears as the carrier of the truth of a specific character which can be linked to hetero-, homo-, bi-sexual, and transgender identities. The project also renders as problematic the imaginary in self-identification, the personal mechanism of experiencing one’s own Self, which is bound to be linked to various systems of boundaries, oppression, discourses of gender politics, sexual exclusions, and all other cultural and social taboos arising from them. The artist also includes in the corpus of the installation figures of old wo/men, thus putting the problem of “ageism” alongside with those of discrimination and social exclusions in Armenia. (16)

Unfortunately, due to lack of space, it is impossible to further elaborate on the practices of artists on the contemporary artistic scene in Armenia whose works feature a marked gender accentuation.

To conclude, I want to emphasize that men would never give up their power position without struggle – be it in art or other spheres. And if we, women, want to have some, at least, scanty hope for societal reform in “different” or “other” thinking, we are to link it to women’s participation, their activism, thinking, and intervention. Of course, this would be possible, to quote Hrach Bayadyan again, “if women themselves wanted to see changes in whatever is degenerated in different spheres and relations in Armenia... as women are part of today’s society which tolerates and also sanctifies all these vices as the pivotal components of its singularly trustworthy ‘national project.’”

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 2. Nonna Stepanyan, *Survey of Fine Arts in Armenia* (Moscow: Sovetsky Khudozhnik, 1985).
 3. Linda Nochlin, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* (New York: 1st publication in ARTnews, 69, 1971).
 4. *ibid.*
 5. Hrach Bayadyan, “The Naked Body and the National Landscape” in *New Figurative Art in Armenia* (Yerevan: Printinfo, 2010).
 6. Nochlin, *Why Have There...*
 7. Kalents, Armine, *Arminen Haroutiun Kalentsi masin: Nerir indz Haroutiun. Husher* ([Armine about Haroutiun Kalents: Forgive me Haroutiun, Memories]), (Yerevan: Nairi, 1997).
 8. *ibid*, p.89
 9. *ibid*, p.166
 10. *ibid*, p.171
 11. *ibid*, p.146
 12. *ibid*, p. 119

13. Nochlin, *Why Have There...*
14. L.Bredikhina and K. Deepwell (eds.), *Gendernaya Teoriya i Iskusstvo: Antologiya: 1970-2000* ([Gender Theory and Art: An Antology]), (Moscow: Rosspen, 2005)
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16. <http://queeringyerevan.blogspot.com>.
17. Susanna Gyulamiryan, "All Others" in *Human Doors Artistic Project* (artist: Raffie Davtian), Art and Cultural Studies Laboratory (ACSL), (Yerevan, 2007).

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