THE 'NEW ARMENIAN WOMAN:'
ARMENIAN WOMEN'S WRITING IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE, 1880-1915

BY

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The 'New Armenian Woman': Armenian Women's Writing in the Ottoman Empire, 1880-1915

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation, 2000

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the creation of a feminist discourse in the literary texts of the Armenian women writers, Srpuhi Dussap (1841-1901), Zabel Asatur (Sibyl) (1863-1934) and Zabel Esayian (1878-1943) in the years from 1880 to 1915. The discourse these three authors constructed constitutes an important aspect of the Armenian intellectual tradition as well as being part of the nineteenth-century international movement for women’s rights. Armenian feminist discourse shares similarities with women’s movements in Europe, particularly in France, while reflecting unique concerns based on Armenian women’s position as an ethnic and religious minority in the Ottoman Empire.

Armenian feminist discourse demonstrates a concern with the idea of the rights of the individual which is a product of the ideology of the French Revolution of 1789. Armenian intellectuals, male and female, applied these concepts to their position as a minority within the despotic Ottoman state but women intellectuals took these ideas farther and applied them to the status of the Armenian woman. Armenian feminists used the concepts of fraternity, equality and liberty to argue for women’s rights. Their engagement with European ideology should not obscure the fact, however, that these authors were particularly concerned with the circumstances of the Armenian community within the Ottoman Empire.

The authors recognized that Armenian women could not achieve emancipation without a corresponding advancement in the overall conditions of the Armenian people,
while at the same time they asserted that the Armenian community could not progress without a change in the status of women. It is due to this understanding of the mutuality of female and national efforts for advancement that Armenian feminists advocated greater female participation in all aspects of Armenian community life.

Armenian feminist discourse was concerned with the issue of redefining the relationship between women and men in marriage and with expanding women's opportunities in the public sphere, particularly in areas traditionally seen as the domain of men, such as the national movement, education and employment. The solution proferred by the authors to these sociological issues was the redefinition of Armenian conventions of femininity through the creation of the New Armenian Woman.
The transliteration system for Armenian used in this text is based on the phonetic values of Classical and Eastern Armenian. The exceptions to this are authors' names which are commonly known by transliterations based on the phonetic values of Western Armenian. For example, I have used the more common Srpühi Dussap rather than Srbuhi Tiwsab.
INTRODUCTION

Beginning in 1880 in the novels, short stories and essays of Srpuhi Dussap (1841-1901), Zabel Asatur (Sibyl) (1863-1934) and Zabel Esayian (1878-1943) an Armenian feminist discourse was formulated. This discourse focused on women’s role in Armenian national development, the position of women in marriage, and women’s right to education and employment. The feminist content of these three authors’ works has been largely ignored in most histories of Western Armenian literature which tend to display a uniformity of description when discussing the three authors. Srpuhi Dussap is usually described as the first Armenian woman novelist, Sibyl as a poet and wife of Hrant Asatur and Zabel Esayian is judged to be the best of them, with particular emphasis on her patriotic texts. Dussap is frequently labeled a “feminist,” as though this term precludes discussion or explanation; the content of her work and that of the other two writers is largely ignored. A reading of their essays and fictional texts, however, reveals that these three writers, like their male counterparts, were concerned with the development of modern Armenian society.

In nineteenth-century Western Armenian letters the ancient literary heritage was being rediscovered through the printing of ancient and medieval manuscripts of Armenian history and literature; combined with this recovery of the past Armenian intellectuals were embracing new ideas about the nature of the individual, natural rights and the state, concepts widely discussed in the wake of the French revolution of 1789. This intellectual movement known as Zartonk [Awakening] in Western Armenian intellectual history sought to direct the development of Armenian society and the individual’s place within the new society. Traditional analysis, exemplified by the works of Hagop Oshagan and James Etnekjian, of the intellectual and cultural achievements of the Zartonk movement has focused solely on theories of society discussed by male intellectuals while ignoring theories created by Srpuhi Dussap, Zabel Asatur (Sibyl) and Zabel Esayian who are each relegated to the category of “woman writer.” This is in part the result of the belief that women do not

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1 The term “Western Armenian” refers to Armenians living under Ottoman rule while “Eastern Armenian” refers to Armenians living under Russian and Persian suzerainty. The three writers discussed in this dissertation belong to the Western Armenian cultural and literary milieux. While I do not always use the term “Western Armenia,” using instead “Armenian,” the designation “Western Armenian” is assumed.
create theories. As Dale Spender has shown, in European and North American scholarship men are seen as the only theorists because theories created by (certain) men are viewed as ‘neutral.’ In fact many of these theories are not neutral, when they legitimize inequalities of sex, class and race.2 Spender argues against the ownership of the realm of theory by any one group by demonstrating that women have created theories of liberation.3 Spender’s emphasis on women’s creation of theories as constituting intellectual traditions enables us to see women’s writing about women’s status and place in society as part of theories of oppression and as theories of liberation. Spender’s discussion of theory and intellectual tradition is illuminating when applied to the texts of Dussap, Sibyl and Esayian because readings of these three authors’ texts reveal theories which identify the causes of women’s oppression, a myriad of solutions to achieving female emancipation and definite ideas about the role of women in modern Armenian society. Throughout this dissertation the terms “feminist theorists” and “Armenian feminist discourse” have been used to describe the three authors and their ideas, in order to emphasize that these writings constitute an intellectual tradition.

Keeping in mind Nancy Cott’s thesis that feminist movements “take part in” and “comprise part of—the general cultural order, while it has its own tradition, logic and trajectory”4 the development of an Armenian feminist discourse within the framework of a blossoming cultural movement and evolving political consciousness has been emphasized. The primary goal of this dissertation is to uncover Armenian feminist discourse through an examination of the theories about women and society articulated by the three authors and to reconnect the Armenian feminist movement with its contemporary intellectual and political movements. I have chosen to examine the writings of Srpuhi Dussap, Sibyl and Zabel Esayian because each author displays a concern with the future of Armenian women and Armenian society against the backdrop of the contemporaneous intellectual concern with

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3 Ibid., 1.
history, progress and the rights of ‘man.’ The contemporary intellectual discourse concerning Armenian political parties, nationalism and modernity affected how Armenian women authors discussed women’s issues. The three authors discussed here display similar concerns as their male counterparts but alter the discourse to include a central, active role for Armenian women.

I date the first stage of Armenian feminist discourse as occurring from 1880 to 1915. I begin with the year 1880 because Srpahi Dussap’s first article on women’s right to education appeared in the periodic press in this year and I date the end of Zartonk ideological feminism in 1915 when the Armenian Genocide, perpetuated by the Young Turk government, occurred. The deliberate killing of the majority of the Western Armenian intelligentsia as the first phase of the genocidal process, the removal of Armenians from their historic homeland and the dispersion of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide throughout the world, resulted in a political and intellectual focus distinct from pre-1915 concerns. This is demonstrated in these authors’ works by the fact that after 1915 Sibyl’s writing virtually ceased and Esayian abandoned many specifically feminist concerns in favour of focusing on the rebuilding of Armenian society in Soviet Armenia. Exceptions to this periodization are Esayian’s novel Verjn Bazhake [The Last Cup] and Sibyl’s play Harse [The Daughter-in-Law] which were published in 1917 and 1918 respectively. Although both works were published after 1915 they display an intellectual methodology and feminist concern which is reflective of the concerns of the pre-1915 intellectual and cultural milieux. For this reason I suggest that the first stage of Armenian feminist discourse and literary activity did end with the Armenian Genocide of 1915.

The remainder of this chapter will introduce the three authors through a discussion of the lives of each author, her intellectual and social activities and will examine the existing critical treatment of the authors.

Srpahi Vahanian, later known as Srpahi Dussap, was born in 1841 on the European shore of Constantinople. When she was a year old her father died. Dussap was raised by her mother, Nazli Vahan (1814-1884), who was an ardent supporter of female education, founding the St. Hripsimyants girls’ school in 1859 and the Aghkatakhanan
Tiknants Enkerutyun [Charitable Women's Association] in 1864, an association devoted to promoting female education; she was also a patron of the Galfaian orphanage and the Narekian and Hamazgiats schools. Nazli Vahan ensured that her own daughter was well-educated. The young Srpuhi attended Ortakoy’s French school until the age of ten and then received private education at home instructed by her brother Hovhannes (1832-1891) who had attended university in Paris. He taught her French, natural sciences and history.5 Srpuhi is said to have also mastered Greek and Italian and to have read Plutarch’s “Lives of Great Men” and Greek philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Homer, Euripides and Sophocles. She was introduced to European writers, such as Lord Byron, Schiller, Victor Hugo and George Sand as well as the Armenian classics and contemporary Armenian writers.6 In 1863 the Armenian romantic poet Mgrdich Beshigtashlian (1828-1868) became her teacher of the Armenian language and ancient and modern literature.7

From an early age Srpuhi Dussap was exposed to debates concerning contemporary social questions through the activities of her mother. Srpuhi Dussap was a member of the Aghkatakhnam Tiknants Enkerutyun [Charitable Women’s Association] founded by Nazli Vahan. She may also have participated in the salon run by her mother where writers and intellectuals met to discuss contemporary social issues.8 Certainly in her own life Dussap organized and participated in the same kind of organizations her mother had founded and participated in. Following her marriage in 1869 or 1870 to the French musician Paul Dussap, Srpuhi ran a salon with husband throughout the 1870s where she entertained Armenian and French intellectuals who discussed literary and other matters. In the 1870s Dussap had two children, Dorine and Edgar, whose education she actively supervised. In 1879 she became an ardent member and eventually head of the “Dprotsaser Hayuhyats Enkerutyun” [School-Loving Armenian Women’s Association] which was devoted to the training of Armenian women as teachers for Armenian girls’ schools outside of

7 Sharuryan, Srpuhi Dussap, 17.
8 Hay Nor Grakanutyun Patmutyun [History of Modern Armenian Literature], 535.
Srpuhi Dussap's literary career began with her first publication, a poem entitled Karun [Spring], in 1864. It was in 1880, however, that Dussap began to publish a series of articles devoted to the question of women's emancipation. The three articles, Kanants Dastiarakutyun [Women's Education] (1880), Kanants Ashkhatutyun Skzbunke [The Beginning of Women’s Employment] (1881) and Kani Me Khosk Kanants Angortsutyun Masin [A Few Words About Women’s Unemployment] (1881), reveal Dussap’s concern with the themes of female education and employment which would become an important part of her fictional oeuvre. It was with the 1883 publication of her first novel Mayda that Dussap began to systematically portray causes of women’s oppression, the psychological effects of this oppression upon women and to theorize solutions. Mayda gained immediate attention among the Armenian intelligentsia as the first novel written by an Armenian woman and because of its feminist content. In Mayda Srpuhi Dussap challenged the socially dominant concept of “natural” male superiority and argued that women needed to emancipate themselves from their inferior social position through society’s recognition of women’s intellectual capacity and access to education and employment. She refined her theories of women’s emancipation in two subsequent novels, Siranush (1884), which addresses women and romantic love and Araksia Kam Varzuhin [Araksia or The Governess](1887) in which she discussed the lack of adequate employment available to women.

After the appearance of Araksia Kam Varzuhin [Araksia or The Governess] Dussap continued her activities in benevolent organizations, particularly those devoted to education. In 1889 she travelled to Paris with her daughter Dorine for medical treatment. Upon their return to Constantinople in 1891 Dorine died at 18 years old. Following her daughter’s death Dussap published no new works although she did continue to keep a journal and hold literary salons at her house in Constantinople. Srpuhi Dussap died on January 16, 1901.

Srpuhi Dussap’s legacy to Armenian literature was a significant one. She introduced a powerful female voice into the exclusively male Armenian literary and intellectual establishment of Constantinople and insured that women’s issues would not be

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9 Sharuryan, Srpuhi Dussap, 32, 45.
The increasing acceptance of women’s issues as a relevant topic is attested to by the fact that by 1900 several Armenian journals, for example Tsaghik and Aragats, included women’s pages in which female contributors wrote of issues affecting women. Journals such as Masis and Aragats frequently printed laudatory articles about Armenian women writers. Examples of such articles include Mer Kin Groghner [Our Women Writers], in Masis (1905) and Hay Kin Groghner [Armenian Women Writers] in Aragats (1911).

Dussap’s most visible legacy, however, was the effect she had upon young Armenian women who aspired to write. The accounts of Dussap’s positive legacy by Sibyl and Esayian and others attest to the validity of Joanna Russ’ argument that women benefit from having female literary models:

Models as guides to action and as indications of possibility are important to all artists—indeed to all people—but to aspiring women artists they are doubly valuable. In the face of continual and massive discouragement, women need models not only to see what ways the literary imagination has been at work on being female, but also as assurances that they can produce art without inevitably being second rate or running mad or doing without love.¹⁰

Both Sibyl and Esayian attested to the enormous impact Dussap had upon them as young writers. Sibyl stated that as a young woman she had dreamed of becoming another Sruuphi Dussap and in particular she admired: “her renown, intelligence, learning and literary career [which] filled my imagination...”¹¹ Zabel Esayian revealed Dussap’s influence upon her in a scene in her autobiography in which the young Zabel visits Dussap, seeking and receiving her approval for embarking upon a literary career.¹² Sibyl’s and Esayian’s statements indicate how Dussap’s career provided a model for young Armenian women of the period. The influence of Dussap’s theoretical writing upon Armenian feminism is demonstrated by a tribute to her in the first Armenian feminist journal, Artemis, established by the feminist, editor and teacher Marie Beylerian (1877-1915): “The loss of Mrs. Sruuphi Dussap to Armenian letters and especially for the issue of women’s rights is

¹² Zabel Esayian, Silihtar Parteznere, [Gardens of Silihdar], in Erker (Erevan: Haypethrat, 1959), 526.
an irreplaceable one.”13

Like Srpuhi Dussap the literary career and social activities of Sibyl (Zabel Khandjian Asatur) combined writing with activism aimed at improving the schooling of Armenian women. Although there is little information about Sibyl’s life and family some facts based on her texts and letters are known. Sibyl, the pen name of the writer Zabel Asatur, was born Zabel Khandjian in Constantinople in 1863. In her writings Sibyl indicates that she attended a French language school, then the Armenian language Holy Cross school, and finally Scutari College from 1873 until 1879.14 At a young age Sibyl became interested in the issue of female education. In 1879 with eight girlfriends from Scutari College she founded the Azganver Hayuhyats Enkerutyun [Patriotic Armenian Women’s Association]. Sibyl’s daughter, Adriine Donelian, later stated that Sibyl’s mother and aunt both supported Sibyl’s endeavour. Sibyl’s aunt, Srpuhi Alanagian, personally went to the sultan’s palace and received the authorization for the establishment of the Azganver Hayuhyats Enkerutyun [Patriotic Armenian Women’s Association].15 The aim of this association was to establish schools for rural Armenian girls. The Association lasted for twenty-two years despite its closure by the Ottoman government during the Hamidian massacres of Armenians in 1894-96 at which time the Association ceased its activities until 1908 when it was reestablished and continued to function until 1915.16 In its first five years the Association opened thirty-five schools.17

Sibyl’s Azganver Hayuhyats Enkerutyun [Patriotic Armenian Women’s Association] worked closely with Dussap’s Dprotosaver Hayuhyats Enkerutyun [School-Loving Armenian Women’s Association] (1879) which had been founded to train Armenian women to teach at schools throughout the country. The teachers from Dussap’s

14 Sibyl, Dzirnere [Charity Cases], in Erker [Works]. (Erevan: Hayastan Hratarakchutyun, 1965), 152.
16 Ibid., 11.
17 Ibid., 9.
Dprotsaser Hayuhyats Enkerutyun [School loving Armenian Women’s Association] often taught at the school run by Sibyl’s Azganver Hayuhyats Enkerutyun [Patriotic Armenian Women’s Association]. The cooperation between these two organizations suggests the inter-connection and cooperation among Armenian women’s social activities.

In 1882 Sibyl married a lawyer named Garabed Donelian. Following her marriage Sibyl lived in the provincial towns of Biledjik, Brusa and Ankara. During this period she was busy teaching, writing articles about children’s education and literature for Armenian papers published in Constantinople, and raising her daughter Adrine (d. 1975). She continued the work of the Association founding twenty schools for girls. In 1889 Sibyl returned to Constantinople and became involved in literary and educational work in the capital.

In the figure of Sibyl social activism was combined with a literary career. In 1901 after the death of her first husband Sibyl married Hrant Asatur (1862-1928) who was a co-editor with Krikor Zohrab (1861-1915) of the prestigious journal Masis from 1898. Together Sibyl and Hrant Asatur published a series of Armenian grammar books for use in schools. In this period Sibyl had another daughter, Emma.\(^{18}\) An extremely gifted teacher, Sibyl taught at the most distinguished schools in Constantinople including the Armenian language Essayian and Central lycées, and the English language “High School” and Mme.Deveau’s (French) higher educational institution. Asatur died in 1928 and Sibyl died in Constantinople in 1934.

Sibyl’s literary production consisted of essays, poems, short stories, plays and a novel. In her literary works Sibyl described the living conditions of the Armenians in the provincial towns she had lived in as a teacher. She also discussed issues such as the status of women in the family. Sibyl’s legacy is displayed most strongly by the generation of talented Armenian women she taught, who include the academic Sirarpie Der Nersesian, numerous artists, the social activist Haykanush Mark, and translators such as Sirvart Kulbenkian.\(^{19}\)

\(^{18}\) Ibid., see note 14, p.167.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., 16.
The youngest and most famous of the three authors discussed here was Zabel Esayian. There is much more biographical information about Esayian than is available about the lives of Dussap and Sibyl, in part because Esayian wrote several autobiographical pieces. These include an autobiography of her childhood in Constantinople entitled Silihtari Parteznere [Gardens of Silihdar] published in 1935 and an unfinished autobiographical work about her early adulthood which she was working on when she was arrested in 1937. This manuscript was published posthumously in the journal Sovetakan Grakanutyun in 1979 under the title Inknakensagrutyun [Autobiography]. While unfortunately unfinished and with several pages missing this document offers a tantalizing glimpse into Esayian’s adolescence and her involvement with the Armenian intellectual community of Constantinople in the 1890s. In addition to these sources a volume of Esayian’s letters to her husband and family has been published entitled, Namakner [Letters] (1977). A series of letters to and from famous Armenian writers has been published as part of a collection entitled Arevmtahay Groghneri Namakani [The Letters of Western Armenian Writers] (1972). These publications, plus her assorted unpublished papers and letters preserved in the Zabel Esayian archive at the Museum of Literature and Art in Erevan, Armenia, have ensured that many of the details of Esayian’s life and works are known.

Zabel Esayian was born Zabel Hovhannisian on February 4, 1878 in the district of Silihdar in Constantinople. She attended the well known Armenian primary school Holy Cross in Scutari, graduating from there in 1892. In her autobiography Esayian stated that after graduation from Holy Cross she was uncertain how to continue her education. Since she was not a boy she could not attend the Central School and no corresponding girl’s school was available to her.20 In the 1890s she frequented a salon run by a Russian-Armenian woman Mrs. Madakian, an educator, who established kindergartens for Armenian children in Constantinople. There Esayian stated she met for the first time well-known Armenian intellectuals including Arshag Chobanian (1872-1954), Hovhannes Shahnazar, Levon Pashlian (1868-1943) and Arpiar Arpiarian (1852-1908). In this salon social and national issues were discussed, especially the Armenian national movement and

20 Esayian, Silihtari Parteznere [Gardens of Silihdar], 528.
the Hnchakian and Tashnak political parties.21

In 1895 Zabel left Constantinople to continue her education in Paris. While young Armenian men had been studying in Paris in earnest since 1839 Esayian was one of the few Armenian women of that period to study abroad.22 The uniqueness of Zabel Esayian’s experience is demonstrated by Christine Serpoohi Jafferian’s account in the same period in the city of Smyrna of her older sister’s winning a scholarship to study in France. Jafferian says her father refused to allow his daughter to study in Paris: “No daughter of mine is going to Paris,’ he thundered, ‘God only knows what ills will befall her.”23 Esayian writes that her own father was hesitant about sending her to Paris alone but decided in favour of sending her abroad in 1895 due to the political unrest and massacres of Armenians in Constantinople and the provinces.24

In Paris Esayian studied literature and philosophy at the Sorbonne. A notebook of Esayian’s from her student days in Paris in 1896 reveals that her studies at the Sorbonne were concentrated upon medieval and modern French literature and history, Greek philosophy, Latin literature and the history and literature of the Middle East.25 In Paris Esayian began to write and publish in earnest; 1895 was the year she published her first literary work, a prose poem, which appeared in Arshag Chobanian’s periodical Tsaghik [Flower]. She wrote for various Armenian and French journals. From 1903-1904 Esayian wrote a series of articles for the women’s pages of the journal Tsaghik. These articles include Knoj Hartse [The Woman Question], Nor Kin [The New Woman] and Parizuhin [The Parisian Woman] and are reports of the European women’s movement. Later articles in the journal Aragats, such as Hay Knoj Dere Hasarakakan Kyanky Meji [The Role of the Armenian Woman in Social Life] and Hay Kine Sahmanadrutenen Edke [The Armenian

25 From the Zabel Esayian archive, Museum of Literature and Art, Erevan, document no.10.
Woman After the Constitution] (1911), examined Armenian women’s activities in Armenian national and charitable work. Her first novel, Spasman Srahin Mej [In the Waiting Room] (1903), was published in serial form in the journal Tsaghik and examines women’s experience of migration and poverty in Paris. Esayan was a prolific writer who wrote non-fiction articles about France, the Armenian community, women, literature and social issues. Her fictional texts of the period from 1903-1922 reveal the author’s interest in women, particularly female subjectivity and forms of oppression. Such thematic novels include: Erb Aylevs Chen Sirer [When They Are No Longer in Love] (1914), Verjin Bazhake [The Last Cup] (1917) and Hogis Aksorial [My Exiled Soul] (1922).

While still a student in Paris in 1900 Esayan married Armenian painter Dikran Esayan (1874-1921). They had two children, Sophie and Hrant. Esayan returned to Constantinople in 1902 where she continued her writing career. She was a well-known and admired figure in Armenian intellectual circles. Esayan’s biographer Arzumanyan notes that between 1898-1906 Esayan was a literary legend in Armenian circles with article after article published about her and her work.

In 1909 Esayan was selected as a member of the Constantinople Patriarchate’s Commission which journeyed to Cilicia to investigate the aftermath of the massacres of the Armenian population there. Her report, which contains her interviews with survivors, as well as her impressions and descriptions of the aftermath of the massacres was published in Constantinople in 1911 under the title of Averaknerun Mej [Among the Ruins]. This work was widely acclaimed upon publication as one of the best depictions of the outcome and the suffering brought about by the Cilician massacres. In 1911 Esayan’s father, whom she considered a decisive influence on her mind and spirit, died.

In 1915 Esayan’s name was on the list of the Armenian intellectuals in

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26 By subjectivity I mean the development of selfhood which is independent of the roles, such as mother and wife, which a women may play.
Constantinople who were to be arrested on April 24, 1915 by the Turkish government as a prelude to the Armenian Genocide. Esayian escaped arrest in 1915 because she was out visiting when the police arrived at her house, and her family managed to secretly send word to her not to return home. She hid for several weeks in Constantinople before eventually escaping to Bulgaria. Her mother and young son remained in Constantinople while her husband, daughter and sisters were already settled in Paris. Esayian was reunited with her son when he was brought to Bulgaria. From Bulgaria Esayian went east to the Caucasus. In 1917 she was in Baku working with Armenian refugees and orphans. Travelling through Iran, Iraq and Egypt, Esayian and her son were reunited with their family in France in 1919. In 1920 Esayian went to Cilicia with her two children in order to help with the Armenian orphanages there. When the French army withdrew from Cilicia in 1920 Esayian attempted to have the orphans moved to a safer place. She returned to Paris shortly before her husband’s death in 1921.

Following 1915 Esayian’s life was a life of exile. During this period she wrote numerous appeals seeking to draw world attention to the plight of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide, including Zoghoovurdı me Hogevarke [The Agony of A People] (1917) and Le rôle de la femme arménienne pendant la guerre (1922). She also continued to write fiction and in these years she published some of her best-known novels: Verjın Bazhake [The Last Cup] (1917), Nahanjogh Uzher [Retreating Forces](1923) and Silihtari Parteznere [Gardens of Silihdar] (1935).

Esayian’s undaunted dedication to her writing is demonstrated by a glimpse into her life during that period provided by her son, Hrant. Following Dikran Esayian’s death Zabel Esayian and Hrant stayed with Zabel’s sister who had married a Frenchman, Mr. Koks. Hrant comments, “Although Mr. Koks didn’t have a bad nature, he was in principle against women writers, and particularly foreign women writers.” Hrant described Koks as a precise man who demanded that meals and bedtimes occur at a set time every day. Hrant wrote:

Sometimes he would wake up at midnight and seeing a light on in our room, where my mother was working, he would come into the room in his nightshirt and in carping tones grumble... It was in those days that Nahanjogh Uzher [Retreating Forces] was born.”

In 1922 Sayian rented a house in Paris with her two children and her mother. Money was scarce and she supplemented her income by writing and giving lectures. In 1926-1927 Esayian visited Soviet Armenia and published her impressions in a large work entitled Prometeos Azatagryats [Prometheus Unchained] (1928). In 1933 at the invitation of the Soviet Armenian government Esayian settled in Erevan. She lectured on French literature at Erevan State University and wrote important new works including Krake Shapike [Shirt of Flame] (1934), Silhjart Parteznere [Gardens of Silhedar] (1935) and Barba Khachik [Uncle Khachik] (1966). In 1937 during the Stalinist purges of Armenian intellectuals, Esayian was arrested and sent into exile in Siberia, along with Eghishe Charents (1897-1937), Aksel Bakounts (1899-1936) and Vahan Totovents (1894-1937). She is believed to have died in prison in 1942/3.

Zabel Esayian’s legacy to Armenian literature is her creation of strong female characters who develop a strong sense of self despite social conditions which act against personal development. Esayian’s characters exist and struggle against the backdrop of Armenian history whether it is the seemingly secure world of pre-1915 Constantinople, the lonely world of exile or the struggle for survival in post-1915 Caucasus.

Critical appraisals of the works of Dussapp, Sibyl and Esayian are divided into two main schools, one nationalist and the other originating in Soviet Armenia reflecting Marxist-Leninist literary theory. Hagop Oshagan’s Hamapatker Arevmtahay Grakanutyun [Panorama of Western Armenian Literature] (1968) is an example of the first approach which evaluates Armenian literature in terms of its relationship to the development of Armenian national identity or what Khachig Tololyan identifies as an “Armenian narrative of art which demands that it contribute to the fulfillment of the social agenda.”

Hay Nor Grakanutyun Patmutyan [The History of Armenian Literature] is an example of the second approach which evaluates Armenian literature in terms of representation of a Marxist

30 Ibid., 91.
understanding of social reality. This approach emphasizes class and economic relationships in literature and tends to view Armenian feminism of this period as "bourgeois." Despite the conflict between nationalist and Marxist-Leninist criticism academics of both schools display a remarkable uniformity in their approach to the texts of these three female writers. Academics from both schools uniformly describe the lives of the authors, list their major novels and sometimes mention the controversy surrounding the author's works. They usually do not evaluate the contribution of the author's ideas and texts to the field of Armenian literature or the Armenian women's movement. While these three authors undoubtedly led interesting lives, more importantly, their writings reveal a sophisticated understanding about issues such as modernization, the political situation of the Armenian community in the Ottoman Empire, education, the institution of marriage and feminism. These writings are worthy of investigation. In the last twenty years a small number of short critical works from France and the United States have started to examine how these writers dealt with issues of gender in their texts. But these efforts have been limited to a few articles and are not full length studies. One of the aims of this dissertation is to redress the relative neglect of these authors' works and to introduce a gendered reading of selected texts. The directions found in standard critical works will be discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

A revealing feature of standard criticism of these three writers is the uniformity of the biographical accounts, in particular the emphasis on each writer's relationship to a significant male in her life. This uniformity is startling as it spans the first biographical account in 1902 to the most recent account in 1988 which ignores fresh critical literary theories. Feminist literary criticism has asked important questions such as: What has aided or inhibited women's writing? How has criticism responded to women's writing? These questions, Mary Eagleton states, have introduced into literary criticism the factor of gender and have exposed how literary tradition itself is a construct with certain writers excluded from it. Early works, such as Ellen Moer's Literary Women (1977) and Elaine Showalter's A Literature of Their Own (1977) sought to recover forgotten women writers and demonstrated the ways in which much of women's writing was excluded from the
English literary canon.32 A similar process of exclusion has occurred in the Armenian literary tradition. In accounts where Armenian women authors have not been ignored the impact and power of these authors have been minimized. In accounts of Dussap, Sibyl and Zabel Esayian, the commonplace emphasis on the writer’s life and her tutelage at the hands of a significant male, by both nationalist and Soviet critics, (who seem to be at odds on other major issues), represents an attempt to suppress the radical potential of these authors to the Armenian literary canon.33 This radical potential is the expression of diverse female subjectivities which is in conflict with the uniform depictions of Armenian women standard in most literary texts.

In order to observe the ways criticism has diluted the content and power of these authors’ works from the Armenian literary canon recurrent themes in criticism will be examined. Joanna Russ has identified various methods used by critics to suppress the writing of women. The methods she discusses include denial of agency, pollution of agency, the double standard of content, false categorizing and isolation. Similar patterns of suppression are discernible in the criticism of the works of Dussap, Sibyl and Esayian. Russ describes denial of agency as occurring when a woman writer is accused of not having written her text which is instead attributed to a man in her life.34 While accounts of the writings of Dussap and Sibyl do not actually state that the man in the author’s life wrote the text the accounts do imply that a significant man in the author’s life “awakened” each author’s literary potential. The most important work about Srpuhi Dussap is A. S. Sharuryan’s Srpahi Dussap: Kyanke ev Steghdzagortsutyune [Srpuhi Dussap: Life and Literary Works] (1963). This volume produced in Soviet Armenia is a thorough account of Dussap’s life. Sharuryan uses contemporary journal articles and letters to piece together Dussap’s biography. Although generally sensitive to Dussap’s social achievements and feminism, Sharuryan attributes Dussap’s literary work in Armenian to the poet Mgrdich

33 Although I have never seen the phrase “Armenian literary canon” used, one undoubtedly exists. This is demonstrated by the widespread delineation of certain authors as great in all critical texts and through the publication of series of classics of Armenian authors.
34 Joanna Russ, How To Suppress Women’s Writing, 21.
Beshigtschlian:

Who knows perhaps she would have ended up like all the children of the rich, despising Armenian, if not for the influence of Mgrdich Beshigtschlian whom the twenty-two year old Armenian girl met in 1863. The writer’s great fame and ardent love of Armenian inflamed the young lady’s dormant patriotic feelings and she began to take private Armenian lessons and write skillful verses.35

Sharuryan attributes Dussap’s Armenian education and the beginning of her literary endeavors to Beshigtschlian. Continuing, Sharuryan states:

For Srpuhi, Beshigtschlian remained the greatest authority whose name she always uttered with timid respect. The teacher awakened in her profound love for her native literature and culture, from that time on she became proficient in Armenian and classical Armenian in the space of one year.36

In both these passages Sharuryan uses the imagery of sleep to describe Dussap’s state before Beshigtschlian’s advent into her life. The imagery of sleep suggests a ‘passive’, female state of mind into which the ‘active’, male must infuse energy and literary creativity.

It has been suggested that, Beshigtschlian’s other role in Dussap’s life was that of a lover. Sharuryan states that while Beshigtschlian loved her, Dussap’s feelings for him were “respectable”:

In the teacher’s heart dwelt a powerful love for his student. He presented her with heart-breaking love songs but Srpuhi only ever loved him as a compassionate sister.37

Sharuryan defends Dussap’s relationship with Beshigtschlian by stating it was innocent on Dussap’s part. James Etmekjian, in an article about Dussap entitled A Nineteenth Century Feminist, speculates that Dussap returned Beshigtschlian’s love and uses this possibility to attack her moral character. Etmekjian hints that the reason Beshigtschlian and Dussap did not marry was because she was from a higher social class:

her [Srpuhi Dussap] engagement to a doctor made it clear to him [Beshigtschlian] that a poorly paid teacher with ill health could not hope to marry someone in Srpuhi Vahanian’s position, although she admired and may even have loved him.38

35 All translations from Armenian into English throughout the dissertation are mine unless otherwise stated. Victoria Rowe. A. Sharuryan, Srpuhi Dussap, 4.
36 Ibid., 4.
37 Ibid., 4.
The article continues on to describe Dussap's life and give a summary of her three novels and the philosophy espoused in each one. Etmekjian mentions the author's advocacy in *Siranush* (1884) of marriage for love and the cruelty of a father's forcing a daughter to marry for money rather than love. Etmekjian ends the article by returning to the theme of Dussap's and Beshigtashlian's possible romantic relationship:

Her father was dead, and she was raised by a broad-minded mother. The question arises as to whether the decision to marry someone other than Beshigtashlian was hers or her brother's. If hers, it exposes her to a charge of insincerity.39

In this passage Etmekjian states that as Dussap did not come from a repressive family, and as she had a "broad-minded" mother she may have had a voice in choosing her own husband. Etmekjian implies that in the absence of parental objection Dussap was hypocritical in rejecting Beshigtashlian and her writings contain ideas which she preached but did not practice. The weakness of Etmekjian's attack on Dussap's character is that it is entirely without factual justification as there is no evidence to suggest that Dussap or Beshigtashlian ever contemplated marriage to each other. Etmekjian's speculation about Dussap's "choice" concerning marriage to Beshigtashlian is a fantasy not based on reality.40 That Etmekjian apparently felt free to make such claims despite having no evidence, a fact he admits in the same article, demonstrates the kind of critical treatment of Armenian women writers have received up until the the present day.

The emphasis on a female author's morals is found in much early twentieth-century criticism and has continued until the present. Russ notes that in nineteenth-century England "virtuous" women were expected to know little about life but that in English literary criticism knowledge of life was considered essential in order to write. As a result of this concept it was believed that a woman writer could not be both a virtuous woman and a good writer. This led to charges of immorality levelled against women writers of the nineteenth century, for example George Sand and George Eliot.41 The suspicion of

39 Ibid., 38.
40 Ibid., 38. Etmekjian acknowledges the "absence of published letters and the full story of her first engagement," but continues his speculation despite lack of evidence.
immorality plagued Armenian women writers as it had done their European counterparts and hence the allegations of a possible illicit relationship between Dussap and her tutor. The allegation appears to have been based on rumours of the time. The frequency of rumours about women writers’ morality is attested to in an autobiographical piece by Esayian in which she noted that certain intellectuals, for example Hovhanness Shahnazar, who appeared liberal in their writings in journals, supporting women’s rights and divorce, privately gossiped about the women they worked with. In particular Esayian mentions that while Sibyl was a good colleague (at the newspapers), privately in the literary salon her male co-workers criticized her and gossiped that she had an intimate relationship with Hrant Asatur (her second husband) while her first husband was still alive.42

The issue of immoral behaviour was made even more pointed during a lecture on Zabel Esayian by author Diran Cherakian (Indra) (1875-1921). He criticized her saying, “As a student in Europe this woman led a dismal, dubious life. She was married and divorced.” When a student protested Cherakian’s attack on the author’s private life during his lecture on her writing, Cherakian argued that there was a connection between a writer’s lifestyle and literary output.43

The start of Dussap’s career is attributed to a man, and the end of her literary career to a woman: the death of her daughter, Dorine. Dussap’s last publication was in 1887, in 1889 (or 1890) Dorine became ill with tuberculosis. She died in 1891. In one of the first pieces written about the affect of Dorine’s death on Dussap, Sibyl stated: “The mother in her was stronger than the woman and writer in her.”44 This statement of Sibyl’s has been widely quoted and is found in Sharuryan’s Srpahi Dussap: Kyanke ev Steghdzagordzutyune [Srpahi Dussap: Life and Literary Works], Hay Nor Grakanutyun Patmutyun [The History of Modern Armenian Literature] and Etmekjian’s A Nineteenth

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42 Zabel Esayian, Inkamaksagagutyun [Autobiography], 69.
43 This scene is described in Hampartzoum Kelikian “Zabel Yessayan: Cassandra From Constantinople,” 8. There is a suggestion that Cherakian’s antipathy towards Esayian was based on the fact that the main character in her satirical novel Keghis Hancharnor [Phony Geniuses] was said to be modeled on him. This does not change the fact, however, that Cherakian chose to criticize Esayian in gendered terms implying she was guilty of sexual impropriety.
44 Sibyl, “Tikin Srpahi Dussap Ir Srahin Mej” [Mrs. Srpahi Dussap in her Salon], 183.
Century Feminist. The popularity of Sibyl’s phrase may be because it encompasses widespread cultural beliefs about women. For example women are typically represented as being primarily and fundamentally maternal; in such a construct being a woman, an individual, and most certainly a writer, are not as important as being a mother and can be easily forsaken when faced with a maternal tragedy.

That Dorine’s death did not mark the end of all Dussap’s literary activities is demonstrated by the fact that although Sibyl and the unnamed author of the article about Dussap in Artemis state that Dussap burned her writings after her daughter’s death, both pieces also contain clues which indicate that Dussap continued to engage in literary activities after 1890. Sibyl’s piece entitled Tikin Srpuhi Dussap Ir Srahin Mej [Mrs. Srpuhi Dussap in her Salon], describes her visit with Dussap in 1899, and portrays a literary salon with Dussap at the centre conversing with various people on intellectual topics.45 The article in Artemis also hints at her literary activity following Dorine’s death stating that:

Mrs. Dussap abandoned her manuscripts after the death, except in French. She kept a journal, in that language, but didn’t write in Armenian any longer.46

Sibyl’s article corroborates the statement in Artemis that Dussap was writing a journal in French in the 1890s.47 Hosting a literary salon and writing in a journal are actions which indicate that Dussap continued some of her literary activities following the death of her daughter and belie the persuasive myth of a mother who easily gave up her literary career when faced with a family tragedy. This is not to suggest that Dussap was not greatly affected by her daughter’s death and that this death did not alter her literary career, but it challenges the notion that women can easily abandon intellectual activity, as if it is a hobby and not a serious occupation. Dussap’s activities following her daughter’s death suggest that she continued to be involved in literary activities until her own death in 1901 two years after Sibyl’s visit to her literary salon.

47 Sibyl, “Tikin Srpuhi Dussap Ir Srahin Mej” [Mrs. Srpuhi Dussap in her Salon], 183.
Artemis’ and Sibyl’s suggestion that Dussap continued her literary activities in French, but not in Armenian, is intriguing and may reflect Dussap’s sense of feeling restricted by Armenian cultural expectations of proper behaviour for a grieving mother. There is evidence that Dussap felt that the Armenian literary establishment was hostile to women writers. This is revealed by Zabel Esayian’s account of her visit to Dussap for guidance. Esayian wrote that when Dussap learned she wanted to become a writer she warned her that Armenian society was not ready to permit a woman to make a name for herself:

She [Dussap] said to me that in our [social] reality it was still regarded as intolerable for a woman to want a place in the public sphere. To overcome this it was necessary to rise above mediocrity. [Dussap said] “A man is free to be a mediocre writer but not a woman.”

The denial of women’s agency has continued in works about Srpouhi Dussap until the present. In the chapter on Srpouhi Dussap in Hay Nor Grakanutyun Patmutyun [The History of Modern Armenian Literature] (1966) the author expresses the familiar argument that Dussap was not interested in Armenian culture until she was taught by Beshigtsashilian. What is particularly astounding about this statement in this text is that in the proceeding pages the author describes in detail Dussap’s mother’s commitment to the Armenian people and culture, which has been amply demonstrated by her founding of charitable organizations and schools to assist in educating Armenian children. Such a view also ignores the evidence from Dussap’s preface to Mayda in which the author stated:

I was particularly inspired by my mother’s progressive ideas which stood out like a bright light in the conservative Armenian world; nothing is as strong as a mother’s encouragement.

Despite this evidence, the role and influence of Nazli Vahan’s patriotic activities on her daughter’s intellectual development are completely ignored in all accounts of Dussap’s writing. In part this is because the role of the salon in Armenian intellectual and literary life

48 Esayian, Silihtari Parteznere [Gardens of Silihtar], 527.
49 Hay Nor Grakanutyun Patmutyun [The History of Modern Armenian Literature], 536.
50 Ibid., 535.
has never been examined. Like salons in France, Armenian salons were important centers of intellectual and political discussion in the Zartonk period and were invariably hosted by women. The importance of the salon on Armenian intellectual life is hinted at through the fact that we know influential and active women like Nazli Vahan and Srpuhi Dussap ran salons. Zabel Esayian later attested to the importance of such a salon, run by an Armenian woman a Mrs. Madagian, in her own development as a writer and a social activist. The Armenian salons, which were attended by both women and men, provided a meeting place for intellectuals to gather to discuss politics, literature and theories of modernization. The salons also provided intellectuals with connections. For example Esayian states that she met Arshag Chobanian at Mrs. Madagian’s salon. Chobanian, who was the editor of Tsaghiq, published Esayian’s first attempts at poetry and non-fiction essays on women’s issues. Esayian’s account of her experience of the Constantinople salon attests to its intellectual significance in the development of an intellectual class in Armenian society of this period.52

The chapter on Dussap in Hay Nor Grakanutyun Patmutyun [The History of Modern Armenian Literature] does have some importance, however, as it is one of the few to attempt to discuss the content of Dussap’s novels. The author acknowledges the feminist content of Dussap’s novels but argues that while Dussap accurately portrayed women’s oppression she failed to find a plausible solution to ending women’s oppression other than emphasis on individual determination. As I shall argue in subsequent chapters Dussap’s emphasis on individual action stemmed from her view that personal emancipation was the first step to finding a solution to the social problem of women’s oppression.

Apart from one volume about her life and works, Sibyl has fared worse than Srpuhi Dussap as she has been largely ignored in studies of Western Armenian literature. The danger to the appreciation of women’s literature of omitting women writers from literary studies is revealed by Van Gerven’s observation:

... As each succeeding generation of women ... is excluded from the literary record, the connections between women ... writers become more and more obscure, which in turn simply justifies the exclusion of more and more women on

52 See Zabel Esayian, Inknakensagutyun [Autobiography], 67.
the grounds that they are anomalous—they just don’t fit in.53

While in her lifetime Sibyl enjoyed a good reputation in established intellectual circles she has been almost entirely forgotten since her death. An article entitled Mer Kin Groghnere “Our Women Writers” (1905) praised Sibyl as an ideal female writer who avoided the outspoken feminism of Dussap.54 Sibyl’s very lack of controversy, however, seems to have ensured her disappearance from literary accounts.

The only modern study about Sibyl is written by Arpik Minasyan entitled Sibyl (1980) and is a study of an individual author in her historical context rather than a theoretical analysis of the content of her literary works. The value of Minasyan’s work is found in this author’s use of new sources. She makes use of correspondence with Sibyl’s daughter Adrine Donelian, to piece together previously unknown details of Sibyl’s life, especially her work in female education. However, Minasyan offers little interpretation of Sibyl’s ideology as expressed in her essays and fiction writings. Minasyan’s study of Sibyl resembles accounts of Dussap’s life in her attribution of Sibyl’s literary career to the influence of a man, Sibyl’s husband.55 It is true that Hrant Asatur was a writer and that he and Sibyl collaborated in the writing of an Armenian grammar book and school textbooks. Yet it is clear from the biographical information which Minasyan provides that Sibyl’s concern with female education (she founded the Azganver Hayuhyats Enkerutyun [Patriotic Armenian Women’s Association] in 1879) and her lifelong teaching career (which stimulated her writing) predated her marriages.

Of the three writers examined in this dissertation Zabel Esayian was the most prolific and had the highest literary status. The critical and biographical accounts of Esayian display a complex and paradoxical response to the author and her works. The pattern of attributing external influence to a female author’s literary production, which has been noted in biographical accounts of Dussap and Sibyl, is also evident in discussions of Esayian’s literary career, with a slight variation. In the case of Esayian there is no strong male presence in her life. Her husband, Dikran Esayian, is not viewed as influential in Esayian’s

53 Quoted in Russ, How To Suppress Women’s Writing, 80.
54 Mer Kin Groghnere [Our Women Writers], Masis 30 (October 1, 1905):472.
55 Arpik M. Minasyan, Sibyl, 16.
life. Perhaps this is because the couple frequently lived apart, or perhaps because Dikran Esayian, a little known painter, did not achieve the fame which Esayian attained. The factor which is used to give legitimacy to and at the same time maintain authority over Esayian’s writing is her university education in France. In the case of Esayian her French education is viewed as a source of inspiration and legitimization. A French education is viewed as bestowing status upon her and functions as a principle of male institutional authority in the same manner that Beshigtashlian and Hrant Asatur are seen by critics as primary agents in the lives of Dussap and Sibyl. One of the earliest examples of this view is Levon Kirishdjian’s article Hay Gragituhin Fransakan Grakanutyyan Mej, [An Armenian Authoress in the French Literary Scene], (1905) which attributes to Esayian a more significant role in the French journal Écrits pour l’Art published by René Ghil than she actually played. Kirishdjian states that Esayian was a member of the editorial board of Écrits pour l’Art and the only woman and foreigner who had the “honour of being invited to collaborate with René Ghil.”56 He also states that Esayian had three roles in this publication, as a member of the board, as contributor to the paper, and finally as Constantinople’s literary correspondent.57 There is no evidence for Kirishdjian’s claim. The only existing evidence of a connection between Esayian and the journal Écrits pour l’Art is the publication of two poems and one short story by Esayian in its pages.58

Two recent studies repeat Kirishdjian’s claim that Esayian was published by various prestigious French journals. Sevak Arzumanyan in Zabel Esayian: Kyanke ev Gortse (1965) and Hampartzoum Kelikian in Zabel Yessayan: Cassandra From Constantinople (1979) both state that she had publications in Mercure de France, Humanité Nouvelle, Écrits pour l’Art and La Grand France.59 A search of these French language

56 Levon Kirishdjian, Hay Gragituhin Fransakan Grakanutyyan Mej, [An Armenian Authoress in the French Literary Scene], Masis 17 (June 18, 1905):261.
57 Ibid., 262.
journals has failed to reveal any new publications by Esayian. This leads to the question of why critics have maintained that she had close ties with the French literary establishment.60 The reason appears to be twofold, the first being the Armenian intelligentsia’s admiration for and emulation of French literature. Esayian’s French education and acceptance in its literary establishment was viewed as proof of her literary sophistication, and hence Armenian literature’s coming of age in the arena of European literature. The second reason is that in large part, Esayian’s acceptance by the Armenian literary establishment was based on her acquaintance with French literary traditions which ensured her place in the Armenian literary canon despite her gender. At the same time, however, the French connection could also be turned against Esayian, as demonstrated by an article in Masis entitled Mer Kin Groghnere [Our Women Writers]. The author accused her of being “more like a Frenchwoman than an Armenian woman.”61 [italics mine]. The use of the term “Frenchwoman” rather than “French writer,” reveals the commonplace judgment of Esayian which was not based on her literary merit but on her behaviour as an Armenian woman.

In her work on ‘borderlands,’ Gloria Anzaldúa states that: “a borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition.” In border culture “males make the rules and laws; women transmit them...The culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system of men.”62 We may consider the Armenian community of Constantinople as being a type of borderland, a minority group in the Ottoman Empire, living outside the lands of historic Armenia. In this ‘borderland’ situation, Armenian women were expected to preserve Armenian culture. Hence, the charge leveled against Esayian in Masis for being more like a Frenchwoman than an Armenian woman, is more

60 My findings are supported by Chouchik Dasnabedian’s extensive bibliography in Zabel Essayan ou l’univers lumineux de la litterature, 73. Dasnabedian lists the three texts published in Écrits pour l’Art and one poem in Humanité Nouvelle but no others in French literary journals.
61 Mer Kin Groghnere [Our Women Writers], Masis 30 (October 1, 1905): 473.
serious than may be immediately apparent. It reveals the myriad of pressures women faced when attempting to engage in the non-traditional behaviour of having a literary career. It is a tension that has remained unresolved in critical appraisals of these writers.

An example of this unresolved tension is revealed in Hamapatker Arevmtahay Grakanutyun [Panorama of Western Armenian Literature]. The author Hagop Oshagan displays a discomfort with reconciling Esayian's gender with his obvious admiration of her writing. He praises the psychological depth of Esayian's female characters. He particularly praises her portrayal in Averaknerun Mej [Among the Ruins] (1911) of the horrors of the massacres of Armenians in Cilicia in 1909, saying:

Not one Armenian should ever forget the anguish and tears in the unforgettable book Averaknerun Mej [Among the Ruins]. And that book was written by a woman.63 [italics mine]

His emphasis, after praising Averaknerun Mej [Among the Ruins], on the author's gender suggests his difficulty in reconciling it with her work. In order to reconcile his sense that it is anomalous for an Armenian woman to have written one of the most powerful accounts of the Armenian experience of massacre Oshagan employs two methods to de-emphasize Esayian's gender: he separates Esayian from the tradition of Armenian women's writing and employs masculine imagery in his discussion of her work.

Oshagan separates Esayian from the intellectual tradition of Dussap's and Sibyl's writing by continually emphasizing the superiority of her writing over the other two authors. He states that Dussap's novels are "dry and soulless," and the female characters of both Dussap and Sibyl are "unrealistic" in contrast to Esayian's characters which he describes as psychologically sophisticated and socially diverse.64 His criticism of Dussap's and Sibyl's characters as "unrealistic" ignores the fact that neither author made any attempt to write in a "realistic" style as they both belonged to the Romantic literary tradition. Sibyl even stated in print that she preferred romanticism to realism and believed

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64 Ibid., 246, 253-4.
that romanticism better explored women’s reality. His separation of Esayian from the Armenian female literary tradition ignores Esayian’s own stated admiration for Dussap and her debt to Dussap’s characters as literary models despite the fact that Esayian was more interested in her characters’ psychology than Dussap had been. I will deal more fully with Esayian’s use of Dussap as a literary model in chapter four. At this point it is important to note merely that Dussap was a model for Esayian and that this fact is suppressed in Oshagan’s discussion of Esayian’s writing.

The result of Oshagan’s separation of Esayian from the Armenian female literary tradition makes Esayian an isolated, rather incomprehensible figure. Russ calls the categorization of women writers as ‘rare,’ “anomalousness” which ensures marginality. If the woman writer is rare and not part of a tradition it is much easier to dismiss both her and other women writers as exceptions and outside of mainstream literature. This, in turn, results in the exclusion of women writers and women’s literary traditions from literary histories. As Spender notes, the failure to respect and preserve women’s ideas causes women to believe they do not produce knowledge or theory, which in turn contributes to women’s belief in their own inferiority and encourages acceptance of the idea that they have nothing worthwhile to contribute.

The second method Oshagan employs to reconcile Esayian’s gender with her writing is to speak of her work in masculine terms. Russ notes that books by women are frequently attributed to “the man inside her” or the author’s “masculine mind.” Oshagan calls Esayian’s writing “strong” like a man’s writing and uses phallic imagery, such as speaking of Esayian’s “thrust,” to describe her entry into Armenian letters.

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65 Sibyl, “Tikin Sruhi Dussap Ir Srahin Mej” [Mrs. Sruhi Dussap in her Salon], 179.
66 Esayian’s admiration for Dussap is made clear by Esayian in her autobiography Silihtari Parteznere, 527 and in an article entitled “Mer Kinere” [Our Women] Tsaghik (April 26, 1903): 151. Esayian’s relationship to Dussap will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters.
67 Russ, How To Suppress Women’s Writing, 85.
68 Spender, ed. Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Women’s Intellectual Traditions, 2.
69 Russ, How To Suppress Women’s Writing, 22.
70 Hagop Oshagan, Hamapatker Arevmtahay Grakanutyun [Panorama of Western Armenian Literature], 246-247.
An important work from Soviet Armenia, on the life and writing of Zabel Esayian is Sevak Arzumanyan’s *Zabel Esayian: Kyanke ev Gortse* [Zabel Esayian: Her Life and Work] (1965). Like Oshagan, Arzumanyan praises Esayian’s works as psychological portraits of her female characters. Arzumanyan calls Esayian’s work “realistic and artistic [geghavestakan].” Like Oshagan, who identified Esayian as one of the “Artist Generation” [Arvestaget Serund] Arzumanyan emphasizes the aesthetic quality of Esayian’s work. Arzumanyan’s praise of aesthetics, however, tends to obscure the political elements of Esayian’s writing, including her feminism. It is clear from her autobiographical writing that Esayian viewed herself as a social activist and her writing as a tool in this struggle. In *Inknakensagrutyun* [Autobiography] Esayian states that from the time of her adolescence, she rejected what she identified as typical Bolis “ornamental” literature consisting of frivolous themes, in favour of serious, socially relevant topics. Her early writings on women’s emancipation, and the problems of social and economic inequalities within the Armenian-Ottoman community, such as *Erb Ayleys Chen Sirer*, [When They Are No Longer in Love] support Esayian’s statement that she was concerned with social issues from the beginning of her writing career.

Chouchik Dasnabédian’s book *Zabel Essayan ou l’univers lumineux de la littérature* (1988) differs from Oshagan’s and Arzumanyan’s works by focusing exclusively on Esayian’s literary texts rather than providing a biography of the author. Dasnabédian provides a skillful critical reading of Esayian’s texts. She is the first critic to examine the issue of female subjectivity in Esayian’s writing. In particular Dasnabédian emphasizes the way in which the development of the self is connected to the act of writing in Esayian’s novel *Verjin Bazhake* [The Last Cup]. Although Dasnabédian’s analysis of Esayian’s writing provides an intriguing line of inquiry which will be explored further in chapter four; I find that her emphasis on Esayian’s understanding of what Dasnabédian terms the “psyché féminine” and her suggestion that the author (Esayian) is inseparable from her

71 Arzumanyan, *Zabel Esayian: Kyanke ev Gortse* [Zabel Esayian: Life and Works], 190.
72 Esayian, *Inknakensagrutuin* [Autobiography], 57.
73 Dasnabédian, *Zabel Essayan ou l’univers lumineux de la littérature*, 33.
female characters obscures much of the feminist content of Esayian’s work. Dasnabédian’s approach makes the author appear isolated and disconnected by ignoring Esayian’s place in the Armenian female literary tradition and Armenian women’s social activism.74

Seta Kapoian’s On the Threshold (1978) and Khachig Tololyan’s The Representation of Woman’s Desire in Zabel Yesayan’s Verchin Pazhag’eh (1988) constitute a major break from previous critical attitudes through the use of feminist perspectives on the writings of Zabel Esayian. In On the Threshold Kapoian examines Esayian’s Silihtari Parteznere [Garden’s of Silihdar], a memoir of Esayian’s childhood in Constantinople and a work which has long been popular in the Armenian Diaspora.75 Kapoian’s article is, as she states in the introduction, an attempt to “relate as an Armenian woman living in France to an Armenian woman writer of the past.”76 Her treatment of Esayian’s work, therefore is personal. But it differs from the personal and nationalist evaluation by Hagop Oshagan, in that Kapoian specifically attempts to examine Esayian’s work from a gendered perspective, using a feminist and psychoanalytical theoretical basis. In the article Kapoian innovatively discusses Esayian’s texts from a socio-cultural perspective, a stance which is still, twenty years later, infrequent in discussions of Armenian literature. Kapoian examined each of Esayian’s female characters in Silihtari Parteznere [Garden’s of Silihdar] from the perspective of their position within patriarchal culture and the family in particular and exposes the narrative devices through which Esayian represented the boundaries between proper and sensual behaviour in women’s lives. Kapoian’s article contributes to our understanding of Esayian as a writer of great subtlety and as an author who viewed the women of her society as encumbered by patriarchal and traditional customs.

74 Dasnabédian uses the term “psyché feminine” as if women share an intrinsic psychological state, a view which obscures differences between women. She also calls Esayian’s female characters romantic doubles of the author, a view which tends to make Esayian’s writing appear “personal” rather than “political.” Ibid., 29, 37.

75 The popularity of the work is attested to by the fact that it is the only work of Esayian’s to be translated. A partial translation in English has been done by Ara Baliozian, The Gardens of Silihdar and Other Writings, (New York: Ashod Press, 1982) and a French translation has been published entitled Les Jardins de Silihdar, (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994).

Applying a feminist literary approach, Khachig Tololyan’s article The Representation of Woman’s Desire in Zabel Esayian’s Verchin Pazhag’eh (1988) is unique among scholarly studies of Esayian’s writings. Tololyan correctly states that most of the contemporary criticism of Esayian’s works do not use feminist literary criticism and thereby miss Esayian’s feminism in general and her depiction of female sexuality in particular. Tololyan regards this lack of acknowledgment of sexuality as a feature of Armenian fiction and criticism, which he says affects both scholarship in former Soviet Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora. He states that it is based on a misconception that:

the massive problems created by the trauma of genocide and the urgencies of maintaining collective identity rightly overshadow the problems of sexuality and the construction of gendered subjectivity, both in the real world and in the narrative. This view follows in part from an Armenian conception of narrative art which demands that it contribute to the fulfillment of the social agenda.77

Tololyan identifies Esayian’s novella Verjin Bazhake [The Last Cup] as having been published first in 1924, while in fact, the novel appeared in a serialized form in the journal Gortsie in 1917. This early date is significant in view of Tololyan’s above quoted passage; published only two years after the beginning of the Armenian Genocide in 1915 this novella has been attacked by subsequent critics for precisely the reasons identified by Tololyan, it does not deal with the issue of Genocide and has been severely criticized as concerned with the “insignificant issue” of a woman’s psychology.78 These opinions overlook the fact that while the novel was published in 1917 the action of the text occurs in the pre-1915 world and may even have been written by Zabel Esayian prior to 1915.

By applying a feminist literary approach, Tololyan’s article illuminates much of the feminist content of Zabel Esayian’s Verjin Bazhake [The Last Cup]. Tololyan analyzes the type of language Esayian used and how this language reflected the author’s construction of gender. Through an examination of the language Esayian used in the novella Tololyan concludes that the author challenged the:

categories of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ in general, and the conventional Armenian

conceptions of masculine and feminine desire in particular.\textsuperscript{79} Tololyan’s evaluation of Esayian’s use of language and gender is unique among critical studies of her work and enables him to reach new conclusions about Esayian’s writing, specifically her portrayal of female sexual desire in the novel:

she [Esayian] is concerned to show that gender is a category used in Armenian society and fiction to hide the coexistence in men and women of aspects of desire attributed only to one sex.\textsuperscript{80}

His recognition of Esayian’s subversion of the categories of femininity and masculinity is a particularly intriguing thesis and will be analyzed further in the course of this dissertation. Tololyan’s article which is only five pages in length and was published twelve years ago has been, until this dissertation, the only scholarly effort to evaluate the feminist content of Zabel Esayian’s writing using feminist theory. I intend to draw upon some of the aspects of Esayian’s writing mentioned by Tololyan and to argue, contrary to the approach utilized by the aforementioned critical studies, that the writing of Sruhi Dussap, Sibyl and Zabel Esayian constitute an Armenian intellectual tradition of feminist discourse. This intellectual tradition has been commonly obscured by studies of each author which focus on the author’s life and writing in her historical context but make little attempt to connect the author’s thoughts to the wider intellectual currents of the period. Either that or these studies take an approach which obscures the author’s feminist content and denies her place in the Armenian women’s literary tradition.

Chapter one will discuss the Armenian literary and intellectual milieux of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Chapter two will move on to examine the three authors’ non-fictional writings in the creation of an Armenian feminist theory. Chapters three and four discuss themes the authors, considered important to Armenian feminist discourse. The concluding chapter will address the authors’ creation of an emancipated modern woman through the figure of the “New Armenian Woman” and the importance of this figure to Armenian feminist and intellectual discourse.

\textsuperscript{79} Tololyan, “The Representation of Woman’s Desire in Zabel Esayian’s Verchin Pazhag’eh,” 81-2.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 83.
CHAPTER ONE
THE ARMENIAN INTELLECTUAL AND LITERARY MOVEMENT

Modern Western Armenian literature developed in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as part of the intellectual movement known as Zartonk. Zartonk is often translated as Renaissance but it literally means awakening, signifying the concept that Armenian intellectuals were awakening from a long period of cultural, intellectual, literary and political sleep in the centuries following the Ottoman conquest of Western Armenia. The beginning of the Zartonk (Awakening) has been attributed to various causes: foreign intellectual influence, greater contact with other Armenian Diaspora communities, the Armenian Apostolic church's activities in printing, translating and education during the rule of two enlightened patriarchs of Constantinople, Golod (1715-1741) and Nalian (1741-1749, 1752-1764), and the intellectual work of the Mkhitarist monastic order. Founded by Mkhitar of Sebastia in 1701 the Mkhitarists initiated a programme of education and printing of ancient Armenian texts, thereby acquainting many Armenians with texts previously unavailable to them.1 As an Armenian Roman Catholic order based in Venice and later Vienna, the Mkhitarists facilitated the introduction of European science and knowledge to the Armenians through a large scale translation process.2

Zartonk period intellectuals focused on three areas which facilitated the development of modern literature: the creation of a mass educational system, the development of a written form of vernacular Armenian and the foundation of a national press. The education movement began with the opening of parochial schools. These schools were usually funded by wealthy patrons and benevolent associations which founded schools for urban and rural Armenians. The emphasis on this educational movement was so great that it was one of the primary considerations of the press throughout the nineteenth century. Many articles appeared in the press discussing school buildings, sanitation, programme of study, teacher preparation, vocational studies, female education and the social usefulness of the

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Initially, schools were established for the education of boys but demand grew for girls' schools. As will be discussed in the next chapter these schools often received funds from Armenian women's associations in Constantinople.

The importance of these schools to the development of modern literature is that they provided education for various children, male and female, so that literacy was not confined to the clergy as it had been in the past. The expansion of literacy to lay elements and to both females and males assisted in the creation of a secular literature and helped to introduce women's voices of various classes into modern Armenian literature. The schools also acquainted Armenian children with their literary and historical heritage, providing writers with literary models and a sense of history which was important in the construction of national identity.

The nineteenth-century education system introduced knowledge of European sciences and humanities. Armenian schools routinely taught foreign languages, particularly French, which introduced authors to European literary forms such as the short story and the novel. In this period higher education in France was encouraged by sending males, and later females, to study abroad. This practice began in 1845-46 when approximately forty male students were sent to France to attend university. As most were the sons of artisans, their education was paid for by wealthy patrons. Upon the return of these students circa 1850, they formed an influential intellectual group within the Armenian community of the time. Avowed modernists, they brought with them new ideas regarding society, social relations, education, technology and politics.

The second issue of importance in the development of modern Armenian literature was the creation of a written, modern, vernacular language. One of the main tasks of the nineteenth-century Armenian literati was the creation of a modern literary Armenian language which could express a myriad of concepts while still being intelligible to the

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4 The importance of Armenian history in Western Armenian literature can be deduced from the number of works, especially the poetry of Daniel Varuzhan (1884-1915), which use imagery from the Armenian past.
Armenian speaking masses, unlike the older literary language, (grabar), which was not understood by those not schooled in it. Certain Armenian intellectuals wanted the vernacular Armenian language (ashkharhabar) to replace classical Armenian as the basis of the written language. The debate over classical and vernacular Armenian was not simply a debate over language but was seen by both sides as symbolic: a debate over tradition and modernity. The church was a staunch supporter of the continued use of classical Armenian while the professionals and intellectuals, usually schooled in the new learning and sciences, supported the use of the vernacular, as a symbol of a new age, popular will and as more conducive to the interests of Armenians as a nation.7

As a result of this linguistic debate various books of modern Armenian grammar appeared. These grammars were all somewhat different as there was no standard consensus on what modern written Armenian would be because spoken Armenian existed in various dialectical forms. Famous intellectual figures such as Krikor Odian (1834-1887) and Nahabed Rusinian (1819-1876) wrote grammars of the vernacular language.8 In 1880 Dussap wrote an essay supporting the use of the vernacular as a written language. Sibyl, in collaboration with her husband, wrote a grammar of vernacular Armenian. According to the memoirs of a contemporary of Sibyl’s, Anais, Sibyl’s grammar book was highly popular upon its publication.9

Language was central also to Zabel Esayian’s work and identity as a writer who participated in the creation of modern literary Western Armenian. Esayian’s novels, like the novels of her fellow Armenian authors, contributed to the creation of the modern Armenian literary language by forming and using new words and styles and by fashioning spoken language into a written form.10

The three writers’ support of the vernacular as a written language places them

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7 Ibid., 61.
9 Ibid., 160.
10 Jamanakakits Hayots Lezvi Batsatrakan Bararan (Erevan: Haykakan SSH Gitutiunneri Akademia, 1969):x. The work of these novelists in language creation is demonstrated by the fact that a dictionary published in 1969 in Erevan quotes various authors’ word usage to demonstrate word meaning and usage; Esayian’s writing is included in the list of authors quoted in this dictionary.
among the group of intellectuals concerned with modernity. It is necessary to stress that Dussap, Sibyl and Esayian participated in the education and language debates as modernizing intellectuals. Frequently these writers are simply designated as "women writers" in histories of modern Armenian literature with no attempt to integrate female writers into the intellectual debates of the time. This approach tends to obscure the ways in which women authors participated in and shaped the intellectual trends of the Zartonk. The connection between feminism and modernity in the works of Srpahi Dussap will be explored in greater detail in chapter four in order to expand our understanding of the role of modernity in the intellectual thought of the Zartonk period.

The triumph of vernacular Armenian as the basis for the modern written language was in large part due to the establishment of the periodic press. Vahe Oshagan states that from the creation of the Western Armenian press in the 1840s, its writers, editors and readers saw its role as being one of enlightenment, edification and entertainment. He states that the press supported secular forces, the use of the vernacular, national unity and a critical spirit. The supporters of the classical and the vernacular argued in the pages of the press, but used the same language, the vernacular, since the vernacular was the most widely understood language, and both sides wanted to influence readers.11 The press also assisted in the development of the vernacular by its creation of a language of journalism.12

The history of the Armenian press began in Madras, India in 1794 and Venice, Italy in 1799 with the establishment of the journals Monitor and Annuals. The press enabled writers to disseminate new ideas, scientific and technological advances, to inform readers about Armenian communities in other countries, and to introduce readers to other peoples and ways of life. Most importantly in the development of the modern literature, it provided an arena for authors to publish their works. The vast majority of Armenian authors had novels and short stories published in a serialized form in journals. The first appearances of Dussap's, Sibyl's and Esayan's novels and short stories appeared in newspapers and journals ensuring a wider audience than a book might reach.

11 Vahe Oshagan, “Cultural and Literary Awakening of Western Armenians,” 60.
The connection between the press and modern literature is so strong that it has led the literary historian, Vahe Oshagan, to date the beginning of modern western Armenian literature with the publication of the journal Masis in 1852.\footnote{Vahe Oshagan, “A Brief Survey of Literature,” 28.} Masis was published by the Armenian Patriarchate in Constantinople from 1852 to 1908. Its first editor was Garabed Utujian, who is representative of the early, modern-oriented intellectuals, who had been sent to France to study in the 1840s and had attended the Sorbonne and the College de France. Utujian's expression of the goals of Masis was one shared by the vast majority of Armenian intellectuals of the period, including Dussap, Sibyl and Esayian, and thus it merits being reproduced here:

It is our opinion that for the welfare of the individual, as well as that of the nation, it is necessary to give the individual, an intellectual, moral, and practical education simultaneously, and in order to facilitate this effort and to crown it with success, it is necessary to be especially unsparing in our attention to the proper education of girls.\footnote{Cited in Etmekjian, The French Influence on the Western Armenian Renaissance: 1843-1915, 139.}

This statement underscores a significant feature of Armenian literature of this period: it was meant to enlighten its readership. Consequently the author was conceived of as a teacher, a leader, and an authority and was expected to act according to this role. In 1905, in an article published in Masis entitled, "The Journalist and the Writer," Esayian stated that a journalist had a responsibility "as a leader of the people, to be modest and noble." Esayian conceived of the novelist’s role as slightly different:

The writer or the poet does not write for the crowd. His impelling motive is the necessity to express himself and those individuals who are his intellectual equals can profit from it. What he gives is pleasure, and he has responsibilities only to those who are capable of enjoying him. The more his work approaches supreme beauty the more his soul, free from suffering, becomes intimate and is loved by those who understand him.\footnote{Ibid., 251-2.}

In this passage Esayian conceives of the novelist, unlike the journalist, as an authority figure who is understood to be in dialogue with intellectuals, not the masses.

This conception of the role of the novelist is important as it illuminates why fiction was
viewed as an appropriate vehicle for discussing social problems and solutions. Fiction was the means through which intellectuals could debate and offer images of an alternative social reality.

In the nineteenth century new literary forms were introduced alongside the older, poetic tradition which dominated Armenian literature since the Medieval period. In the nineteenth century, novels, short stories and plays became important literary forms as European literature was translated into Armenian. In 1852 the Dedeyan brothers established a printing press in Smyrna, hired a team of translators and began to sell European novels. By 1880 approximately 200 volumes had been printed by the Dedeyan Press. Translations of Moliere, Dumas, Hugo, Sue, Racine, Goldini, Lamartine, Voltaire, Prevost, Sand and Musset were therefore made available to western Armenian readers.16

As is obvious from the above titles the majority of translations were from French literature. The influence of English literature was almost negligible with only a few translations of Shakespeare and British romantics, such as Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott.17 In his extensive survey on the impact of French literature on modern Armenian literature, James Etmekjian notes that the French literary schools of classicism, romanticism, realism, naturalism and symbolism, were represented in Armenian poetry and prose.18

Two of these French literary schools made the most significant impact on Armenian letters: romanticism and realism. The remainder of the chapter will focus on the influence of romanticism and realism in western Armenian literature, and especially in the writings of Dussap, Sibyl and Esayian.

Romanticism was the first European literary school to make an impact on nineteenth-century Armenian literature. Vahe Oshagan dates the romantic period in Armenian literature from 1855 to 1870, while James Etmekjian dates it as starting in the

1840s and continuing on after the appearance of realism in 1884. Etmekjian’s periodization is more accurate when women’s writing is integrated into the periodization. Dussap’s novels, all of which were written in the romantic style, were published in 1883, 1884 and 1887. In addition, Etmekjian notes that after the advent of realism some authors wrote in a mixture of romanticism and realism. This is true of Sibyl’s writings which often combine elements of romanticism and realism.

The literary movement known as romanticism, made its appearance in Europe between 1770 and 1830. Romanticism has been defined in a myriad of ways attesting to its complexity and multiplicity. Despite the complexity of the romantic school certain features distinguish the romantic text: emphasis on individualism, idealism, the primacy of the creative imagination, nature, the importance of feeling and the use of symbolic imagery. Nineteenth-century Armenian authors became acquainted with European romanticism through their reading of the European romantics. The first Armenian novel, Khosrov Ev Makruhi [Khosrov and Makruhi] (1851), was composed by Hovhanes Hisarian in the romantic style. The heroine of Hisarian’s novel reads the novels of European romanticism: Clarissa Harlowe, La Nouvel le Heloise, Mathilde, Paul et Virginie, Corinne and Atala. Hisarian prefaced his novel with a statement that makes clear the importance of foreign influence in nineteenth-century Armenian literature:

Where must one begin when writing a novel among a people which has not a single example of this type of literature? No matter where one begins, one must copy foreigners, or still more exactly, one must translate them.

While acknowledging the thematic similarities between European and Armenian romanticism Boghos Zekiyan notes that these movements developed under very different

22 Ibid., 60.
historical contexts. He argues that unlike European romanticism which developed partly as a reaction against the rationalism of the European Enlightenment, Armenian romanticism developed alongside the national movement, and speculates that it was the patriotic elements of romanticism that were appealing to Armenian writers. 

Certainly patriotism and the betterment of society is the primary focus of Armenian romantic authors. Srpuhi Dussap’s novels which support female emancipation do so in part because she believed that if women were able to exercise their talents and intellect through education and employment social conditions among Armenians would improve.

Srpuhi Dussap’s novels are written in the romantic style. It is known that Dussap read authors of the romantic school, including Victor Hugo, George Sand, Milton, Byron and Schiller. Stylistically her novels display the romantic’s love of minute description of nature and the use of flowery embellished language. Dussap’s novels also display cosmopolitanism, another feature of romanticism, through the introduction of characters of various nationalities and the portrayal of various cities and countries in her novels. It is in the content of Dussap’s novels that her adherence to the ideas of romanticism is most evident. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) maintained that corruption stems from civilization, and particularly the ownership of property which results in social inequality. His remedy was the return to nature, which he called the first social state, a communal organization based on sharing. Dussap, who had probably read Rousseau, was fascinated by the notion of a more egalitarian society in the natural world. Unlike Rousseau, who emphasized women’s subordination to men, Dussap hypothesized that in the natural world harmony and equality had existed between the sexes and therefore could be achieved again by following the laws of nature.

Dussap’s emphasis on nature and gender equality was unique in Armenian romanticism and caused a great deal of controversy. Dussap’s feminism and her use of

romanticism were severely criticized by the Armenian intelligentsia. When Dussap's first novel Mayda, appeared in 1883 it was the first novel by an Armenian woman to address the issue of Armenian women's liberation. The publication of Mayda caused a storm of controversy. In 1885 Y. Demirdjibashian stated that no other book had caused such an uproar in Armenian literary circles as had Mayda. An article from 1883, said readers “consumed” Mayda, to such an extent that it was difficult to obtain a copy of the novel.\textsuperscript{28} The novel had supporters, such as Matevos Mamurian (1830-1901), who described Mayda as “an unique, impudent work in Armenian literature and not only in its authorship, form, style, theme and novelty, but also in its spirit and morality.”\textsuperscript{29}

The novel also had many detractors, such as Arpiar Arpiarian(1852-1908) and Hagop Baronian (1842-1891), both of whom criticized the novel’s lack of realism. Arpiarian claimed that the author of Mayda did not understand “the Armenian woman, Armenian society or Armenian life.”\textsuperscript{30} Arpiarian's criticism reflects a fairly standard view of the male intelligentsia which constructed ‘the Armenian woman’ as a single entity, implicit in the use of the singular ‘woman,’ devoid of differences based on class, family and region. Arpiarian’s vision obscures the fact that nineteenth-century Armenian society was composed of various classes and different social customs based on regional and familial practices. Dussap understood there was no single ‘Armenian woman.’ Her characters are drawn from the urban, wealthy milieu; this does not imply, however, that Dussap was uninterested in the lives of rural Armenian women. Her work in benevolent associations devoted to expanding educational opportunities for rural Armenian children shows that she was concerned with the conditions of rural Armenians. But like all good authors when Dussap wrote fiction, she described the world she had experienced. Mayda is romantic in style and use of imagination but it addresses real issues, such as how does a young woman who has been denied education and training support herself and her young child when her parents and husband die?

\textsuperscript{28} The following description of the controversy surrounding Mayda is from A. Sharuryan, Srpahi Dussap, 128-150. Sharuryan’s description is based on the debate about Mayda found in contemporary journals.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 135.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 102.
In 1883 when *Mayda* was published realism was in ascendance in Armenian letters with supporters of realism often bitterly critical of romanticism. In an open letter to the press (a common Western Armenian critical practice) Hagop Baronian criticized *Mayda* stating that he found the coincidences and action in the novel improbable.  

Dussap's use of the romantic style allowed her to be inspirational while Baronian's criticism is reflective of a critical stance which emphasizes form over content. As Randi Warne notes in her discussion of the fictional writings of Canadian feminist Nellie McClung (1873-1951), the emphasis on form over content has guaranteed that "intentionally didactic fiction like McClung's would be discounted." Baronian's criticism, which emphasizes form over content, is in conflict with Dussap's (like McClung's) understanding of literature as a means of exposing forms of oppression and providing solutions to social problems. In the preface to *Mayda* Dussap was clear that her primary consideration in writing the novel was to address women's social oppression. In the preface to *Mayda* she states:

> I want to expose the principle elements of social corruption through the novel. I don't claim to have written a novel of great or even modest success. Instead my intention is to reveal the truth in an appealing manner and this is the main goal of my writing.  

In Sibyl's writing she included elements of romanticism and realism but stated a preference for romanticism. In an article published in 1903 in *Masis* Sibyl wrote:

> I have always loved romantic literature, and what its authors were trying to say. I think for the majority of women, the ones I know anyway, reality is in romantic literature.

I would suggest that the reason both Dussap and Sibyl preferred romantic literature over realism is because this style allows the authors to be inspirational and imaginative. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, Dussap and Sibyl were concerned with identifying women's oppression and offering solutions. Romanticism, with its emphasis on the imagination, allowed the authors to imagine alternatives to the current social reality. As

31 Ibid., 133.
34 Sibyl,"Tikin Dussap Ir Srahin Mej"[Mrs. Dussap in her Salon], 179.
authors who wanted to escape the restrictions of contemporary cultural conventions of femininity, romanticism offered Dussap and Sibyl a literary form in which to envision a more satisfying reality for women. This is why Sibyl believed, that women in particular, preferred romanticism over realism.

By the 1880s, however, realism had entered the Armenian literary scene and eventually became the dominant literary school. Etmekjian dates the advent of Armenian realism with the publication of a new journal in 1884 called Arevelk [Orient] which competed with the journal Masis. The writers of Arevelk vehemently rejected romanticism in favour of realism. Eventually writers who supported realism came to edit both Masis and Arevelk, which accounts for the eventual domination of realism.35 In 1891, yet another new journal supporting realism appeared, entitled Hairenik [Fatherland], it was edited by Arpiar Arpiarian, and attracted radical, young writers, like Krikor Zohrab (1861-1915) and Arshag Chobanian (1872-1954).36

An examination of how intellectuals defined “realism” reveals that much of the literature they admired was what is commonly termed naturalism. In Masis in 1892 an article appeared, entitled “Our Literature,” the author Arshag Chobanian defined the job of the writer as follows:

What do the new writers do? They walk in the streets. They look into every nook and corner. They visit the fields, the forests, and the mountains. In society, they observe everything. They note down and study events. Then they return to their rooms and write, having only their notebooks before them.37

Chobanian’s description of the writer resembles the definition of the naturalist writer who was understood by proponents of naturalism to function as a scientist. The naturalist writer was expected to observe and record as impersonally as the scientist.38 The influence of naturalism in the Armenian literary context is the result of the popularity of the naturalist writers, Emile Zola (1840-1902) and Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893), among western Armenian writers. The Armenian writer Krikor Zohrab, one of the influential proponents

36 Hiran Thorossian, Historie de la littérature Arménienne, 290.
38 Lilian Furst and Peter Skrine, Naturalism, 21.
of realism and naturalism in Armenian letters, was an ardent admirer of Zola and de Maupassant and even used images and the literary structures of these two French authors in his own short stories.39

Zabel Esayian, unlike Dussap and Sibyl, never wrote in the romantic style, instead preferring realism and naturalism. Esayian went to Paris to study literature at the Sorbonne where she was exposed to French romanticism, realism and naturalism. She stated that as a student she read George Sand, Henri Barbusse, René Ghil, Maurice Maeterlinck, Arthur Rimbaud, Honoré de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert and Baudelaire. She also read the American writer Edgar Allen Poe. The influence of Edgar Allen Poe in Esayian’s writing can be seen in the supernatural elements of short pieces, like Marde [The Man] (1905). In the 1920s her son indicated that Esayian read the works of Marcel Proust and Fyodor Dostoyevsky.40 It was suggested by Emile Zola and Jules Claretie that realism in art was the product of the revolution of 1848. Since realism was seen as the “laying claim to the true” it was seen by Claretie as a “parallel phenomenon to the need of reorganization and social reform.”41 This suggestion is intriguing when applied to Western Armenian literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as this was a period of political and social upheaval in the Western Armenian community and a time when Armenian intellectuals were searching for solutions to social problems. Esayian’s preference for realism or searching for the ‘true’ resulted in an alternative way of examining women in Armenian society distinct from Dussap’s and Sibyl’s methods.

Lilian Furst and Peter Skrine state that realism and naturalism share a vision of art as the “mimetic, objective representation of outer reality (in contrast to the imaginative, subjective transfiguration practiced by romantics.)”42 In Armenian women’s writing the trend away from romanticism to realism and naturalism resulted in greater emphasis on depictions of “outer reality” in the works of Zabel Esayian. Esayian was concerned with

the working class, the poor and the idea of human beings as determined by heredity and environment; themes which are hallmarks of naturalism.43 Esayian’s experimentation with naturalism is demonstrated by her early works, *Spasman Srahin Mei* [In the Waiting Room] (1903) and *Erb Aylevs Chen Sirer* [When They Are No Longer In Love] (1914), in which the characters are drawn from the working class and are subject to the restrictions and impulses of their environment. In *Erb Aylevs Chen Sirer* [When They Are No Longer In Love] Esayian even demonstrates the affects of alcoholism on the characters’ lives, a central theme in the works of that premier naturalist, Emile Zola.

The romantic emphasis on the imagination enabled Dussap and Sibyl to envision a social environment in which women would be emancipated from oppressive structures and unequal restrictions. Realism was the means by which Esayian explored the impact of social oppression on women. Esayian is generally credited with introducing the psychological analysis of characters to Armenian literature.44 What is not acknowledged in discussions of Esayian’s psychological elements is that the vast majority of her psychological portraits depict the affects of patriarchy and oppressive political structures on Armenian women. Therefore in the following chapters how the three authors approached women’s societal oppression and emancipation from perspectives influenced by romantic and realist visions will be examined.

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43 Ibid., 12,42.
CHAPTER TWO
ARMENIAN FEMINIST DISCOURSE

The focus of this dissertation is the creation of a feminist discourse among Armenian women. Feminist discourse here refers to the discussion of the problems experienced by Armenian women living in the Ottoman Empire and the solutions proposed by the women authors. I concur with Dale Spender's argument that women's writings opposing gender hierarchies constitute an intellectual tradition of theories of liberation.1 From 1880 when Srpuhi Dussap published her first article on women's employment until 1915 Armenian women evaluated and sought to improve women's place in the family and society, discussed the merits of female education and employment and discussed issues of Armenian national identity and culture. Their writings, written in Armenian, are part of Armenian intellectual tradition as well as part of an international women's intellectual tradition about women's emancipation. As Linda Edmondson has noted, women in the nineteenth century in countries with "very different social and political systems questioned a way of life which was highly circumscribed by law and custom and which offered them little outlet for their energies beyond domesticity and the diversions of a limited social life." Women began to demand education, paid employment, greater rights within marriage and the family and, finally, suffrage.2 The movement for women's rights was not confined to Europe and North America, but was an international movement which appeared in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Feminist movements are often dismissed by nationalist groups outside Europe and North America as "western orientated" and not properly national, which enables nationalists to ignore the issue of women's rights.3 An examination of the Armenian women's movement refutes such criticism because it is evident that instead of borrowing feminism a women's rights movement was both created and adapted by indigenous women to speak to the needs of the entire society. Upon reading their works it is clear that Armenian women were responding to the challenges and issues facing the

1 Dale Spender, ed. Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Women's Intellectual Traditions, 1.
Armenian community in the Ottoman Empire from 1880 to 1915. The type of feminist discourse they created reflected the intellectual traditions of the Armenians, the political and social realities of the Ottoman Empire as well as new theories about society and the individual which were a product of the French Revolution and its subsequent intellectual manifestations. Armenian feminist discourse was a mixture of both local and international discourse and sociopolitical realities.

Historians of feminist movements have tried to provide an explanation for the emergence of strong women's movements in the nineteenth century and the explanations articulated differ based on the geographical location and historical circumstances of the various movements. Historians of European movements tend to emphasize the consequences of industrialization and the resulting social and demographic changes. They say that the transition from agricultural to industrializing society resulted in important changes affecting women and the family. Women's status in the family was altered by changes in access to education, employment and wage earning. But greater access to education and employment did not necessarily result in an improvement in the status of women, a fact which caused women to mobilize to improve the position of women in the new economic system.4 Analysts of Middle Eastern and Asian feminism attribute the rise of feminist discourse in these regions to the connection between female liberation and national liberation.5 Jayawardena writes that “the struggles for women’s emancipation” were “an essential and integral part of the national resistance movements.”6 In her analysis women’s emancipation was viewed as a precursor to national emancipation in countries which were subject to foreign political and economic colonization. The result of their connection between female and national emancipation was that male intellectuals in the Middle East and Asia supported women’s emancipation to a certain degree in their countries.

4 See Edmondson, and Christine Bolt, The Women’s Movements in the United States and Britain from the 1790s to the 1920s. (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 42.
6 Jayawardena, Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World, 8.
because:

Faced with societies that were sufficiently developed and powerful enough to subjugate them, and with the need to modernize their own societies, many reformers of Asia seized on the apparent freedom of women in Western societies as the key to the advancement of the West, and argued that ‘Oriental backwardness’ was partly due to women’s low status.  

The belief that modernization and strength on the European model could be achieved only through changing traditional social organization, especially the upbringing and education of future generations, resulted in an emphasis by the intelligentsia in Asia and the Middle East on the role women would play as mothers in the process of modernization.

A synthesis of these two approaches as to the causes and workings of feminism in the nineteenth century is useful when discussing Armenian feminist discourse. The attention paid to the internal changes happening in society by historians of European and North American women’s movements provides an intriguing line of inquiry when applied to the Armenian situation since the nineteenth century was one of enormous social, political and economic change for the Ottoman Armenian community. On the other hand, the affects of colonization and the influence of national liberation movements emphasized in the approach of historians of Middle East and Asian feminism provides insight into the development of feminism in the context of Armenian women’s position as an ethnic and religious minority under Ottoman Turkish rule. The Armenian experience differed somewhat from Kumari Jayawardena’s model in *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* as she is concerned with the affects of Western colonization while the Armenians had lost political independence in the fourteenth century and consequently had been living as a colonized people under Ottoman Turkish domination. In the nineteenth century Armenians experienced the affects of European colonization, in the realm of politics through the “Armenian Question” and in the realm of culture as Roman Catholic and Protestant missions ran schools for Armenian children which disseminated their cultural practices including their notions of ‘correct’ gender behaviour. Therefore by the nineteenth century Armenians were subject to two types of imperialism, Turkish and European. The remainder of this chapter will explore the development of Armenian feminist discourse

7 Ibid.,11-12.
against the backdrop of internal social and political changes and the external pressures of colonization and the resultant establishment of an ideology of national liberation.

Armenian society in the nineteenth century was a society in transition. The politics of the Ottoman Armenian community had altered in the nineteenth century as the newly educated class demanded a say in the governing of the Armenian community. This resulted in the establishment of an Armenian National Constitution and an assembly to govern the internal affairs of the Ottoman Armenian community.8 On an international level the political situation among Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire was affected by the European powers' involvement in what was termed the “Armenian Question.” The “Armenian Question” referred to the “plight of the Armenian population and its struggle for civil rights and administrative reforms.”9 The “plight of the Armenian population” included “unjust and exorbitant taxation, corrupt and oppressive administration, the inadmissibility of Christian testimony in Muslim courts of law, and depredations by nomadic Kurdish and other tribal elements” to which the Armenian population, especially in the eastern provinces, were subject.10 The “Armenian Question” was internationalized in the Treaty of Berlin of 1878. According to the terms of this treaty, the Ottoman sultan was required to implement reforms and guarantee the safety of the Armenian population. The responsibility for overseeing the implementation of these reforms was given to the European powers jointly.11 In reality the sultan made no effort to implement genuine reform or safeguard the non-Muslim population and the European powers did little except issue collective notes reminding the Ottoman government of its obligations.12 In response to the continuing abuses of the population Armenian political parties and revolutionary groups, including the Armenakan, the Hunchakian and Dashnachtsutyun parties, developed,

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10 Ibid., 204.
11 Ibid., 204.
12 Ibid., 212.
whose goal was to ameliorate the conditions of the Armenian population living in the Ottoman Empire. In 1895 the European powers again applied pressure on the Ottoman government to implement reforms in the eastern provinces. While officially agreeing through diplomatic correspondence to implement reform, the sultan in fact ordered massacres of the Armenian population. In the massacres of 1895-96 “approximately 100,000 Armenians were killed, hundreds of town quarters and villages were looted and gutted, many villages were forcibly converted to Islam and a new Armenian exodus resulted from the bloody pogroms.”

The years of oppression, actual massacres and threats of massacres affected the entire Armenian society and Armenian women in particular ways. Fear of abduction and rape meant that Armenian women, especially in areas prone to attack, were closely confined to the house for physical protection. Essayian’s autobiography attests to the vulnerability of Armenian women through a description of her grandmother’s experience with the janissaries. In Essayian’s autobiography her grandmother states that when she was a young woman, Armenian women in Constantinople did not leave the house, except to attend church, due to fears of abduction. When Essayian’s grandmother left the house to attend her first communion she was attacked by janissaries who pulled the veil from her head. Although the young girl managed to escape the janissaries her parents decided to send her outside of the quarter to be married because they feared that having seen the girl, the Janissaries would return and abduct her. Consequently, the young fourteen year old girl was married and sent to live away from her family and outside of her familiar neighbourhood. By the late nineteenth-century the circumstances of the Armenians living in Constantinople were more secure and women were able to more freely walk around the streets. Essayian notes that in her youth, unlike her grandmother’s youth, Armenian women in Constantinople no longer found it necessary to wear veils. The same is not true in the provinces where Armenian women were frequently abducted by Turks and

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13 Ibid., 222.
14 The janissary corps was a select group of soldiers who had been taken from Christian parents as boys and converted to Islam. They were legally slaves of the Ottoman sultan.
15 Zabel Essayian, Silihtari Parteznere [Gardens of Silihdar], 396-400.
nomadic Kurds. The consequences of this physical insecurity was that Armenian girls were married at young ages in order to ensure (it was hoped) greater protection since virgins were preferred by abductors.16

The Young Turk revolution of 1908 was initially greeted by the Armenians with optimism as the new leaders promised a constitutional government. However, the Young Turk government's ideology of pan-Turkism, the goal of which was to Turkicize the minorities and to unite the Turkic people of Anatolia, Iran, Transcaucasia, Russia and Central Asia into a pan-Turkic empire, threatened non-Turkish minorities.17 As Armenia was situated between Turkish Anatolia and the Turkish population in Iran and Transcaucasia, the Armenians represented an obstacle to this dream of Turkish unification. By 1913 Turkish territorial losses in the Balkans and the declaration of independence by Albania ended the power of moderates and liberals in the Turkish government. A coup led by ultranationalists gave dictatorial powers to a small group led by a triumvirate, which ruthlessly suppressed all opposition. As a result of renewed interest in the "Armenian Question" following the Balkan Wars, the European powers again raised the issue of reform and drew up a plan of reform in February 1914.18 The outbreak of the world war in 1914 jeopardized the implementation of the reforms. Combined with pan-Turkic visions of empire and a desire to end the "Armenian Question" forever, in April 1915 the Turkish government organized further deportations and massacres of the Armenian population. The Genocide of the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire began on April 23/24, 1915 with the arrest of Armenian political, religious, educational and intellectual leaders of Constantinople.19 The pattern of the Armenian Genocide conforms to the United Nations definition of genocide as articulated in 1948:

"acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or part, a national, ethnic, racial or

17 Bournoutian, A History of the Armenian People Vol.II. 97.
19 Ibid., 29.
religious group,” including:
a. killing members of the group;
b. causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
c. deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
d. imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
e. forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

In 1915 Armenian men were forcibly conscripted into the Turkish army and then deliberately murdered, while women, children and the elderly were forcibly marched into the desert under conditions designed to bring about death. Many Armenians died at this time as a result of deliberate murder, ill treatment, exhaustion, starvation, and illness brought about by the horrendous conditions. The process of genocide was carried out during the deportations when many were killed, raped, beaten, abducted to be used as slaves, and their property stolen by the gendarmes who accompanied the caravans, and by the local Turkish and Kurdish populations. Armenian children were abducted into Turkish and Kurdish families where their ethnic and religious identities as Armenian and Christian were obliterated. The actions perpetuated by the Turkish regime conform to the United Nations definition of genocide listed above.

From the mid-nineteenth century until the Armenian Genocide in 1915, as a consequence of the changing political situation, rapid social change was occurring among the Ottoman Armenians. There was an increase in migration from the countryside to the urban centres, especially to Constantinople. Many of the migrants lived in poverty in urban slums. The migration of the rural Armenian poor was disturbing to the urban intelligentsia and numerous writers wrote of the exploitive conditions the rural poor lived under. In a series of short stories the writer Krikor Zohrab explored the conditions rural migrants encountered in Constantinople. His fiction portrayed the overwork of porters and especially the sexual abuse young women working as domestic servants experienced.

22 Hovannisian, The Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1914,” 204.
23 The two short stories “Tefarik” and “Postal” deal with the sexual exploitation of rural women, while the story “Ayrin” describes the overwork of the Armenian porters. These short stories may be found in Krikor Zohrab, Erkeri Zoghovatsu, Vol.1. (Erevan: Haypethrat, 1962).
There was a sense that urban Armenians had a duty to assist rural Armenians. This sense of obligation is evident in a speech given in 1909 by Sibyl when she states:

We have taken a vow, whatever they say and do against us, we are not going to digress from our objectives one iota, until our last breath we are going to work for our provincial sisters. We are going to raise them, we are going to give them a worthy position, and we are going to train our future generations to serve their sisters, they (the provincial sisters) will learn to love their urban sisters, and it is through this mutual responsibility to each other, that the sacred constitutional system will be realized—Freedom, Equality, Fraternity and Justice.24

By using the terms “Freedom, Equality, Fraternity and Justice,” Sibyl reveals the contribution of French revolutionary thought to Armenian intellectual (and feminist) discourse. She envisions a new social structure based on justice and the rule of law, which she hopes will evolve as a result of cooperation between rural and urban Armenian women.

The emergence of a system of mass education during the Zartonk resulted in the mixing of children of various socioeconomic levels in the schools. A consequence of the expansion of education was a sense of anxiety based on social class, and several contemporary writers have described feelings of shame and confusion at the sight of poor children at school. Zabel Esayian, Sibyl and Arpiar Arpiarian wrote short stories which describe the experience of being educated with poor children and display a sense that it was shameful to witness the experiences of poor children. This aspect of the new educational system and its treatment in the works of the women authors will be discussed in detail in chapter four.

As members of Armenian society, women were affected by the economic, social, material and political changes just as were men. It is in this period of change that the issue of the position of Armenian women in society demanded the attention of intellectuals. As Jayawardena has noted, the belief that modernization and strength on the European model could be achieved only through changing traditional social organization, especially the upbringing and education of future generations, resulted in interest in women’s roles in this process of modernization by the intelligentsia in Asia and the Middle East. For this reason intellectuals wrote in support of female education and the social benefits incurred as a

result. Jayawardena states, and this is relevant to Armenian society as well, that the type of female education theorized by male intellectuals was designed to train women to become a suitable partner to the new, Western educated or missionary influenced man. She was to be dressed in the new style, be familiar with Western customs, to speak the appropriate European language, thereby 'proving' that she was the negation of everything that was considered 'backward,' while still accepting that her primary role was to be in the home maintaining national culture.25

As a result of missionary and European education Armenian intellectuals were exposed to European and American culture and ideology. As a consequence Armenian men wanted wives who would reflect their European and American orientation. In the words of American missionary, Mary Van Lennep:

The Armenian gentlemen feel that a thorough reformation cannot take place in their nation, until those who will be wives and mothers shall come under Christian influence. And they take a deep interest in this enterprise [the establishment of an American missionary secondary school for girls].26

While missionaries taught subjects such as reading, writing, and religion, they understood an important part of their work to be the modelling of 'proper' behaviour. The letters of Theresa Huntington Ziegler, a missionary among the Armenians of Harpoot from 1898 to 1905, reveal the manner in which Armenian school girls were introduced to American femininity through emphasis on appropriate school clothing. In one of her letters Theresa Huntington Ziegler writes:

By dint of perseverance on the part of the missionary teachers, most of the school-girls have been taught to wear something white in the neck, and sometimes on the sleeves of their dresses.27

Ziegler's letters also state that the female pupils were required to comb and braid their hair each day and if it wasn't combed accordingly to the standards of the missionary teachers

25 Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, 12.
27 Theresa Huntington Ziegler, *Great Need Over the Water*, ed. Stina Katchadourian (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Gomidas Institute, 1999), 121.
they would be sent home to redo it.  

This type of seemingly unimportant detail was part of the missionary objective of modelling American conceptions of femininity to Armenian girls and was an important part of the education provided by missionaries. While American missions proliferated among the Armenian population in the provinces, France was the model country the Armenian intelligentsia of the capital sought to emulate. Armenian boys and young men were sent by families and patrons to France to study in lycées, institutes and universities which offered training in fields such as medicine, architecture, engineering, teaching, translation and journalism which were unavailable in the Ottoman Empire.  

French schools for girls staffed by Roman Catholic nuns were established in Constantinople by the 1830s. As a consequence of the intelligentsia’s French orientation educated Armenians of the capital spoke French. Dussap, Sibyl and Esayian were fluent in the French language.

As a result of contact with Europeans, Armenians quickly adapted European social customs and dress. Lucy Garnett, who visited the Ottoman Empire in the early 1890s, noted that what she called the 'traditional Armenian costume' was no longer worn by urban Armenian women who favoured European dress. Contemporary Armenian descriptions of women’s clothing, however, suggest why women abandoned the old style dress. In his account of Ottoman social life Krikor Basmajian states that when he was a boy in the 1850s in the city of Adrianople Armenian women wore the yashmak and feradje but by the time of his writing 1890, Armenian women wore European dress. Zabel Esayian’s account of her youth in Constantinople confirms Basmajian’s observation. Esayian states that while her grandmother’s generation had worn the yashmak and feradje her generation wore

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28 Ibid., 230.
29 James Etmekjian, The French Influence on the Western Armenian Renaissance, 95.
31 Lucy Garnett, The Women of Turkey And Their Folklore (London: David Nutt, 1893), 211.
32 The yashmak was a veil which covered the face and the feradje was a type of cloak worn outdoors. Jennifer Searce, Women’s Costume of the Near and Middle East, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1987), 49, 85.
European clothes. The abandonment of the yashmak and feredje among urban Armenian women was not problematic for Armenians as this style of dress was associated with Islamic not Armenian custom. Yet how Armenian women should conduct themselves in the private and public spheres was a problematic and much debated issue. While male intellectuals supported what they considered ‘progress,’ they often criticized what they saw as Armenian women’s total embracing of European manners and fashions. In 1866 Matteos Mamurian wrote:

there are the ostentatious Armenian women, the foreign loving Armenian women ... they are to be seen in the company of Europeans, they stammer a few European words, they wear fine European clothes, they possess only European masks and rouge but with rotten hearts and wooden heads they are soulless bodies.

What is noteworthy about Mamurian’s imagery is that it centres around the Armenian woman’s body. As Jayawardena states, progress in Middle Eastern and Asian society was symbolized by the appearance of the female body:

women had to show that they were the negation of everything that was considered ‘backward’ in the old society: that they were no longer secluded, veiled and illiterate with bound feet and minds, threatened with death on their husbands’ funeral pyre.

Mamurian’s statement reveals the same kind of association of the female body as a battlefield upon which cultural identity was fought. His statement is a call for a cautious approach to adoption of European style and demonstrates that he expected Armenian women to maintain Armenian cultural identity through the female body. The following statement by an Armenian woman born in a medium-sized town in the Ottoman Empire in 1906 reveals the same connection being made between the Armenian female body and Armenian cultural identity. Elise Hagopian Taft writes:

The (Armenian) girl remained untouched, as pure as the virgin snow at the highest peak of Mount Ararat until the wedding night. Armenian men would have a bride in no other way.

The correlation between the Armenian girl’s virginity and Mount Ararat (an important

34 Zabel Esayan, Silihtari Parteznerei [Gardens of Silihdar], 399.
35 Cited in Arpik Minasyan, Sibyl, 77.
36 Jayawardena, Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World, 12.
symbol of Armenian identity) connects virginity with the symbolic image of Armenian identity and constructs both the virgin Armenian girl and Mt. Ararat as guardians of Armenian identity. Feminists like Zabel Esayian rejected this emphasis on the passive female body as a symbol of Armenian culture. For example in an article written in Tsaghik in 1903 Esayian criticized Armenian women’s dressing in European style clothing, which she described as consisting of “unattractively dressed hair, and strange looking clothes which make our women’s full and ample figures look ugly.”38 In the same article, however, Esayian quickly turned from the topic of Armenian women’s bodies to describe and praise the work of Armenian women in the field of education, intellectual life and charitable works.39 In this article entitled Mer Kinere [Our Women] Esayian makes Armenian women’s active participation in the Armenian community her focus rather than the passive constructs of the female body revealed in Mamurian’s and Taft’s statements.

Some nineteenth-century Armenian intellectuals, such as Stepan Voskan, Mateos Mamurian and Krikor Chilirigirian, wrote articles in journals defending women’s rights and comparing Armenian women with European women. They concluded that the Armenian woman was not backward but that she must be trained in correct morals. They offered the examples of the brave “Vardan Armenian Women.”40 This is a reference to Vardan Mamikonian whose army fought the Persians in 451 A.D. The historian Eghishe wrote of the battle and noted the bravery and loyalty of both Armenian men and women. Armenian women of Vardan Mamikonian’s period were said to have displayed heroism and bravery and became a model for modern Armenian women.41 The image of the women of Vardan Mamikonian’s time was used repeatedly by Sibyl and Esayian to justify contemporary Armenian women’s activities in the public domain. Sibyl states that the women of Vardan Mamikonian’s time advocated female education and opened schools and

39 Ibid., 151.
40 See Eghishe, History of Vardan and the Armenian War, trans. Robert Thomson. (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982). The image of the brave Armenian woman in the time of Vardan was used repeatedly by nineteenth century intellectuals.
41 Cited in Arpik Minasyan, Sibyl, 76.
uses this to legitimize contemporary demands for female education. While Esayian employed the imagery of the St. Vardan’s women to praise Armenian women’s resistance to the deportations of the Armenian Genocide of 1915. Both authors refer to contemporary Armenian women as the “true sisters” of the women of Vardan Mamikonian’s time. The favourable comparisons of the women of the past and contemporary women implied an active role for Armenian women in improving the conditions of the Armenian nation.

In 1859 Stepan Voskan wrote that women should be more than bedfellows or wives since patriotism towards the Armenian nation “beats in their hearts.” He argues that patriotism or lack thereof in women was of the uttermost importance since women have the ability to wield great influence:

The homeland is in the heart of women, and when that heart is found to be empty (as is the case in many Armenian ladies...) it is impossible for patriotism, true patriotism to blossom, and for the multitude to stand firm under freedom’s banner. Women, with their soft hands are preparing that firm independence, which is the mark of a human being and with these moral weapons they shatter the roots of bondage. Finally in many instances faith is spread to many places and in many nations by women’s influence.

The idea that Armenian women had an influential role in the development of national identity and modernization was a liberating concept for Armenian women. As Jayawardena’s study reveals, the results of the new style of education had consequences unforeseen by male reformers:

In spite of efforts to ‘Westernize’ and educate women within the confines of a traditional patriarchal framework, further demands were made by those women who had already benefited from educational opportunities. Women reformers, for instance, were interested in emancipating women from certain social customs that were detrimental to them, and from legal, economic and political constraints which, in spite of their education, kept them in a subordinate position.

The sense that reforms were not adequately representing women’s needs and demands led

42 Sibyl, Azkanver Hayuhik [Patriotic Armenian Women], 156.
44 Arpik Minasyan, Sibyl, 76.
45 Jayawardena, Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World, 17.
to the development of a feminist discourse in books, journals and magazines. While
male intellectuals sought to establish what form Armenian women's patriotism should take, 
Armenian women articulated in novels and short stories and journals their sense of how
they desired to contribute to national development. A distinct feature of nineteenth-century
Armenian feminism was the concern with national development and progress. While
Armenian women struggled to achieve rights for women they conceived of this aim as
beneficial to both Armenian women and the Armenian nation. From 1880 to 1915
Armenian women of various social classes went to the new schools, wrote in journals,
founded philanthropic organizations, migrated from the countryside to the city and worked
in low paying, sometimes exploitive jobs. It is in these roles as actors, leaders, students,
wage earners and mothers that Armenian women participated in the changes society was
experiencing.

The focus of this dissertation is the response of three Armenian women writers to
these changes and their search for a place for Armenian women. To this end they created a
theory of women's emancipation which legitimized their participation in the public sphere;
they spoke up for opportunities and rights, female education and inclusion in paid
employment and a role in the shaping of Armenian national identity. An examination of the
fiction and non-fiction essay articles by the three writers enable us to reconstruct
nineteenth-century Armenian feminist discourse. The questions this chapter will address are
the following: what constitutes Armenian feminist discourse? What were the issues
Armenian women considered important? What was their relationship with European and
North American women's movements?

The working definition of feminism I use in this dissertation is based on that of the
prominent historian of American feminism, Nancy Cott. Her definition of feminism as
opposition to sex hierarchy, the assertion that gender roles are socially constructed and
identification with a "group called women," are all concepts recognized and accepted by the
three women writers of this study. Due to its importance in this discussion Cott's
definition of feminism is worth quoting at length:

46 Ibid., 17.
First is the belief in what is usually referred to as sex equality but which might be more clearly expressed in the negative, as opposition to sex hierarchy. Equality is such a difficult quantity to apply to human beings (because it is colloquially taken to mean sameness) that the point is served better by expression in terms of opposition to ranking one sex inferior or superior, or opposition to one sex's categorical control of the rights and opportunities of the other. Second, feminism in my working definition presupposes that women's condition is socially constructed, that is, historically shaped by human social usage rather than simply predestined by God or nature. Although the concept has only recently been given vocabulary in the distinction of gender from the biological category of sex, the perception that women's status vis-à-vis men (whatever its natural or divine origins) has been purposefully shaped and thus can be reconstructed has long been essential to efforts to gain women rights or freedoms... [And third point] Feminism posits that women perceive themselves not only as a biological sex but (perhaps even more importantly) as a social grouping. Related to that understanding is some level of identification with "the group called women," some awareness that one's experience reflects and affects the whole. The conviction that women's socially constructed position situates us on shared ground enables consciousness and the community of action among women to impel change.47

The history of the usage of the word "feminism" in Armenian is revealing of how the women writers dealt with in this thesis thought about women's rights and their connections with other national women's movements. The term "feminism" seems to have been first introduced to Armenians in 1903 in the "Women's Page" section of the journal Tsaghik, where the word appeared in a series of articles by Zabel Esayan. The word "feminism" was not used by Dussap in any of her novels, although she is called a "feminist" by Esayan.48 Instead Dussap used terms such as "free woman" [azat kin] and the language of "rights" [irawnk].49 The early 1903 references to feminism indicate that the term was unfamiliar to readers demonstrated by its being printed in Latin characters, following the French spelling, 'féministe' for a person and 'féminisme' for the ideology.50 The use of Latin characters occurs in Tsaghik only with foreign terms which do not have an equivalent in Armenian accentuating the term's foreign quality.51

By 1904, however, the terms, 'féministe' and 'féminisme' were sufficiently

48 Esayan, *Siblihtari Partzcneres* [Gardens of Stilhde], 525.
51 Ibid., 141. In the same article the term "à la mode" and "paradoxes psychologiques" appear written in Latin script.
familiar to the readership of Tsaghik to be transliterated into Armenian characters. Following the appearance of the transliterated terms in January 31, 1904, Tsaghik always printed ‘féministe’ and ‘féminisme’ in Armenian characters. This is the birth of the term “feminism” in Armenian usage and is used to the present day.52 The transliteration of the term feminism in 1904 occurred at a time when the rise of feminist movements in foreign countries and feminism’s relevance to Armenian women was being debated. By 1904 Esayian was not the only writer to use the term. Sibyl used the term in Tsaghik in March 1904 and acknowledged its widespread usage as far as “Russia and Japan.”53 By 1911 Esayian employed the language of women’s rights used by contemporary European women’s organizations in an article describing women’s rights movements in Europe. Esayian translated terms such as ‘Woman’s Liberation Question’ [Knoj Azatagrutian Hartse], ‘Feminist movement’[Feminist Sharzhum] and ‘Woman’s Liberation Cause’ [Knoj Azatagrutian Date]54 thereby endowing Armenian with the vocabulary to discuss women’s rights. In the 1903-1904 series of articles the authors defined feminism and debated its merits and debits in foreign countries but did not discuss its direct relevance to Armenian women. They introduced feminist ideas through detailed descriptions of the activities of women in Europe, which enabled the author to present feminism while keeping her own views private. The introduction of these new terms in 1911 in the discourse of women’s rights corresponded with a shift in the writings of Zabel Esayian away from the simple reportage of European women’s organizations of the earlier period to a more analytical phase in which the author, whose language reveals her familiarity with concepts from Europe, evaluated and altered these concepts to construct an Armenian version of feminist discourse.

Mary Maynard has identified three main issues found in English feminist thought of this period, which were important to Armenian women: theories of equal rights; women

52 Tamanakakits Hayots Lezvi Batsarakan Bararan, (Erevan:Haykakan SSH Gitutiunneri Akademia, 1969), 816. This dictionary defines the word “feminism” [feminism] as the struggle for women’s equal rights.
and the family; and employment and economic dependency.\textsuperscript{55} I propose to briefly explain how European and North American feminists discussed these issues and then outline how Armenian women dealt with these issues.

In her work on the English and American feminist movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Nancy Cott states that feminists used two paradoxical arguments to advocate women's advancement or equal rights: the sameness and difference arguments. The argument of sameness stated that women had "the same intellectual and spiritual endowment as men—were human beings equally with men—and therefore deserved equal or the same opportunities men had to advance and develop themselves." The difference argument stated that women differed from men "whether through natural endowment, environment or training. Human females were moral, nurturant, pacific and philosophically disinterested, where males were competitive, aggrandizing, belligerent and self-interested; and that it therefore served the best interests of both sexes for women to have equal access to education, work, citizenship in order to represent themselves and to balance society with their characteristic contribution."\textsuperscript{56} Implicit in both arguments is the vision that women's present status in society is the result of social constructions which can and should be altered, which was a liberating and powerful concept for women.

The 'sameness' argument with terms such as 'inalienable rights' used the language of the French Revolution and liberal philosophy.\textsuperscript{57} Sruphi Dussap was a staunch proponent of the 'sameness' argument. She viewed women's current status in Armenian society to be the result of the denial of women's equality with men:

\begin{quote}
That great principle, which is being proclaimed in Europe, the principle of freedom and equality is no more than words here. What kind of equality is it when men trod underfoot half the human race? What kind of freedom is it that deprives women of the right to protest, to work, to take initiative? What is it that tells men: "Work without fear. You're free." And to women: "Caress without complaint your chains"...It does not seem to matter that there are tears and suffering and a fury that roars without, however, being able to raise its voice since it will only be forced to be stilled by the injunction: "Soften your voice, you're a woman; it is not yours to
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{56} Nancy Cott, "Feminist Theory and Feminist Movements: The Past before Us," 50.
\textsuperscript{57} Maynard, "Privilege and Patriarchy: Feminist Thought in the Nineteenth Century," 227.
enjoy what is ours alone. Look after the children, look to our comfort.” Under these conditions women are under a grotesque pressure that disfigures them and in this false light men judge their minds, their hearts, their abilities, their passions, finally pronouncing a damning verdict.58

In this passage Dussap challenged traditional concepts of male and female identity which she understood as a product of custom and differences in education and opportunity rather than any ‘natural’ difference. She protested the categorization of women as ‘inferior’ to men, stating that any ‘inferiority’ was caused by lack of opportunity and training:

Without proof, men attest to the inability of women, even when history indicates otherwise, recalling the great roles women have played when circumstances permitted. This is especially significant when we note that these historic roles have been assumed without any special preparation, no special knowledge, no experience, no practical instruction. It is clear from this how much a woman is capable of achieving, how far she can go, and to what degree she can serve progress.59

Dussap’s argument stresses that current notions of proper ‘feminine’ behaviour are socially constructed. She sees women as having many different roles in society and argues against monolithic constructions of the ‘Woman’ common in intellectual circles:

... it is easy to deduce that women offer a variety of images. Even in our day we notice the childlike woman concerned only with having fun; the immoral woman, with her profits; the woman at the market, with her goods; the virtuous citizen, with her family; the student, with her books; the noble woman, with her titles. When there are such variances among women, how is it decided, I wonder, in what light she should present herself? How do we want to see her? A housewife or student? Slave or free? A woman of society? A citizen? A mother? Is it clear how she should be? No.60

In Dussap’s theory of feminism all traditional perceptions of society were subject to examination and reevaluation and she judged traditions on the basis of whether they contributed to individual and societal progress. Her vision of the ‘new Armenian woman’, a figure she gradually constructed in her three novels, was a well-educated, patriotic and progressive individual who would be employed in a useful career. Her emphasis particularly on the individual woman attaining personal goals was a unique and significant contribution to Armenian feminist discourse.

59 Ibid., 12.
60 Ibid., 13.
Cott notes that historians of woman's rights and suffrage ideology have shown that nineteenth-century feminists used both the 'sameness' and 'difference' arguments in discussions of women's rights. Cott asserts that the use of both these seemingly contradictory arguments "on women's full and equal human capacity" and "women's unique strengths and potential" are indicative of the fact that the idea of 'woman's sphere' was both the "point of oppression and the point of departure for nineteenth-century feminists." The idea that the 'woman's sphere' could be both limiting and liberating is also evident in the works of Sibyl and Zabel Esayian. In a debate carried out in the pages of Tsaghik, Sibyl and Esayian each defined her notion of the nature of woman and women's proper role in society. Sibyl espoused a concept of woman's nature which is close to the argument of difference in Western feminist movements. Sibyl states that women are happier in their true sphere, the home, because she informs her readers, there they are loved and respected by husbands and children. As the article continues, however, Sibyl states that this ideal situation is no longer prevalent and that many women are compelled and desire to work. The problem then is, according to Sibyl, that the work open to women is inadequate as women are barred from "respectable" professions with the only available option being the unacceptable one of domestic service. Sibyl's article reveals her desire to promote the traditional role of the woman in the home and yet at the same time allow women to enter professions.

Sibyl's cautious approach was attacked by Zabel Esayian in a subsequent issue of Tsaghik. Esayian's article begins with sarcastic questioning of why Sibyl's article had been written and a strong implication that it should not have been written at all. The issue to which Esayian takes umbrage is the suggestion that work should only be open to those women who do not have fathers and husbands to support them. Esayian's argues, using concepts reminiscent of the argument of sameness, that all human beings should be able to provide for their own subsistence and not be dependent on the support of husbands, fathers or brothers. She also attacks the idea that only poor women who have no other options

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need to work. She argues that work allows all human beings, regardless of gender and social standing, to use their intelligence and exercise their talents. Although Sibyl and Zabel Esayian approach the question of women's position in society from different theoretical positions, both display a commitment to improving the conditions of women in society. Sibyl's contention that women's proper sphere is in the home is based on her observation that women do not have adequate professions open to them. This was a problem acknowledged by many feminists and demonstrates a concern with improving the quality of life women would encounter in the public sphere before thrusting women outside of the home. Esayian's argument that women of all social classes should be employed is a plea for women's right to exercise their intellects and talents in a system which had historically denied or refused to acknowledge these rights.

The second issue English and Armenian feminists discussed was women's roles as wives and mothers. Maynard says of nineteenth-century English feminists:

... marriage and motherhood were still regarded as women's primary roles. They were seen as the normal, but not inevitable, aspect of most women's lives. Rather, it was the wife's subordination in marriage with which they disagreed, and their challenge was largely to its patriarchal, authoritarian, and hierarchical form. In contrast, they emphasized the need for an egalitarian relationship, where marriage was a partnership and the wife equal to the husband. Yet closer scrutiny of the literature suggests that, for most writers, it was not equality so much as complementarity which was being suggested. Many, for instance, seemed to accept that men and women would have different roles to play in the home and that these would be premised on the wife's maternal and domestic skills.

The vision of marriage described by Maynard is similar to the idea of marriage espoused by Armenian feminists who advocated marriage as a partnership with the wife as an equal to the husband while at the same time accepting some gender-based divisions in marriage based on the woman's maternal role. Armenian feminists' discussion of love and marriage will be discussed in detail in chapter four. Dussap differed somewhat from Maynard's model in that she viewed marriage as inevitable in Armenian society because of social pressure to marry. In her first novel Mayda she writes:

... They imprison a woman in her house telling her: "Concentrate all your forces

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here in this place. Whatever purpose you have in life will grow dim here, in one long agony. Your borders are these four walls. In these you’ll look after your children; this is your station in life."65

As the American feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) had done in her fiction66 Dussap questioned women’s ability to adequately care for children with no proper training:

Indeed the care of others is a noble vocation, but are the necessary means provided to achieve this, the principles, the education on which society relies for its betterment? A young woman who marries doesn’t necessarily understand her role as a mother, and from her ignorance springs confusion; from confusion, corruption; from corruption, weakness, that is destruction, the very death of society. In this way, then, a woman’s ignorance and slavery puts the foundations of society as a whole in peril.67

In this passage Dussap warns of the social consequences of neglecting women’s education. Later she addressed the personal and societal consequences of confining women solely to the role of mother.

A woman who happens to be a mother seems to have a purpose. But I wonder, what purpose is allowed for a childless woman or an unmarried one so that she is not constrained to be poor and useless? They’ll either consume her with the deadly boredom of doing nothing or they’ll condemn her to being a coquette.68

These two passages display a characteristic feature of Dussap’s feminism: she strove to demonstrate the connection between the welfare of women and the welfare of society in order to show that female education and greater opportunities for women would benefit women and the society as a whole.

The third important issue nineteenth-century feminism focused on was female employment. Maynard notes two arguments in favour of female employment articulated by English feminists. Some argued that paid work for women was “normal, desirable, and would make them into better human beings.” A second argument for female employment was women’s need for an independent income, for married women to decrease economic dependency on husbands and for unmarried women who were otherwise condemned to

65 Srpui Dussap, Mayda. This translation is from Elise Antreassian, 12.
67 Srpui Dussap, Mayda. This translation is from Elise Antreassian, 12.
68 Ibid., 12.
live in poverty. In Armenian feminist discourse female education and employment were closely entwined. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed an increase in female education among Ottoman Armenian women. Young women born at the turn of the century frequently knew how to read and write in contrast to their mothers. For example, Serpoohi Christine Jafferian born in Smyrna in 1914 knew how to write but her mother did not because:

In her time parents did not send their daughters to school. A woman’s place was in the home, to multiply the family, and to provide care. There was no need for girls to be educated; they were not expected to support the family.

Jafferian’s statement that girls did not have to be educated because they were not expected to support the family is indicative of the prevailing ideology which constructed men as wage earners and women as staying home, caring for the family. How prevalent this division was in actual sociological terms is difficult to evaluate. Jafferian’s account of her family reveals that her grandmother, although presumably illiterate (based on Jafferian’s earlier statement’s about female literacy), did work as a midwife and was so skilled that it was said: “What a shame society does not allow girls to go for higher education. She would have become an excellent obstetrician.” In another account from the same period Dirouhi Highgas reveals her family’s disapproval of female education but some acceptance of learning a trade:

I desperately wanted to finish my education. But my grandmother and uncle both said it was not necessary; I had all the schooling I would ever need. “Besides,” Grandmother said, “Education is a dangerous thing for a girl. It will put crazy ideas into your head.” [She added]: “It is hard to get married if you have too much education. No man wants a wife with her nose stuck in a book all day long. We will send you to dressmaking school.”

Dirouhi Highgas explains this lack of acceptance of female education as a result of her family’s position as working class: “Armenian girls, at least in our economic and social strata, simply did not go to college or have ‘careers’.” Recognition of differences in

71 Ibid., 11.
73 Ibid., 158.
attitudes among the social classes is important in any discussion of Armenian society and cultural practice. It is a distinction recognized by Zabel Esayian, who was aware that many Armenian women had to work in order to survive and that not all women had husbands or male relatives to support them. She addressed the problem of working class women and employment in the novel Erb Aylevs Chen Sirer [When They Are No Longer in Love] in which Esayian portrayed the exploitation of illiterate, urban female workers in Constantinople.

Armenian feminist ideology should not be viewed as a monolithic concept, fixed and unchanging. Armenian feminists attempted to create and legitimate new roles for Armenian women in society, and each author constructed her own vision of what shape these new roles should take according to her understanding of the needs of women and society at the time of her writing. While all three authors discussed love and marriage, female education and employment, and the Armenian woman’s ‘proper sphere’ in ways similar to their European counterparts, Armenian feminist discourse was affected by the political and social conditions of the Ottoman Empire which were quite different from the sociopolitical conditions of feminists in France or England who were (usually) writing as part of the religious and ethnic majorities of their countries. As noted above, the period from 1880 to 1915 witnessed enormous changes in all aspects of the Armenian community’s existence and these changes are reflected in the writings of each author. Therefore, while Esayian expressed her admiration for Dussap, her vision of the new role women should play is frequently different from Dussap’s vision. I would suggest that alterations in the circumstances of the Armenian community altered feminists’ focus and affected how critical women writers felt they could be of Armenian society. In the 1880s Dussap was able to focus almost exclusively on social constructs of gender and to be critical of Armenian social practices she viewed as oppressive to women; whereas Esayian’s life and writing career encompassed the massacres of the Armenian population in 1894-96, the massacres of the Armenian population of Cilicia in 1909 and the Genocide of Armenians in 1915. As a consequence of state orchestrated violence which threatened the existence of the Armenians as a nation, Esayian’s writing tended to emphasize cooperation
among Armenian men and women to improve the situation of the nation. This is especially true of Esayian’s non-fiction writing.

Two articles by Esayian, the first published in 1904 in Tsaikhik, entitled “To Our Women” [Mer Kinerun] and the second published in 1911 in Aragats, entitled “The Armenian Woman After The Constitution” [Hay Kine Sahmanadrutnen Edke] reveal Esayian’s contributions to Armenian feminist ideology and particularly Armenian feminism’s relationship with Armenian patriotism. Esayian’s thought was altered by the political events affecting the Ottoman Armenian community and this affected her feminism.

As Lois West’s work has shown, feminism and nationalism are not incompatible ideologies:

 Various types of feminist and nationalist movement activists on both a grassroots and elite level work today for the identification with their national group—be it based on shared history, culture (language, religion, ethnicity, styles, fashions, tastes), sense of place (the region), or kinship—while simultaneously fighting for what they define as the rights of women within their cultural contexts.74

The same pattern of entwining feminism and patriotism identified by West can be seen in Esayian’s work. In her article Mer Kinerun [To Our Women] Esayian writes:

When we turn our attention to the entire world women’s important activities in every field are noticeable and naturally we think immediately of our women and ask the important question: “What are our women doing?”

What are we doing when our sisters in other countries are doing everything they can, through their individual and their separate efforts, to increase man’s activities in science and literature, in humane and ethical work, when it is only by these means that civilized countries progress.75

The connection between the position of women and their roles in ‘national progress’ was fundamental to Esayian’s version of feminism. It was a feature of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century feminism outside of Europe. Armenian feminism differed from feminism in countries such as Iran, India and Japan, however, in that it had no state structure to support or be supported by. Therefore the focus of the intellectuals’ attention was the Armenian people. Esayian outlined the role she believed women should play and why as follows:

What we desire for our women, whatever social class they belong to and whatever level of their progress, is that everyone should do their share in educational and charitable work. Their place alongside men is necessary and valuable. This desire

74 Lois West, ed. Feminist Nationalism, xiii.
is of particular significance when we cast our eyes around us...[there]are
(Armenian) children who go to school hungry and half-naked, there are
unemployed women who must work for a living, unfortunate girls alone in their
misfortune, sick people who have no medicine, and children who are dying because
of their parents’ ignorance and poverty.76

Although Esayian’s statement in this article may be viewed as a rather cautious approach to
women’s participation in societal movements, her emphasis on women’s and men’s
cooperation in societal work was radical in the social context of Armenian life in which the
woman’s place was seen as exclusively in the home. Arguing in terms similar to maternal
feminists in Europe, Esayian sought to make women’s public roles more palatable by
presenting women’s involvement in social activities as an extension of their roles within the
family. She states that women have a “valuable contribution to make” which until the
present has been confined only to “benefiting their families.” Maternal feminists used this
argument to advocate greater female influence within the public sphere. In this article
Esayian also draws upon the ‘difference’ argument by advocating that Armenian women
extend the duties they perform in the home into the public sphere in order to benefit society.
This supports Cott’s contention that the ‘private sphere’ was both a point of oppression and
of departure for women because Esayian does not challenge the notion that a woman’s role
is essentially a nurturing one but uses this concept to advocate the extension of this role
into the public sphere paving the way for women’s activity outside of the home.

The connection between Armenian women, women’s organizations and the
Armenian nation in a political context is made explicit by Esayian in a 1911 article entitled
Hay Kine Sahmanadrutnen Edke. [The Armenian Woman After the Constitution]. In this
article Esayian examines the position of Armenian women on the basis of gender and
ethnicity, following the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 which promised freedom from
despotism and greater political rights for Ottoman subjects. The article finds that the
situation of the Armenian nation, particularly those Armenians living in the provinces, is
worsening. The Cilician massacres of the Armenian population in 1909 are discussed by
Esayian as an example of the deteriorating situation. The article is devoted to outlining how
urban Armenian women sought to help refugees from the provinces. As West notes,

76 Ibid., 27.
women in feminist nationalist movements struggle “to define and reconceptualize their relationships to states, nations and social movements as activists central to the debate, not as passive recipients.”77 Esayian’s article conceptualizes the role of Armenian women as an active one. She praises Armenian women for mobilizing to establish organizations to care for the needs of the displaced Armenian populace which was migrating to cities such as Constantinople.78 Esayian believes that women’s contribution and service to the nation was of fundamental importance which would be remembered by future generations. In the article she also acknowledges that Armenian women could not attain their social and economic goals while the safety and physical existence of the Armenian nation as a whole was not assured.

In conclusion, it is evident from a reading of fictional texts and non-fiction essays written by these Armenian women writers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that these women writers, familiar with feminist theory from Europe, but committed to ameliorating the conditions of the Armenian nation, with a specific focus on the female part of that nation, constructed a distinctive set of theories devoted to creating a just and active place for Armenian women in the family, in the sphere of education and employment, and in the public sphere. The following three chapters will discuss in greater detail the issues identified as part of Armenian feminist discourse, as found in the novels, short stories and dramas of the authors Srpuhi Dussap, Sibyl, and Zabel Esayian.

Fiction as a means of expressing hopes and desires for the present and future was commonly used by women who are now identified as feminists by scholars but were better known to their contemporaries as novelists.79 In her work on Canadian feminist Nellie McClung, Randi Warne suggests that McClung’s “skill as a storyteller became a potent weapon in her struggle to have women’s work recognized and rewarded, as she attempted to infuse her readers with a feminist and religious vision which would empower them to the

77 Lois West, ed. Feminist Nationalism, xiii.
Jennifer Waelti-Walters has noted a similar process of envisioning or to use her term “reconceptualizing” women’s place in society in the fiction of French feminist novelists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who she states “were trying to reconceptualize the relations between women and men.”

Fiction enabled women writers to create a variety of new social roles for women within the pages of the literary text. This made fiction a powerful tool for feminist writers. Sruhi Dussap, Sibyl and Zabel Esayian all recognized this potential and used it to disseminate new ideas about Armenian women. Because Armenian women’s fiction of this period enabled authors to identify women’s issues, to criticize certain social customs and to inspire change, it is a useful source for exploring the type of feminist discourse created by Armenian women writers within the sociopolitical and intellectual context of the period from 1880 to 1915. Consequently each subsequent chapter of this dissertation identifies themes considered important by feminist theorists, discusses how the theme was understood in the social context of Armenian society or Armenian intellectual tradition and finally how the authors treated this subject in fictional texts with an emphasis on the ways in which the authors differed from standard treatments of the theme in order to benefit women. Chapter three will look at female education and employment as these issues were viewed as the first steps in women’s emancipation. Chapter four analyzes the theme of romantic love and women’s emancipation in selected fictional works by Dussap, Sibyl and Zabel Esayian. Romantic love was perhaps the single most important theme in Armenian women’s fiction because most Armenian women expected to marry, and therefore feminist discourse developed in the context of heterosexual relationships. In Armenian feminist discourse marriage was considered normative and desirable but the writers articulated a vision of equality and companionship between the partners based on romantic love which they hoped would enable women to attain happiness and a sense of self in order to benefit women and society. Chapter five, which is also the conclusion, examines the solutions articulated by the three authors through the creation of the figure of the new Armenian woman.

The writings and the ideology created by Sruhi Dussap, Sibyl and Zabel Esayian

81 Jennifer Waelti-Walters, Feminisms of the Belle Epoque, 9.
have largely been obscured. There are few translations of their works in any language and many of the texts have never been reprinted in Armenian since their original appearance at the beginning of the twentieth century. The ultimate goal of this dissertation is to redress the neglect of these authors and to introduce the reader to a feminist discourse created by Armenian women which is part of both the Armenian intellectual tradition and an international women’s intellectual tradition.
CHAPTER THREE
EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Education was a crucial theme in Armenian feminist discourse, and among the Armenian intelligentsia in general, because education was seen as creating a new, modern Armenian person. The new individual was deemed to be dependent on the kind of education s/he received and was therefore a much debated topic among the Armenian intelligentsia. The following chapter will explore the themes of female education and employment in the literary texts of Sruhi Dussap, Sibyl, and Zabel Esayian. These writers explored their own experience of education and identified differences between female and male education, especially the failure of the current educational system to prepare Armenian girls for employment. Education as a means of preparing women for employment may seem a logical and obvious goal but was actually controversial as many male intellectuals viewed female employment as interfering with women’s primary role as mothers. Armenian feminists’ discussion of education and employment despite opposition will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

In nineteenth-century Europe female education gained considerable support on the basis of new theories of the maternal role in raising children. Jane Rendall states in The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860 that drawing on the works of Locke and Rousseau, and contemporary writers such as Pestalozzi, there was an emphasis on “the role of family and parents, and especially mothers, in imprinting good and moral lessons upon the child in infancy, in drawing out what was best in the child’s nature.” As a consequence of new theories of child development, attention was paid to the mother’s role in educating and socializing her children.1 These theories were of profound interest to the intelligentsia of the Middle East and Asia who were occupied with questions of modernization and industrialization. They linked the improvement of maternal performance to the improvement of the nation. The Egyptian Qasim Amin in his book entitled The Liberation of Women (1899) made the connection clear when he stated that if women were better educated they would make better

wives and mothers of sons who would be good and productive citizens. Earlier in the century Armenian intellectuals and wealthy community members advocated and financed women's education for the same reason articulated by Amin. An account written by Tikranuhi Apkariants describing the foundation of an Armenian girl's school in the town of Nor Jugha in Persia makes the connection between national development and female education among Armenians clear. Apkariants states that female education began in Nor Jugha in 1858 with the establishment of a girls' school at the local convent. The school was established through the funds of Manoug Hortanian, whose purpose Apkariants explains was to:

Dispel the centuries old darkness of his country and make it attain a higher level. In his opinion, educating mothers would give the nation rational members.

The elevated status the concept of motherhood received as a result of connecting child development with patriotism enabled Armenian women writers to discuss female education assured of male intellectual support. A reading of their texts on education, however, reveals that their discourse of female education went beyond merely preparing women to raise patriotic sons. A speech delivered by Sibyl in 1909 demonstrates how the author conceived of the theme of female education as a means of creating an active role for Armenian women in national development:

[Those who] argue that the Armenian woman should be given bread instead of education, here, officially from this rostrum, I answer them for once and for all: even more than bread the Armenian woman needs education, she is the fatherland's heart and soul, on her we are going to build our patrimonial house and even the gates of hell won't be able to stop her.

Do you see the Armenian woman as worthy only of pity? She isn't. She is going to earn her bread through her own efforts. The Armenian woman is as intelligent and hardworking as the American woman, the Englishwoman, and the Frenchwoman. In fact she is more modest, courageous and especially stronger than they are, but she must be educated as they are educated.

In this portion of the speech Sibyl utilizes the language of patriotism when she

3 Tikranuhi Apkariants, "The Education of Women in Nor Jugh", Artemis 2-3, (February/March, 1903), 55.
4 Sibyl, "Azkanver Hayuhik" [Patriotic Armenian Women], 161.
states that Armenian women are the foundation upon which the nation is going to be built. Her statement that the Armenian woman’s intelligence and industry is equal to that of the European or American woman is a declaration of equality with the women of the powerful countries of Europe and America, countries called “civilized” in the Armenian press. Her emphasis on Armenian women’s superiority to Western women in terms of modesty was a fairly standard concept among the Christian and Muslim intelligentsia of the Middle East. Amidst these acceptable concepts, however, Sibyl ascribes a central place to women in the creation of Armenian national identity. In her conceptualization of women, and she clearly states that it is both urban and rural Armenian women she is thinking of, they are active participants in the struggle for constructing the Armenian nation. Her declaration that Armenian women do not need charity in the form of food but rather the training to earn their own living constructs Armenian women as powerful and active and introduces the more unacceptable theme of employment. Sibyl’s image of women is in contrast to literary portrayals of women by the male intellectual Krikor Zohrab who described rural Armenian women as showing “blind and uncomplaining obedience.”

In Zohrab’s construction the rural Armenian woman is a passive image rather than a real person. The passive Armenian woman was a commonplace literary construct although not in the texts of Dussap, Sibyl and Esayian who portray strong and complex female characters while at the same time acknowledging the obstacle of patriarchal traditions. In the same speech in order to overcome patriarchal traditions Sibyl legitimizes Armenian women’s active roles by citing strong women in Armenian history:

1200 years ago the Armenian took great interest in women’s education. It may come as a surprise when I say that Stepan Siunetsi’s sister, Sahagatukhd, established a music school in eighth-century Armenia; today such schools, which are the mark of a civilized nation, do not exist. History has also given us the name of the lady Shushan Pahlavuni who established schools in villages in the remotest regions of Armenia. And in the eleventh century the daughter of King Ashod I, Mariam, the mother of Prince Siuniats, had a great love for literature and passionately loved the Armenian language. She didn’t like the translation of the Gospel of John and had it

5 Esayian, along with other intellectuals, routinely referred to European countries as “kaghakirt” (civilized). See for example Zabel Esayian, “Nor Kine,”[The New Woman] Tsaghik (April 26, 1903):141.
translated again ... In the twentieth century are we going to abandon the women of Armenia to carry dirt and be a servant to farmers?7

A common tactic among Middle Eastern and Asian reformers of the nineteenth century was to position women as guardians of national culture while still being modern. Jayawardena notes that: "To seek legitimacy for this position many reformers idealized the civilization of a distant past, speaking of the need to regain the lost freedom that women were once said to have possessed in their societies."8 Sibyl's speech uses similar devices when she presents the audience with a series of women in history who supported education or were learned themselves. Her references to women from Armenian history construct female education not as foreign but rather as essentially Armenian. While Jayawardena views references to the ancient past as supporting women's "traditional subordination within the family," Sibyl's use of history has a liberating potential not acknowledged by Jayawardena. Armenian intellectuals of the nineteenth century, such as Mikayel Portukalian and Sareyan, encouraged Armenians to look to the heroes of Armenian history as models.9 In the absence of an independent state, Armenian intellectuals based much of what it meant to be Armenian on the practices of historic independent Armenia. Sibyl's justification of female education on the basis of historic practice was a potentially powerful argument as it connects women's emancipation with Armenia's emancipation suggesting the two concepts can exist only when both are achieved. Sibyl juxtaposes eighth-century Armenia with twentieth-century Armenia implying through the use of the word "civilized," in contrast to the image of carrying "dirt," that the past was more progressive than the present. This argument drew upon the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century intellectual and political concern with achieving progress. In this speech Sibyl portrays female education as assisting Armenian women in participating as full members in the shaping of national identity by recapturing their national heritage and by implication contributing to national development.

7 Sibyl, "Azkanver Hayuhik" [Patriotic Armenian Women], 160.
8 Jayawardena, Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World, 14.
While Dussap and Sibyl concurred that female education would benefit the nation, they differed from male intellectuals by viewing education as a means of improving the overall condition of women and a step towards greater female participation in areas customarily reserved for men. In Europe the same trend is discernible as feminist thinkers, such as Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), shifted away from a focus on how female education would benefit future generations to discuss the value education could have upon women personally. In Mayda Dussap argued in favour of female education for two main reasons: the confidence it would inspire in women and its importance in preparing women for employment. In the novel Dussap demonstrates the problems inherent in keeping women uneducated when the main character’s husband dies leaving her alone with a small child to support. Mayda is frightened and does not know how she will support herself and her daughter. The character of Madame Sira notes Mayda’s lack of confidence and her undeveloped sense of self, saying:

You didn’t value yourself, you were nothing, you only gained respect by following your husband’s orders, don’t you have a heart for feeling, a mind for thinking and reason for judging, in short a will to act?11

Madame Sira encourages Mayda to guide her own destiny. She tells Mayda that: “The person who derives her strength from others and not from herself will always be in a precarious position.”12 Therefore she encourages Mayda to become involved in activities which would assist in strengthening herself and her financial position. Madame Sira observes that women’s traditional upbringing, including lack of education, has hindered their ability to enter into public roles: “I understand your shyness about speaking and performing activities [in public], this is an unfortunate result of women’s training.” 13

The solution offered in the novel to the problem of women’s dependency on men is education. Mayda begins to educate her daughter because she wants her daughter to be prepared to support herself unlike Mayda who is ill-equipped to financially support herself.
herself. In the novel Dussap sought to demonstrate that, not only was female education good for women, it was a solution to the social problem of female unemployment and poverty. In Armenian society men were expected to financially support female family members. In the novel Dussap addressed the question of what would happen if women were left without male relatives. Although Dussap does not portray Mayda as entirely poverty stricken, the author is clearly asking her readers to consider what happens to women who are uneducated and untrained when they are left without parents or husband to support them. The fact that Mayda cannot survive in the world and dies at the end of the novel reflects the author's pessimism regarding women's fate when they have neither confidence nor skills to assist in their survival.

The importance Srpahi Dussap and Sibyl placed upon female education is demonstrated not only by their writings but through their participation in benevolent associations devoted to this issue. Before Srpahi Dussap and Sibyl became famous as writers, both women were active in the establishment of charitable organizations devoted to education and the training of teachers. One of the primary focuses of Armenian feminist discourse was the creation of a role for women in public, community life. While female education and employment were designed to facilitate women's entry into the public sphere traditionally dominated by men, the benevolent associations established and administered by Armenian women also created a public space for women.

The benevolent associations appear to have enabled Armenian women to officially participate in social reform. Earlier in the century wealthy Armenians had sometimes established schools for children; the founding of benevolent associations which were collective in formation and relied not on the funds of a single individual but on the efforts of a group of people to finance education proliferated in the last half of the century. Sharuryan states that by 1883 the majority of Western Armenian schools for girls and boys were funded by charitable organizations. There seems to have been a connection between membership in benevolent associations and commitment to women's

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14 Ibid., 26.
15 Sharuryan, Srpahi Dussap, 41.
emancipation. Women like Srpuhi Dussap, and her mother Nazli Vahan, were able to participate in social reform through the creation of a system of female education in Constantinople by founding and/or membership in benevolent associations committed to opening schools. This is demonstrated by Srpuhi Dussap’s membership in Aghkatakhnam Tiknants Enkerutyun [Charitable Ladies’ Association] founded by Nazli Vahan in 1864 and Dussap’s later leadership of the Dprotsaser Hayuhyats Enkerutyun [School Lovers’ Armenian Women’s Association] founded in 1879.

Of these three authors it is in the figure of Sibyl that the connection between social activism and benevolent associations is most evident. Sibyl was able to influence the development of Armenian female education in the rural areas through the Azganver Hayuhyats Enkerutyun [Patriotic Armenian Women’s Association] which she founded in 1879 with eight female friends, and with her mother’s and aunt’s encouragement. The founders “vowed to work for the homeland [Armenia]” a statement which reveals their commitment to social progress which they saw occurring by creating greater opportunities for Armenian women and girls. Throughout her life Sibyl was committed to female education: she gave lectures in support of this topic, taught in various girls’ schools in the provinces and in Constantinople and with her second husband wrote modern textbooks for schools.

That these associations formed a type of social movement is demonstrated by their close and complementary connections with each other. Dussap’s Dprotsaser Hayuhyats Enkerutyun [School Lovers’ Armenian Women’s Association] (1879) which had been founded to train Armenian women to teach at schools throughout the country frequently supplied teachers to teach at schools established by Sibyl’s Azganver Hayuhyats Enkerutyun [Patriotic Armenian Women’s Association]. In addition, in her fund raising speech for the Azganver Hayuhyats Enkerutyun [Patriotic Armenian Women’s Association] in 1909 Sibyl reveals connections with other Armenian women’s associations.

16 A.M. Minasyan. Sibyl, 8.
17 Ibid., 15-16.
18 Ibid., 12.
when she discusses their collaboration with the Oriordats Miutyun [Young Ladies’ Union] in order to provide rural Armenian girls with suitable clothing to wear to the schools run by Sibyl’s association.19

The associations not only provided Armenian women with an arena in which to put to practical use their desire to participate in societal reform they also trained women in the etiquette of public life. In her work on English feminists from 1885 to 1914 historian Lucy Bland notes that philanthropic associations gave women experience in important practical skills such as public speaking, committee chairing, and the writing of reports.20 A similar type of training is observable in Armenian women’s benevolent organizations. The activities Sibyl performed on behalf of Azganver Hayuhyats Enkerutyun [Patriotic Armenian Women’s Association] include fund raising, selling tickets, giving lectures in order to procure funds for her Association and organizing schools in the provinces.21 These activities would have taught Sibyl, and other women who were involved in the associations, skills necessary for functioning in the public world. Benevolent association therefore acquainted women with skills necessary for work in the public domain.

As women who had been educated and had a long history of working for education, when Dussap, Sibyl and Esayian discussed female education they frequently represented their own experiences of female education. Their textual treatment of their own educational experiences provides a glimpse into how the education system worked in turn-of-the-century Constantinople and more interestingly into the problems the authors identified as being inherent in the type of education they had received. Esayian’s education differed from Dussap’s and Sibyl’s in several significant ways, reflecting the changes in Armenian female education the two older authors had endeavoured to create through their work in charitable organizations devoted to education. In order to comprehend what these changes consisted of it is useful to compare Esayian’s educational experience with theirs. Srpuhi Dussap was educated at a French school until the age of ten. It was said that the

19 Sibyl, Azganver Hayuhik [Patriotic Armenian Women], 159.
20 Lucy Bland, Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885-1914, 51.
21 Minasyan, Sibyl, 13.
quality of education provided by the school was not considered deep enough for the intelligent girl and as a consequence her instruction was undertaken by her brother Hovhannes (1832-1891) who had attended university in Paris. He taught her French, natural sciences, and history. Due to her mother’s great love of music Dussap was taught to play the piano. She read Italian and Greek. She was noted for having read Plutarch’s “Lives of Great Men” and other classical authors. In her early twenties Dussap was tutored in ancient and modern Armenian language and literature by Mgritch Beshigtashlian.22 Dussap’s education reflects her family’s social and economic status: she could afford to have private tutelage, a system of education which traditionally had enabled members of the elite to receive education before the development of a school system.

Dussap’s primary instruction at a French school reflects the establishment of foreign missionary schools which increased in number throughout the nineteenth century and provided some of the earliest schools for Armenian girls. Roman Catholic nuns administered a secondary school for girls as early as 1839 in addition to day schools for girls.23 American Protestant sponsored education for Armenian girls increased as a result of the formation in 1868 of the Women’s Board of Missions. The education provided by the Protestant schools which combined the study of academic subjects in Armenian with practical skills such as hygiene, housekeeping, and sewing helped to ensure the success of these schools.24

Initially Sibyl’s education followed a similar pattern as she too attended a French primary school. There Sibyl learned French but was not skilled in written Armenian.25 In a short story entitled Ḍzrinere [Charity Cases] Sibyl’s description of her first day at Holy Cross school indicates the deficiencies she identified with having a foreign education. The teachers asked the young Sibyl:

Have you read Christian books? No.

22 Sharuryan, Տղբի Dussap, 11-12.
24 Ibid., 121, 116.
25 Sibyl, Ḍzrinere [Charity Cases] in Erker, 150.
As a consequence Sibyl had to be put in a class of younger children in order to learn to read and write Armenian. As opportunities for education in Armenian expanded children attended Armenian language schools. Sibyl attended Holy Cross and then an Armenian lycée from 1873-1879. The number of Armenian schools began to expand in this period as the Armenian patriarchate feared loss of membership in the Armenian church due to the conversion efforts of Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries in the Ottoman Empire. The Armenian patriarchate's power had already diminished due to the establishment of Protestant and Roman Catholic millets which included many Armenians.

In Zabel Esayian's autobiography, *Silihtari Parteznere* [Gardens of Silihdar], learning is portrayed as part of the domain of men as writing and reading are activities associated with male relatives. Esayian states that her father and his male relatives were all educated having attended secondary schools. Her own experience of learning to read is connected to her relationship with her father:

> While the water for tea boiled my father opened the daily newspaper *Arevelk* and read. I sat on his lap covered by his fur robe. In that warm nest I passed many happy hours as my eyes followed the letters on the paper. Sometimes I would put a finger on a letter and ask my father what it was and he would interrupt his reading to answer. Often my mother or one of my aunts would scold me: 'Leave your father alone. Don't bother him.' But my father would signal with his hand that he was fine and would hug me tighter, answering my questions with great patience.

> Suddenly one day I was reading! At first my father could not believe I was truly reading. He pointed out letters on various pages of the journal and in a stammering voice I read them aloud.

In this scene women are portrayed as hostile to education by silencing the young girl when she is learning to read. It is the figure of her father who transmits literacy by teaching the child the alphabet, thereby assisting Esayian in her development as a writer. In contrast her
grandmother is described as illiterate.\textsuperscript{32} Yet her female relatives do provide Esayian with talents which also assist in her development as a writer. It is they who are described as the source of the stories Esayian listened to enthralled.\textsuperscript{33} Her grandmother, although illiterate, is said to have spoken “pure Armenian” thereby endowing Esayian with a rich and varied vocabulary.\textsuperscript{34}

Esayian’s description of her formal education reflects the structure of Armenian education of that period. In contrast to her older female relatives Esayian was literate and she was educated in the Armenian schools which proliferated by the 1880s when she attended school. In contrast to the two older writers Esayian received her primary school education entirely in Armenian schools, first attending a private school in her neighbourhood and then the well known Holy Cross School.

By 1883 when Esayian was five years old and about to begin school, Constantinople had eleven Armenian girls’ schools. All Armenian schools in the 1880s faced problems of censorship as the Ottoman government routinely confiscated books on Armenian history and geography; because such books documented the history of Armenia before Ottoman Turkish domination they were forbidden. In addition to the problem of censorship the Armenian press of the period noted many problems, especially lack of standardization, in the administering of these schools. What children were taught and by which methods were dependent on the interests and methods of each school and individual teachers.\textsuperscript{35} This problem is reflected in Esayian’s portrayal of her education. Her first experience of schooling was in a local neighbourhood private school run by a married couple. The education consisted primarily of religious instruction. As Esayian showed interest in classical Armenian, she was given extra lessons in reading the Bible in the classical language.\textsuperscript{36} According to Esayian the man who ran the school was a “frustrated

\begin{footnotes}
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\item[32] Ibid., 394.
\item[33] Ibid., 411.
\item[34] Ibid., 394.
\item[35] Sharuryan, \textit{Srubu Dussap}, 41-43.
\end{footnotes}
and angry" man who became paranoid, believing that people were persecuting him. Esayian says, he in his turn persecuted his wife and the children at the school.\footnote{Ibid., 486.} When Esayian was transferred from this school to Holy Cross, which was one of the principal Armenian schools in Scutari, much of what she had been taught at her first school had to be unlearned. In her autobiography Esayian recounts that on her first day at Holy Cross school she was asked to read aloud in front of the class. She began to read according to the methods taught at her first school. These methods included shouting and banging on the desk. Her reading provoked laughter among the other pupils and the teacher explained to her that it was not necessary to shout and bang the desk when reading aloud.\footnote{Ibid., 492-3.}

The education Esayian received at Holy Cross consisted of instruction in history, French, Armenian, and arithmetic.\footnote{Esayian, "Inknakensagrytun," [Autobiography] Sovetakn Grakanutiun, 53.} When Esayian was twelve her teacher of Armenian language was the author Hrant (1859-1915). He was a fervent nationalist who frequently spoke of the conditions of Armenians living in the provinces and secretly gave the pupils books by the patriotic author Raffi (1835-1888). Esayian noted that reading Raffi's novels Tavit Peke, Samvel and especially Khente [The Crazy One] captivated her imagination, making her dream of living in provinces and helping the Armenians there.\footnote{Ibid., 56.} Her description supports Sharuryan's contention that, whatever problems the schools may have had, they were successful in instilling in a generation of students a sense of Armenian identity.\footnote{Sharuryan, Sruhi Dussap, 43.} In addition to stimulating Esayian's feelings of patriotism, Hrant early recognized Esayian's literary ability and encouraged it.\footnote{Esayian, "Inknakensagrytyun,/[Autobiography], 57.} As a consequence, although Esayian was not a member of a very wealthy family like Dussap, public schooling allowed her to attain an education and prepare for a literary career that would have been unavailable to her a generation earlier. Esayian's autobiography, however, makes it clear that education for girls was not as well established as education for boys. The author states that...
when she graduated from Holy Cross school her father did not know where to send her for her secondary school education because there was no Armenian girls’ secondary school in her neighbourhood.43

The authors identified several problems with the contemporary education system these include: mixing of different classes and gender distinctions in the schools. One of the most striking features of the new educational system was the mixing of different social classes in schools. In a short story about her schooling at Holy Cross, Sibyl described the feelings of alarm the poor pupils caused in her:

Here and there I saw in the halls, very dirty, barefoot children, with matted hair and old clothes, they looked like beggars and were called the charity cases.

The schoolmistress rang a bell and called: “The charity cases come for lunch.” These charity cases crossed to the nuns’ room. “The charity cases come and take paper and pen.” Together all of them stood up, wretched and proud.

I didn’t know the meaning of the word charity cases which made me think it was something bad, giving me the idea they were guilty and to be blamed. I asked myself what crime these poor children had committed to become charity cases ... There were moments when feelings of sympathy constricted my throat; but these moments in which I pitied them quickly passed. There was something sweet in my tears but a hard, cruel loathing was around me. With curly hair, dirty fingernails, these girls, beneath whose clothes hung rags and strands of yarn, were a nightmare to me ...

Voluntarily, I resigned from my walks and games in order to avoid any situation in which I would be approached by these charity cases. Day after day this unconfessed detestation was growing, these passions and fancies were becoming extreme and tortured me.44

At the end of the story Sibyl indicates that she overcame her feelings of revulsion, but a strong suggestion remains that class and economic differences among the pupils were deeply unsettling to the author. In fact, Sibyl’s involvement in social reform may have had their origins in her desire to eradicate economic and social differences among the Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire. When Sibyl later described why she founded the Azganver Hayuyats Enkerutyun [Patriotic Armenian Women’s Association] she cited her desire to eradicate the poverty and ignorance of the rural, Armenian population as the primary factor.45

43 Esayian, Silihtari Partecnere. [Gardens of Silihdar].528.
44 Sibyl, Dzrinere [Charity Cases], 152.
45 Minasyan, Sibyl, 8.
Esayian's autobiography confirms Sibyl's description of the treatment of poor pupils at the school. In *Silihtari Partezner* [Gardens of Silihdar] Esayian expresses anger about the common practice by teachers in her school days of publicly dispensing charity to poor pupils so that everyone knew who was a recipient of charity and who was not.\(^{46}\) The widespread portrayal in literature of poor children at school indicates that this was a disturbing phenomenon to writers.\(^{47}\) The phenomenon is reflective of the fact that this was a period of rapid social change in which migration from the countryside meant that urban and rural Armenians of different social classes interacted more frequently than had been common in the past. It is possibly due to this interaction that the intelligentsia laid increasing stress on cooperation between Armenians of different classes and between urban and rural Armenians. Both Esayian's and Sibyl's literary texts emphasize an interest in and responsibility to the poor and to rural Armenians much more than the older texts of Dussap had done.

In addition to problems of social class, from its inception one of the social obstacles the education of young women encountered was related to fears around the loss of female chastity. A common argument against female literacy had been that if girls knew how to write, they would write love letters.\(^{48}\) Love and the expression of sexuality outside of family arranged marriages was seen as threatening to the social structure of Armenian society and will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. At this stage it is important to note simply that such fears existed and were reflected in the structure of the school system. The schools were often mixed due to the fact that the financial means to support entirely separate girls' schools was not available.\(^{49}\) Holy Cross was a mixed school in that girls and boys both attended the school but the girls and boys were taught

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\(^{46}\) Esayian, *Silihtari Partezner*, [Gardens of Silihdar], 500.

\(^{47}\) A short story entitled "Faith" by the author Arpiar Arpiarian (1852-1908) also portrays this theme when he describes the embarrassment of a young girl who is the recipient of charity at a Constantinople girls' school.


\(^{49}\) Tikranuhi Apkarians, 55. Apkarians notes that in Nor Jugha the school for girls received so little money that there was barely enough money to hire a teacher, therefore the girls' school was combined with the boys' school.
separately and had separate playgrounds. Esayian’s description of the behaviour of some of the girls and boys reveals the ways such rules of separation could be circumnavigated and confirms that separation was based on safeguarding female virginity. She says that there was a locked door between the two playgrounds and that the children managed to remove the lock and play games on the threshold of this door:

For the most part the girl pupils were scandalized by our behaviour. But they watched with longing our daring, they approached us observing our games but they never participated. Usually the administration watched this “communication” with indifference but sometimes they prevented it. Often that happened because there was a suspicion about one of the older girls or her parent’s complained. They would prevent us from playing with boys but in a few days we found a means of reopening the door and playing together.\textsuperscript{50}

Concern with safeguarding female chastity remained a problem even when the pupils were separated. At Holy Cross many of Esayian’s teachers were male and she describes an episode in which one of the female students claimed a male teacher kissed her. As a consequence of the ensuing scandal the teacher was arrested and exiled from Constantinople.\textsuperscript{51} The separation of girls from boys at school seems to have meant that the two groups received different types of education. In her novel \textit{Araksia Kam Varzuhin} [Araksia or the Governess] Dussap was highly critical of these differences. In the novel she states education was:

not to truly enrich the mind, but rather to provide superficial polish. The reading and writing of Armenian, and also French, is considered sufficient among us to be proud that a girl is granted a reasonable education.\textsuperscript{52}

Despite problems with the content of the educational system, it produced unforeseen results in the form of women committed to social change and reform. Sibyl and Esayian, products of the new educational system, were examples of activists who worked for women’s greater participation in the public domain something not envisioned by male intellectuals.

As Jayawardena has observed, the new western educated male wanted a wife who appeared modern but was still loyal to national culture. Education was the means of creating such a woman. While the male intelligentsia agreed that “obviously unjust practices should be abolished, and women [should be] involved in activities outside the

\textsuperscript{50} Esayian, “Inknakensagryun,”[Autobiography], 53.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 58.
\textsuperscript{52} Dussap, \textit{Araksia Kam Varzuhin} [Araksia or the Governess], 363.
home, they [women] still had to act as the guardians of national culture, indigenous religion and family traditions.” 53 This dichotomy plagued Armenian women too.

A story by Zabel Esayian about her life as a student in Paris reveals both the anxiety and the sense of freedom women experienced when attending institutions of higher learning. Esayian’s representation of anxiety is interesting because of the three authors she lived the most unconventional life. She studied abroad and travelled throughout Europe and the Middle East alone. Although married, Esayian frequently lived apart from her husband and her children. She wrote for journals, met intellectuals, participated in political discussions and was engaged in work with Armenian orphans entirely separate from her husband and family. This is in stark contrast to Dussap and Sibyl, who engaged in public work with the support and presence of their respective husbands.

Esayian’s story Marde [The Man] (1905) reveals a sense of vulnerability about women and higher education abroad. The action of Marde [The Man] occurs in 1896 in Esayian’s second year of study in Paris. The story explores the psychological effects of higher education and migration abroad on two students, the Armenian Zabel Esayian and the Russian Miss Zavatska. The Paris of this story like other stories depicting Esayian’s life in France is a dark and gloomy city as demonstrated by Esayian’s description of the building and area where she lived:

It was the beginning of my second year in Paris. At that time I was living in the Boulevard Arago in a small room on the sixth floor which overlooked a courtyard, that is to say a small square space, resembling, from the sixth floor, a deep hole, the bottom of which I never saw. The hole was pierced by small windows from which twice a day the smell of badly prepared food seemed to endlessly float up, nauseating us. Above me I saw only a square patch of sky, which was often covered with the black, polluting smoke and hopeless, damp fog from the nearby factories. On the days when I saw a clear blue sky, a childlike joy filled my soul and it seemed to me that for human being’s complete and pure happiness a blue and sunny sky was all that was necessary. 54

The physical environment where she lived shaped the author’s personal psychological state:

Sometimes from the depths of the courtyard, with the smell of grease and oily particles covering the four walls, the voice of a itinerant singer would spiral.

53 Jayawardena, Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World, 14.
54 Zabel Esayian, “Marde”[The Man], Masis. (March 26, 1905): 68.
upward, I would stop my work, and standing next to the window I dreamed...I dreamed...if an "Org du Barbary" came by with his stifled and mournful music, I don’t know why but it filled my soul with unequaled sadness and sentimental yearnings as I cried in my sunless and melancholy room.55

Esayian’s melancholy was exacerbated by her feelings of loneliness. She says she had friends in Paris but they were frequently busy with exams and she spent her leisure time reading Edgar Allen Poe (1809-1849) and Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867).56 Her loneliness was intensified by the fact that she did not meet very often with other Armenians and consequently rarely spoke her native tongue which caused feelings of alienation:

I said that I felt hopeless and bitter at that time, the reason will be understood when I say that not one of my fellow countrymen came to call and it happened that for days, sometimes weeks, I didn’t utter a word in my own language. It was by these means that I lost my habit of thinking in Armenian.57

This passage clearly demonstrates that for Esayian the loss of speaking her native tongue was one of the problems of study abroad. Although this was a problem presumably experienced by both female and male foreign students, Esayian’s alienation was exacerbated by the fact that she lived without other Armenian students. Unlike her male counterparts or the Russian girls she lived with, Esayian did not have a female Armenian student to live with and speak her own native language. This is in large part due to the fact that it was uncommon for Armenian women to study abroad in this period. Therefore the experience of living in France is portrayed as separating Esayian from elements of herself. Her statement, “I didn’t utter a word in my own language” reveals a disintegration in Esayian’s sense of identity, and seems to raise the question: “if she is not speaking her own language who is she?” This is a particularly pertinent question in the Armenian context in which the speaking of the Armenian language is held to be one of the principal features of Armenian identity.

The main action of Marde [The Man] revolves around one of the Russian girls, Miss Zavatska, who like Esayian studied literature. Since Zavatska suffered from a respiratory disease and her years were numbered, Esayian did not understand why in this

55 Ibid., 68.
56 Ibid., 69.
57 Ibid., 69.
case she chose to spend her youth in the poor student quarters of Paris.\textsuperscript{58} One evening Zavatska entered Esayian’s room in a frightened state and told her of a strange occurrence she had experienced for the past several nights. Each night as she prepared to sleep she heard someone at her door. Initially the man said nothing but after she called out he began begging for money and trying to enter her room. Frightened the girl asked the concierge if someone had been in the building in the night. The concierge merely laughed at her and told her it was her imagination.\textsuperscript{59} Esayian offered to spend the night in Zavatska’s room in order to ascertain what was there. That evening the two girls gathered in Zavatska’s room, talking and drinking rum.\textsuperscript{60} In the night while Zavatska slept Esayian thought she heard someone at the door and was very frightened. The next morning she advised Zavatska not to stay in the house any longer. Very soon after Zavatska, because of her respiratory illness, was taken to hospital where she was subject to delusions. Esayian concludes the story by stating that she herself was never sure if there was in reality a man at the door or if when she heard someone at the door she had somehow entered into Zavatska’s melancholy state of mind.\textsuperscript{61}

The style of \textit{Marde} [The Man] resembles the supernatural stories of Edgar Allen Poe, whose works Esayian tells the reader at the beginning of the tale, she had been reading during this period.\textsuperscript{62} The influence of Poe’s supernatural and psychologically charged stories is found in the suggestion of a mysterious presence and the state of heightened mental awareness of the two girls. What is uniquely Esayian’s work in this piece is how she takes elements found in Poe and transfers them to depict the psychological state of two young foreign women living and studying in nineteenth-century Paris. Esayian implies that the two girls entered into the same delusion because they share similar psychological feelings. They are both lonely and feel vulnerable due to the condition of

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 69.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 72.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 69. Esayian read Poe’s works in French the translation of which had been done by Baudelaire, whose poetry Esayian also mentioned reading in this period.
being foreign in an alien city but also based on their gender and their reason for being in Paris.

In an article on feminist thought in nineteenth century England Mary Maynard noted that one of the main issues feminists discussed was the threat which uncontrolled male sexuality, such as rape and sexual harassment, posed to women’s safety.63 In Marde [The Man] Esayian confronts this reality in women’s lives through her depiction of women’s vulnerability and fears about attack. For this reason the voice heard outside the young woman’s door occurs at nighttime when she is alone. This is why Zavatska can sleep the night Zabel stays with her but is frightened when she is alone. The two young women’s terror is a result of their feelings of vulnerability regarding living alone. The experience of living alone is due to the fact that they are in a foreign country without any family. Certainly when Esayian was in Constantinople she did not live alone but with her family. The sense of being entirely alone and helpless is demonstrated when Zavatska hears the voice for the first time:

...around me everything was silent and it seemed to me that the city was empty. My heart was pounding so hard that for a minute I thought that its beats were the knocks [at the door] I had heard earlier.64

In addition to feeling alone and vulnerable in a foreign city this story hints at anxiety about women’s entry into new roles. In part this story may be read as a story of women’s advent into higher education. That this was an unfamiliar and isolating experience is highlighted in the story by Esayian’s description of the building where she lived. She says that the first five floors were inhabited by workers and their families while the sixth floor was divided into small rooms occupied by female foreign students. The young women are portrayed as separated from the inhabitants of the house by space, gender, occupation and one suspects social class.

Esayian’s description of the Russian students reveals ambivalence. She states that she admired the manner in which the Russian girls bonded together and acted as family to

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64 Esayian, "Marde" [The Man], 69.
each other far from their country. She also admired their determination but this is not unmixed. She describes the Russians as:

... sad, blonde girls, who with difficulty climbed the six flights of stairs. In their bloodless and depressed faces, however, their eyes shone calmly and unwavering with a vigorous and determined light.

In the representation of sadness and determination the author seems to be hinting at the psychological cost of the women’s studies abroad. The frequent images of illness in this text highlight this cost: there is the illness of Miss. Zavatska, the “bloodless” faces of the girls and the nauseating stench coming from the building and nearby factories.

The Russian women students seem to have captured Esayian’s imagination. In another text Esayian states that the young Russian women she lived with were for the most part students of medicine and the social sciences. In the novel Spasman Srahin Mej [In the Waiting Room] (1903) Esayian portrayed one of them as a famous medical researcher in Paris. Her portrayal of the brilliant, female doctor in this novella, however, indicates ambivalence around women’s entry into new roles. Esayian portrays the Russian researcher as having short hair and a stern face which resembles a man’s face. A male character in the novel thinks that only her eyes are feminine but they are “too bright and have an unhealthy look.” The image of the intelligent woman in the novel is contradictory. She is both admired and achieves professional success but is also portrayed as masculine with her only feminine feature described as “sickly” looking. Esayian’s conflicting images of intelligent and strong women whom the author admired but at the same time seem to have induced anxiety in the author is an expression of Esayian’s sense of dislocation in studying in Paris and embarking on a new path. As Renate Duelli-Klein argues in her discussion of the feminist writer and theorist Hedwig Dohm (1833-1919) in

65 Esayian gave this information about the Russian students she lived next to in a separate article: Esayian, “Knoj Tiparnar: Rus Usanoghuhin Barizi Mej,” [Types of Women: Russian Women Students in Paris] Tsaghik (June 14, 1903):234.
66 Esayian, “Marde” [The Man], 68.
68 Esayian, Spasman Srahin Mej [In the Waiting Room], 408.
fiction Dohm was able to expose her:

... doubts, pains, and disillusionment about having to live in a male-dominated society, which did not take women seriously nor let them explore possibilities to become persons in their own right. Thus in her novels all female characters are torn between the old (oppressive) and the new (liberated) roles for women and feelings of despair abound.69

Duelli-Klein’s statement is relevant to Esayian, who of these three authors, was the most concerned with the problems of being a woman in patriarchal society. While Dussap’s and Sibyl’s writing tends to focus on how to improve women’s situation, Esayian’s writing tends to concentrate on the psychological consequences of women’s oppression, without the hope of change so eagerly envisioned by Dussap and Sibyl. In her body of work, however, despite the obvious difficulties, Esayian never expressed regret about her studies in France, on the contrary, when she wrote her autobiography she considered her time in Paris as a liberating experience personally and in her exploration of social issues which interested her.70

The goal of education in Armenian feminist discourse was to encourage women to enter into the public sphere. The benevolent associations and schools facilitated women’s entry into the public spheres, although Esayian’s texts, written by an author who had perhaps the most public role of the three authors, reveal that tensions existed between the desiring and attaining of entry into the public sphere. Despite such displays of anxiety about women’s entry into new spaces the trend towards greater female participation in the public sphere continued in Armenian women’s writing.

In Armenian feminist discourse female education was viewed as preparation for women’s employment. Women’s employment is understood in these texts to refer to wage-earning labour. In traditional society Armenian women had certainly worked in the home. In the rural areas women of the household were responsible for cleaning, cooking and preserving food for the winter months.71 What was new in the discussion of employment by these three authors was the emphasis on labour outside of the home and

70 Esayian, Silihtari Parteznere [Gardens of Silihdar],527.
71 Susie Hoogasian Villa, Armenian Village Life Before 1914, 53. Villa describes in great detail women’s industry within the home.
wage earning. This may be reflective of a changing economic situation. We know from memoir literature that Armenian women were part of the wage-earning labour force at least by the beginning of the twentieth-century, if not before.72

Despite the social reality female employment unlike female education was not widely endorsed by male intellectuals who believed that it would conflict with women’s primary role as mothers. In her novel Mayda Dussap publicly challenged the denial of women’s entry into paid employment and the elevation of the category of motherhood without a corresponding respect for women:

It is difficult for me to pardon men for perpetuating this injustice against women, by pushing women out of jobs, they kept these jobs for themselves. I don’t understand why society gives us the responsibility of the family which requires so much knowledge. Why are they giving women a job [motherhood] which is so elevated they cannot successfully achieve it? What is going to be the result of this conduct?73

In this passage Dussap clearly identified women’s unpaid work in the family as beneficial to men by providing free domestic labour and keeping women away from economic competition with men in the workforce. She understood that an ideology which constructed motherhood as an unrealistically glorious occupation and the only possible role for women served to perpetuate women’s oppression by denying them access to privileges enjoyed by men.

In her study of feminist theorists in nineteenth-century England, Mary Maynard has identified two principal arguments in favour of women’s employment: the argument that paid work for women was normal, desirable, and would make women into better human beings and a second argument which emphasized that female employment was necessary so that women could earn independent income.74 The same types of arguments are evident in discussions of employment by Armenian feminist theorists. In the novels Mayda (1883) and Araksi Kam Varzuhin [Araksia or the Governess] (1887) Dussap argued in favour of female employment as desirable because it enabled women to exercise their talents in a

72 See for example Jafferian, Winds of Destiny, 7,11. Jafferian discusses her grandmother’s work as a midwife and her aunt’s work as a dressmaker in pre-1915 Smyrna.
73 Dussap, Mayda, 27.
socially productive manner. As shall be seen later in this chapter Dussap also argued in favour of women’s employment due to women’s need for income independent of parents and husbands. In an article published in 1904 Esayian argued that all human beings should be able to provide for their own subsistence and not be dependent on the care of husbands, fathers or brothers. Esayian articulated the benefits of employment when she stated that work allows all human beings, regardless of gender and social standing, to use their intelligence and exercise their talents.75

As a social and economic issue the discussion of female employment by Armenian feminists was an evolving discourse affected by the social and economic conditions prevalent at the time of writing. A comparison of Dussap’s novel Araksia Kam Varzuhin [Araksia or the Governess] (1887) and Esayian’s novel Erb Aylevs Chen Sirer [When They Are No Longer In Love] (1914) demonstrates the different ways the topic of female employment was approached by the authors. In 1887, when Dussap’s novel Araksia Kam Varzuhin [Araksia or the Governess] was published, the goal of the text was to promote female employment. In it the author argues that female education should prepare women for employment. She is concerned with portraying middle and upper class women’s employment as respectable at a time when female employment among the prosperous classes was perceived as shameful to male family members. In contrast, in Esayian’s novel Erb Aylevs Chen Sirer [When They Are No Longer In Love], the working-class characters accept women’s paid employment as necessary. The author’s attention is focused on portraying the exploitive conditions and low pay the women encounter. The remainder of this chapter will explore the treatment of female employment and the issues raised by the authors in these two texts.

In her discussion of French feminist novelists of the Belle Époque, Jennifer Waelti-Walters has observed in these novels from France that the female characters usually enter professions out of love, especially love for the father who is frequently portrayed as having no son to carry on his work. The female character is portrayed as strong and intelligent. She usually rejects the submissive role of her mother but if she cannot escape a submissive

75 Zabel Esayian, "Feminizmi Artiv" [On the Subject of Feminism], Tsaghik 16 (April 17, 1904): 8.
role she does attempt to modify it.\textsuperscript{76} Dussap’s novel \textit{Araksia Kam Varzuhiin} [Araksia or the Governess]\textsuperscript{77} shares several of the features identified by Waelti-Walters. The main character, Araksia, is an only child who becomes a governess in order to rescue her parents from poverty and out of love for her father who is paralyzed and unable to support his family. She is a strong and intelligent young woman who determinedly overcomes societal disapproval in order to earn her own money instead of relying on the charity of others. She rejects the passivity of her mother who will not take action and work because she fears it will demean the family’s social standing, preferring instead to wait for financial assistance from her relatives.

Despite Araksia’s determination to work, obstacles hinder her throughout her career. Dussap makes it clear that the obstacles Araksia encounters are constructed by social conditions and beliefs which deny women access to employment. \textit{Araksia Kam Varzuhiin} [Araksia or the Governess] is written in favour of female employment and is dedicated to Dussap’s own daughter in the following terms:

\begin{quote}
To my darling Dorine. My daughter I present you this, my third and maybe final novel. Understand my child and begin to love work as Araksia does, always illuminate your mind, trample fearlessly upon social prejudices, be the protector of just causes, be a friend to the weak and an enemy to the oppressors. Repulse moral faults, remember your own dignity and the dignity of your sex.\textsuperscript{78}
\end{quote}

The dedication reveals that for Dussap female employment was a just cause and one which would serve to undermine women’s oppression. In Dussap’s theoretical construction, for women to freely choose to work is a conscious act against women’s oppression in society. For this reason Dussap connects education and employment with illumination of the mind, trampling social prejudices, supporting just causes and fighting oppression. Because Dussap saw female education and employment as freeing women from oppression brought about by ignorance and economic dependency, she was critical of the limitations of current female educational practices and restrictions around employment.

\textsuperscript{76} Jennifer Waelti-Walters, \textit{Feminist Novelists of the Belle Époque}, 100.
\textsuperscript{77} Varzuhiin is usually translated as “teacher.” I have chosen to translate it as governess as this most accurately describes the job Araksia performs. She lives with her pupils in their family home and gives them lessons as well as acting as a companion to them.
\textsuperscript{78} Dussap, \textit{Araksia Kam Varzuhiin}, 359.
As a first step in preparing women for employment Dussap wanted to reform the type of education available to young women. In Araksia Kam Varzuhin [Araksia or the Governess] she criticized contemporary education which she stated was: "not to truly enrich the mind, but rather to provide superficial polish. The reading and writing of Armenian, and also French, is considered sufficient among us to be proud that a girl is granted a reasonable education." In contrast to contemporary views on education Dussap viewed education's primary task as teaching women how to think and become responsible, ethical beings:

Araksia studied Armenian and then French but she particularly loved ancient and modern philosophy. She compared, she examined, she thought and finally that reading helped her, and instead of blindly following established customs, thoughts and prejudices, she formed within herself a powerful determination and influenced others. She showed people the path where they must proceed, she wanted to have the freedom to think and to work. With that same freedom, however, she wanted the dignity to be able to stand up as a virtuous woman and to despise society's trifles which censured the girl from thinking, speaking and sacredly loving freedom. She wanted this because humanity is born to enjoy freedom and love.

Dussap infuses education with radical social implications. In her construction education should not be designed to produce linguistically accomplished women who support the status quo but rather women who reason and by reasoning are able to reject traditional customs and prejudices. In the latter half of the passage when she writes "[Araksia] showed people the path where they must proceed" Dussap constructs the new educated women as a leader who can guide others on the path towards true progress. In her final sentence: "to despise society's trifles which censured the girl, thinking, speaking and sacredly loving freedom, because humanity is born to enjoy freedom and love" she asserts women's right to think and freedom as a basic human right.

In the novel it is the character of Araksia who embodies Dussap's ideal educated woman. Araksia is thoughtful, intelligent and continually subverts social conventions in a polite but firm manner. Dussap describes her as someone who "wants to keep the rights given by nature, she wants to be a useful person, without being presented as a societal

79 Ibid., 363.
80 Ibid., 363.
ornament.” While Araksia does not always agree with her mother she manages to “remain true to her own path” without hurting her mother. Araksia thus embodies what is positive in traditional custom in that she demonstrates filial respect for her mother but at the same time remains loyal to her own principles. Showing filial respect yet remaining true to their own principles is a characteristic of all Dussap’s heroines, suggesting that the author viewed respect for family members as an important custom but one which should not compromise the individual’s ethical principles.

Araksia has an ethical sensibility which is quite different from societal norms of proper behaviour represented in the novel. When her mother argues against Araksia’s finding employment on the grounds that she will tarnish the family name because society will know of the family’s poverty, Araksia argues that to be poor is not shameful and she would rather work than starve. When her unconvinced mother insists that a wealthier relative will assist the family Araksia construes receiving charity instead of earning one’s own money as the true source of shame, saying:

Mother what does it matter what others know, when we know that we are the objects of charity? How can our conscience and our honour bear this?

It is because of her reading of philosophy and her personal reasoning that Araksia has a strong sense of her personal honour which is different from common societal notions of honour. Araksia’s sense of herself as a separate and distinct person is further developed when she finally does enter into the working world.

While Dussap asserts that women should have the right to think, to be educated and to be employed, throughout the novel, she carefully identifies the ways in which society hinders women’s enjoyment of these rights. The author makes it clear in the course of the novel that female education is inadequate because it does not assist in women’s personal development and is not designed to prepare women for employment. In a dialogue between Araksia and her friend Vartanush, Dussap shows that women are unprepared for employment because certain types of knowledge are denied them. Araksia states:

81 Ibid., 363-4.
82 Ibid., 368.
I have a talent for book-keeping, if social conditions permitted I would have pursued accounting because I have a particular inclination for that area. But to my sex every dream of entering such a career is hindered.

Vartanush replies,

Who doesn’t know your accomplishments not only in accounting but also in science. I remember that your teacher, who was also mine, was certain that you could have a good future if you were only of the opposite sex.

Vartanush then remarks that she has never had Araksia’s brains. Araksia replies:

You aren’t a practical creature, you are a poet, you are love, a devoted and sublime dream. In you numbers and accounts have no place. 

In the novel Dussap demonstrates how access to knowledge and learning was prohibited based on gender. Vartanush represents the proper woman because she is emotional and loving and her talents lie in writing poetry, areas more socially acceptable for females than careers in accounting and sciences. In contrast, Araksia, who desires to work and is particularly gifted in fields traditionally reserved for men, is viewed by society as improper. Araksia, while unable to enter into employment in accounting and sciences, but still determined to work resolves to find employment as a governess saying, “I chose the only work available to me, that is to be employed as a teacher in a respectable family.”

Dussap’s statement that Araksia’s employment opportunities are severely restricted reflects the social reality of that period. Like many European feminists, for example the English feminist Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (1827-1891), who called for the expansion of the numbers and kinds of jobs available to women, Armenian feminist theorists recognized that one of the major obstacles to female employment was the lack of desirable jobs. In an article published in 1904 Sibyl states that the work available to women is inadequate as women are barred from “respectable” professions.

In the first half of the nineteenth century teaching school was seen as an unsuitable job for an Armenian woman. In 1864 the Protestant missionary Josephine Coffing described the difficulties a young Armenian woman graduate of the mission school

83 Ibid., 374.
84 Ibid., 375.
85 Maynard, 231.
experienced when she attempted to administer a school for girls in the provincial town of Marash. The young woman was very discouraged and nearly all her pupils had left the school:

The men called her a brazen-faced thing for trying to teach, a thing no woman could do. The women called her crazy, because she did not improve her opportunities for matrimony. Some called her proud; some accused her of wishing to turn a 'Frank'; and all turned from her with scorn and cutting indifference.87

By 1878, however, there were ten schools in Marash taught by Armenian women and Mrs. Coffing comments that by this time:

So rapid had been the change in public sentiment that the people thought they [the women] excelled men in teaching.88

By the end of the century, teaching young girls was one of the few careers to provide educated Armenian women with a respectable job and wages. As a consequence Armenian women entered teaching in great numbers. Mary Patrick, the principal of the American College for Girls in Constantinople, noted that of the college's large number of Armenian students between the years 1871 and 1924 eighty percent were reported to have become teachers.89 Teaching in some ways reproduced women's domestic role because it consisted of training children, a factor which may have contributed to its acceptability in Armenian society. By portraying Araksia as good at accounting and sciences, Dussap indicates her disapproval of restricting women's career options to one particular field, but her placement of Araksia in the position of governess is reflective of social reality.

The opposition to employment Araksia faces from her mother indicates that in some families even teaching was not considered a respectable occupation for the daughter of a middle- to upper-class family. The argument between Araksia and her mother about her desire to work as a teacher in a private home demonstrates the existing social taboos against female employment. Her mother argues that employment as a governess is humiliating, saying: "Won't you feel that if you go to a family to teach that you will have descended to

88 Ibid., 113.
89 Mary Patrick, A Bosphorus Adventure, (California: Stanford University Press, 1934), 233.
the level of a servant?' As their discussion continues the mother reveals her primary fear of the consequence of Araksia’s employment:

You don’t think that your living outside of your home will affect your social standing? Permit me to speak freely, if you do this you can dream only of making a poor marriage.

Araksia replies:

I don’t desire to marry merely in order to assure my future. By my labour I can support you and myself. Permit me to show you that I will never be a companion of fortune to a person who instead of respecting me and my inclinations to work, regards me with contempt.91

In traditional Armenian society what constituted personal honour [badiv] was gendered. For a man his honour was shown by his ability to earn money and command his household.92 For a woman honour was demonstrated by her chastity before marriage and faithfulness to her husband after marriage. For this reason Araksia’s mother sees her husband as having failed in his duty to his family by not being able to work due to illness and carelessness with his money in a risky business venture. She says to him with bitterness after Araksia leaves to work as a governess:

It is the duty of men to earn money and look after the family. Not only are you unable to work and fulfill your duty but you have caused my only child to leave home.93

In Araksia Kam Varzuhin [Araksia or the Governess] and an earlier novel entitled Siranush Dussap challenges the notion that female employment shamed the men of the family. In Siranush Dussap defends a married woman’s employment arguing that it is not a humiliating act for her husband’s honour. Instead in this novel Dussap describes the social custom of the girl’s family giving a dowry as a much more humiliating custom than honest female employment when she has the married women who desires to work say:

If my husband was unemployed due to laziness and I fed him you would be right [that this is shameful]. But I ask you what is honourable when they [women] enter

90 Dussap, Araksia Kam Varzuhin, 367.
91 Ibid., 367.
92 Highgas, Refugee Girl, 20. In this memoir a sister’s sewing for money is viewed by her brother as shaming him because it implies that he cannot support her himself.
93 Dussap, Araksia Kam Varzuhin, 380.
into a contract [giving a dowry] at the time of their marriage or when they are sold for the highest or lowest price? With that [socially] approved money many times they [men] prepare their households, they undertake [business] activities, and sometimes what is even more contemptible, they waste this money on their own pleasures.94

In this passage, as in many of Dussap’s texts, she strips away hypocrisy by showing that men often do rely on women for financial gain. Men benefit from women’s dowries but do not acknowledge this financial benefit. Women do not benefit from their own dowries as they cannot control how that money is spent nor in such circumstances do they have the satisfaction or confidence of earning their own money.

In Dussap’s texts if the control of finances as the basis of male honour is challenged so too is the basis of female honour. When Araksia’s mother states that working and living in another person’s house will decrease Araksia’s marital prospects she is voicing concern about Araksia’s chastity. In several short stories the author Krikor Zohrab, a contemporary of Dussap’s, portrayed the sexual exploitation of domestic servants in wealthy homes in Constantinople. For example in Postal [Whore] he suggested that attractive domestic servants were procured by the family for sons in order to ensure familial control over male sexuality while holding the young women responsible in the advent of pregnancy or scandal.95

The problem of chastity is one Araksia does experience when she works in the Abgarian house as a governess. This threat is demonstrated not by seduction or coercion as in Zohrab’s short stories, but by attacks on Araksia’s reputation by the mother of the children Araksia teaches. Mrs. Abgarian does not like Araksia and her most potent weapon against Araksia is her insinuation that Araksia is not chaste. She achieves this through indirect allusions which are potentially damaging to Araksia’s reputation. On an occasion when Mrs. Abgarian sees Araksia talking to a young man who is a guest at the Abgarian house, she tells her that she is paid to look after the children not talk to men. Araksia speaks in her own defense, but when the son of the house defends her too Mrs. Abgarian answers him thus: “I didn’t know that this shameless teacher had learned so well the art of

94 Dussap, Siranush, 169.
winning young men."  

The difficulties Araksia experiences at the hands of Mrs. Abgarian demonstrate the problems working women faced because they were not considered respectable. When Araksia is fired from her post as governess on an allegation of unchaste behaviour, the novel demonstrates women’s continued vulnerability by showing that women still can be ruined by suggestions of unchaste conduct despite their education. Mrs. Abgarian uses a pretext to send Araksia from her house. The letter she sends Araksia is designed to ruin the unmarried girl’s reputation:

Mrs. Abgarian informs the teacher Araksia that due to her *indecent* behaviour she can no longer remain in her house. From this minute she is free to search for another position.77 [italics mine]

Despite the existence of social constructs which limit women’s opportunities the character of Araksia continues to challenge the traditional categorization of honour [badiv]. Her response to her mother’s statement that she will not be able to make a good marriage if she works as a governess, “I don’t desire to marry merely in order to assure my future ... I will never be a companion of fortune to a person who instead of respecting me and my inclination to work, regards me with contempt,” is indicative of Araksia’s sense that her honour rests in her capacity to work. This vision of female honour constructs honour in a woman’s actions and choices and not in passively being a virgin which is central to traditional constructs of honour [badiv]. In this novel Dussap carefully shows that what assists Araksia in maintaining a strong sense of self despite the adversity she experiences is the confidence employment gives her.

In the novel the author illustrates the potential empowerment employment gives women. Power in this text takes many forms: it is political, economic and personal. When Araksia tells her mother that she wishes to work in order to earn money, her mother replies that work is humiliating for women. Araksia’s reply reveals her recognition of the political and economic power employment gives men:

‘Are men who are the rulers of the earth debased when they work mother?’
‘That is an entirely different matter, men are born to command.’

37 Ibid., 455.
'Employment is power because it is by it that the opposite sex becomes dominant.'

In this passage Araksia challenges the notion that men have political and economic power simply because they are men and 'born to command.' She recognizes instead that men have achieved a position of dominance in society precisely because they occupy influential positions and control wealth. Her statement challenges the notion that men's social position is based on 'natural' rights or abilities, recognizing that in fact it is a social construct which has empowered men. Because patriarchal ideology represented the public sphere as masculine and the private sphere as feminine as a natural, rather than a social construct, Dussap's main focus in the novel is to refute the idea that employment is "natural" to one sex but not the other. She is particularly concerned with explaining the benefits employment will bestow upon women. In order to demonstrate the benefits of employment Dussap contrasts the psychological affects of employment and lack of employment on women through a comparison of the two strongest female characters in the novel: Mrs. Abgarian and Araksia.

Mrs. Abgarian and Araksia are adversaries in the novel as they represent opposite values. Mrs. Abgarian is a twisted character who nevertheless appears outwardly socially successful. She is physically beautiful, the mother of two daughters and has achieved the highest social level by marrying the wealthy widower Abgarian. Her outward appearance is contrasted with her inner self which is shallow, empty and scheming. The author demonstrates Mrs. Abgarian's lack of affection for her children and her unfaithfulness to her husband as examples of her moral degradation.

In contrast to Araksia's employment, which is viewed by traditional societal values as demeaning, Mrs. Abgarian's luxurious dresses and furnishings bought with her husband's money are admired by society. Through her portrayal of Mrs. Abgarian's social success and inner corruption Dussap demonstrates that it is not female education and employment that are wrong but rather society's values which admire the display of wealth and female idleness.

Despite her social success Mrs. Abgarian's power is actually limited because she

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98 Ibid., 366.
99 Ibid., 392.
relies on her beauty and the manipulation of her husband in order to attain riches and not by her own intellect and personal endeavors. She never displays a sense of self; her desires are all material ones. She is a parasite and at the end of the novel she is likened to a fallen monarch. Her failure to prevent Araksi’s marriage to her stepson, despite her plots to divide them, is indicative of how her real power is limited. The last scene of the novel portrays a dialogue between Mrs. Abgarian and her stepson, Nerses, which reveals the limitations of her power:

“When I remember that your wife was once a teacher in my employ, I can never accept anything from you.”
“You think that the person who works isn’t modest, but she is highly esteemed by me. She has attained the highest level in your pleasure loving society. You have seen that work ennobles. Surely, Madame, you have been persuaded of that.”
“If as you say work ennobles, then beauty must be rewarded with a crown. I want the crown.”
“But there is a difference Madame, while work elevates the individual until life’s end, enthronement like yours ends in humiliation and shame.”

Mrs. Abgarian’s social power (her “enthronement”) is based on her beauty, which is subject to the gaze and judgments of others. Ultimately Mrs. Abgarian’s power is determined by external factors and like the monarch she is compared to she can be swept away by the forces of change represented by the modern woman, Araksi. In contrast to Mrs. Abgarian’s illusionary power, Araksi’s intellect and work, which are part of her personal experience, can never be taken from her and can “elevate” her mind for the rest of her life because they are not subject to external judgments. What Araksi has in contrast to Mrs. Abgarian is a strong sense of herself and the self-confidence which personal achievement gives her.

From the beginning of the novel Dussap portrays Araksi as a strong character. She is intelligent, educated and well read. She displays loyalty to her parents and desires to help them after her father is paralyzed. She yearns to be usefully employed. When she is offered the chance to be adopted by a wealthy woman she declines, desiring to live by her own work. Although from the beginning of the story Dussap portrays Araksi as a

100 Ibid., 546.
101 Ibid., 376.
strong woman, the young woman’s strength and personal development increase when she actually does begin to work. When she takes up her post as a governess Araksia’s first hardship is overcoming her grief at leaving her parents in order to reside in an alien house. As she begins to teach the two Abgarian girls, a feeling of satisfaction infuses her:

Employment which she had dreamed of, finally allowed her to realize her dream and to enjoy with such satisfaction the results of her labour of love. It seemed to her that she was a new person and that she was a useful individual in society, that she could finally say “I can earn money myself, because I want to and am able to, I work.”

The abovementioned passage demonstrates the way in which employment gives women an arena to exercise their talents in a productive manner. Most importantly in this text, the experience of productive work enables women to develop subjectivity. Araksia’s sense of self and her self-worth increase as a consequence of her labour.

In the preface to her first novel Mayda Dussap had asked what roles were available to unmarried or childless women when society only respected the role of wife and mother for women. In Araksia Kam Varzuhin [Araksia or the Governess] Dussap provided an answer by suggesting that paid employment would enable women to function as productive members of society. Nor was Dussap solely concerned with the social benefits of female employment. Araksia’s final statement: “I can earn money myself, because I want to and I am able to, I work” reveals that Dussap conceptualized employment as assisting in the development of women’s sense of self and emancipation.

In all Armenian feminist discourse, and especially in the novels of Sruhui Dussap, the central issue was the development of selfhood among the female characters. Dussap searched for ways to claim this independence and she identified education, employment and, as shall be seen in the next chapter, romantic love as the means by which selfhood could be achieved. This connection between women’s employment and sense of self is made clear towards the end of the novel when Araksia, who has lost her job as a governess, resolves to find other employment despite her engagement to the wealthy...

102 Ibid., 381.
103 Ibid., 393.
Nerses, saying "I feel that the day I compromised my honour I would cease to be myself."\textsuperscript{104}

Although Dussap saw the first step in women's emancipation as being the creation of a sense of the female self and a new sense of honour, she conceptualized this within the structure of the family and especially in marriage. Therefore in her novels Dussap created new men as well as new women. These new men were expected to support women's emancipation. For this reason Araksia's fiancé, Nerses, admires her inclination to earn her own living. These men understand and support women's new roles, as the young man, who says admiringly of Araksia to Mrs. Abgarian, does:

You think a woman isn't charming and agreeable because she is a teacher? On the contrary when a girl works for her livelihood a new brilliance infuses her person.\textsuperscript{105}

In contrast to her earlier works \textit{Mayda} and \textit{Siranush} in which the heroines die at the end of the novels because they cannot survive or resist tradition, Dussap allows her heroine in \textit{Araksia Kam Varzuhin} [Araksia or the Governess] to live and achieve success. The success Araksia achieves, however, is that she marries the wealthy Nerses Abgarian. Nerses is portrayed as a 'new' man to Araksia's 'new' woman in that he respects her education and work. Dussap makes it clear, however, perhaps paradoxically, that marriage to the wealthy Nerses is Araksia's reward for her decision to work:

"Do you see mother", said Araksia, "employment instead of humbling me, raised me [meaning her social status will be raised by marrying Nerses]."

"My daughter," replied the foe of employment, "God has rewarded your devoted soul."\textsuperscript{106}

Dussap rewards her heroine for her education and courage to work with a wealthy and socially well positioned husband. In part this may be to make palatable to her audience the idea of female employment which here brings tangible rewards in the form of a socially desirable husband. It may also be Dussap's concession to social reality. In the author's social context there is no greater achievement for women than a successful marriage so this

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 456.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 397.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 417.
is what the author bestows upon her character for daring to work. By portraying Nerses as a 'new man,' however, Dussap hints that this marriage will not mean the end of Araksia’s personal independence which it is implied will continue after the marriage.

In contrast to Dussap’s Araksia Kam Varzuhin [Araksia or the Governess] Esayian’s novel Erb Ayleys Chen Sirer [When They Are No Longer in Love] explores women’s employment from the perspective of working class women. In her study of French women novelists of the same period Waelti-Walters observes that female characters who have a sense of self usually succeed in their professions while women who study and work because they are poor usually abandon their work as soon as they can. The same trend is discernible in Dussap’s and Esayian’s novels. While employment was liberating for Araksia as she freely chose to work and in doing so increased her sense of self and social worth, in Esayian’s novel female employment is an economic necessity which is not emancipating because the women do not freely choose it and are forced to work for low wages under exploitive conditions. A comparison of these two novels’ treatment of female employment reveals differences in women’s experience based on social class.

Erb Ayleys Chen Sirer [When They Are No Longer in Love] is the story of a twenty seven-year-old unmarried woman, Yevpime, who lives with her widowed mother, Yeranik Hanım, in a working-class quarter of Constantinople. The women are very poor and work in their home as yarn dyers as do all their female neighbours. Both women yearn to escape from the drudgery of their lives and hope to achieve this escape through Yevpime’s marriage to her boss. In this novel female employment is considered commonplace as both the men and women of the quarter work in the yarn dying business. The work is divided into gendered categories, however, as the men work outside of the house while women work inside the house with the yarn. Unlike Dussap’s Araksia and Esayian’s female characters in other novels, Yevpime is not portrayed as a someone who challenges social convention. At the beginning of the novel she laments her unmarried state, desiring to be married and a mother like her peers. She is afraid for her future as her father is dead and her maternal uncle will not be able support her after her mother’s death.
because he is poor also. Her desire to be like her peers reveals her acceptance of social reality while her fears for her future indicate that the only real economic and social options available for adult women is to marry.

Employment in this novel does not develop a sense of self nor confidence because here employment is represented as oppressive. The reasons why women must enter the workforce are the first indicators of women’s economic oppression as indicated by Yeranik’s story of her marriage. Yeranik Hanim tells her daughter Yevpime that she (the mother) was the daughter of a master artisan who had several apprentices working under him. Upon her marriage her father provided her with a good dowry which her husband spent on alcohol at the local tavern. As a consequence of her husband’s improvidence, and the fact that women do not have economic control over their dowries or any of the income the husband earns, Yeranik Hanim and her daughter live in poverty. Yeranik Hanim’s situation is not represented as unique. The author states that the majority of men in the quarter go to the tavern every evening to drink while the women work at home and the children grow up poor and hungry. The conditions under which women enter the workforce, as unskilled, desperate to support themselves and their children, and burdened by alcoholic husbands, sets the stage for their continued oppression within the structure of the workforce. The women work in their homes preparing the yarn. That this labour is unhealthy is demonstrated by Esayian’s description of Yevpime’s washing of the yarn at the outdoor fountain in cold weather. Their boss, Hagopjan Agha, (Agha is an honorific and its use in the text serves to demonstrate his higher position vis-à-vis the people in his employ) is described as a cruel man who is widely suspected of cheating his workers:

His workers don’t like him but they respect him because he is the person who provides them with the work they need in order to live. He is cold and unbending in hard times, declining to offer help. He never misses the chance to cut costs and they even suspect that he deliberately falsified the accounts of money owing to

108 Ibid., 27.
109 Ibid., 38.
110 Ibid., 29.
the ignorant and illiterate female workers.\textsuperscript{111} Esayian's portrayal in this novel of the working conditions and dishonesty of the boss is based on her maternal aunts' experiences in the same work. In her autobiography \textit{Silihtari Parteznere} [Gardens of Silihdar] Esayian described her maternal aunts' work in the yarn business and her aunts' sense that they, and the illiterate female workers, were being cheated by their boss.\textsuperscript{112}

In addition to monetary exploitation Esayian suggests that sexual exploitation also occurs. One day when the boss Hagopjan Agha is visiting Yeranik Hanim and Yevpime, he sees Yevpime washing the yarn at the fountain in the courtyard. While Yevpime is washing her dress becomes wet and her clinging clothes reveal the contours of her body. Hagopjan Agha is attracted by this sight and fantasizes about what it would be like to be married to a healthy, young woman like Yevpime in contrast to his own sickly wife who is dying.\textsuperscript{113} He indicates his interest in Yevpime by commenting on her beauty to her mother Yeranik Hanim, and demanding a chair to sit in the courtyard to watch the girl work.\textsuperscript{114} Although Hagopjan Agha does not force himself on Yevpime, Esayian indicates that ultimately all the power in this relationship rests in the hands of Hagopjan Agha. The author demonstrates his power over the two women when he tells Yeranik Hanim that because he likes her he will give her some extra work and insists despite the fact that he knows she does not want to do the work.\textsuperscript{115} He can and does compromise the women's reputation in the neighbourhood when he visits the women in their home without promising to marry Yevpime. As a consequence of his visits Yevpime's reputation is ruined in the neighbourhood. No other man will marry Yevpime and the neighbouring women despise her because they fear a marriage between her and Hagopjan Agha will have negative consequences for themselves.\textsuperscript{116} Why such a marriage would have negative

\begin{thebibliography}{113}
\bibitem{111} Ibid., 29.
\bibitem{112} Esayian, \textit{Silihtari Parteznere} [Gardens of Silihdar], 432.
\bibitem{113} Esayian, \textit{Erb Aylevs Chen Sirer} [When They Are No Longer in Love], 29-30.
\bibitem{114} Ibid., 29.
\bibitem{115} Ibid., 30.
\bibitem{116} Ibid., 58.
\end{thebibliography}
consequences for the working women is not stated by the author but perhaps the women fear Yevpime’s knowledge of their lives and her potential to take revenge on the women for their obvious disapproval of her behaviour. As Yeranik Hanim states: “We have the man in our hands but at the expense of our neighbour’s goodwill.”

Esayian states, however, that Yeranik Hanim and Yevpime do not entirely blame the women for their disapproval because they know that in the same circumstances they would be disapproving but they feel they have compromised their reputations and gone into debt to provide Hagopjan Agha’s evening entertainment to such a degree that they cannot turn back. Yevpime must marry Hagopjan Agha or they will have lost everything, reputation and money.

The difference between the women and the boss in the novel is that if he does not decide to marry Yevpime he will have lost nothing. The women’s plight is not resolved by the end of the story as the reader never learns whether Hagopjan Agha will marry Yevpime or not.

Esayian’s portrait of female employment in Erb Aylevs Chen Sirer [When They Are No Longer in Love] is quite different from her portrayal of women and work in Hogs Aksorial [My Soul in Exile] (1922). In the latter novel Esayian portrayed, in a manner reminiscent of Dussap’s Araksia Kam Varzuvin [Araksia or the Governess] a woman’s joy in her work. The main character of this novel, Emma, is an artist who has lived abroad but returns to Constantinople to exhibit her paintings. Contemplating her paintings Emma says: "At that moment I felt comfort and with assurance I began to look and gradually feel wonder. This evening my soul slowly reached that condition which had given birth to these pictures ..." The positive portrayal of female employment in Hogs Aksorial [My Soul in Exile] reveals that Esayian did advocate female employment but recognized that what distinguishes women’s experience of work is affected by social class. Emma’s work is a joy because it is freely entered into and enables Emma to exercise her talents and thereby increases self-expression and confidence while for the working-class Yevpime work is

117 Ibid., 61.
118 Ibid., 58-60.
119 Zabel Esayian, Hogs Aksorial [My Soul in Exile], in Erker [Works], 133.
simply a necessity and contributes to her oppression.

Esayian’s *Erb Aylevs Chen Sirer* [When They Are No Longer in Love] portrays women as having no alternatives to patriarchal economic and marital structures. The novel does not offer solutions to the problems women face; instead, through the story of Yevpime’s life, Esayian illustrates how oppressive structures converge to limit poor and uneducated women’s options. Esayian’s fictional portrayal of oppression in this novel resembles Marilyn Frye’s discussion of how oppression works. Frye states:

> The experience of oppressed people is that the living of one’s life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable but are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and to restrict or penalize motion in any direction.120

In *Erb Aylevs Chen Sirer* [When They Are No Longer in Love] Esayian portrays Yevpime’s life as having been shaped by barriers beyond her control, such as poverty and her father’s alcoholism, which in turn are part of an economic system which controls working men by paying them little. This is “systematically related to” a hierarchical system of patriarchy which while subordinating working class men vis-à-vis upper class men allows working class men to dominate women of their own class by giving them control over dowries and wages which they spend on alcohol.

Employment does not offer Yevpime escape from her poverty as she is poorly paid and (Esayian suggests) cheated by the boss. Yevpime’s only option is to marry which is represented as an equally unattractive alternative. Marriage to an artisan, like Yevpime’s first suitor Khachik, is represented as undesirable because Khachik, although he loves Yevpime, makes little money and is a heavy drinker. His promise to quit drinking for her sake is dismissed in the text by Yeranik Hanim when she tells Yevpime that men will say anything *before* marriage, but after marriage men are the “masters.”121 The life Khachik offers Yevpime is a continuation of her mother’s and the neighbourhood women’s lives of drudgery, poverty and alcoholic husbands. Marriage to a wealthy man, like Hagopjan Agha, is equally problematic, however, as he does not truly care for Yevpime, and is

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121 Esayian, *Erb Aylevs Chen Sirer* [When They Are No Longer in Love], 10.
represented as cheap, cowardly and cruel. Yevpime’s attempt to free herself from her poverty is restricted and penalized by the neighbours’ attitude towards her. Yevpime’s situation is portrayed by the author as hopeless. In part Esayian offers no solutions to Yevpime’s situation because Esayian was most obviously under the influence of naturalism when she wrote Erb Aylevs Chen Sirer [When They Are No Longer In Love]. Naturalism in literature emphasized the author’s impartiality and viewed people as determined by hereditary, milieu and the circumstances of the moment.\footnote{122 Lilian Furst and Peter Skrine, Naturalism, (London: Methuen and Co, 1971),42.} In this novel Esayian is careful to remain impartial yet her portrayals of the psychological consequences of Yevpime’s experience of alcoholism and poverty demonstrates Esayian’s awareness of the structures of oppression which women cannot alter without wider social and economic changes occurring.

One of Esayian’s main contributions to Armenian feminist discourse was her inclusion of the urban, working-class woman in theories of women’s emancipation. A comparison of Araksia Kam Varzuhin [Araksia or the Governess] and Erb Aylevs Chen Sirer [When They Are No Longer In Love] reveals the different factors which affect women’s employment. Employment freely undertaken assists in developing women’s sense of self by building confidence which allows the female characters to question established social customs and to try to change these customs to enable women to have greater freedom. Poorly paid and unskilled labour does not assist women’s personal development. Women, like Yevpime, are simply caught in a system of oppression which they do not understand and from which there is no escape. Despite the different ways each author treats female employment in these two novels, both texts demonstrate that Araksia’s and Yevpime’s dilemmas are the result of social constructs which subordinate women to men by denying women access to money and the means of earning decent wages.

In Araksia Kam Varzuhin [Araksia or the Governess] Dussap identified the obstacles to women’s employment as lack of adequate education and conventional constructions of femininity. The former meant that women were not trained to enter into professions and the latter made women’s access to the public domain difficult as any
involvement in the ‘world of men’ was viewed as threatening to women’s chastity. The problem of women’s lack of education and therefore preparation was addressed by the authors’ emphasis on female education and their involvement in benevolent associations devoted to expanding and improving the quality of female education.

The problem of female chastity remained a more difficult question. In Araksia Kam Varzuhi [Araksia or the Governess] Dussap demonstrated her awareness that allegations of unchaste behaviour could permanently ruin a woman’s reputation. In Erb Aylev Chen Sirer [When They Are No Longer in Love] Esayian showed how working women could be exploited economically and sexually. Esayian also portrays in this novel a working-class woman’s attempt to use sexuality as a means of escaping poverty, but shows the limitations of this attempt because social conventions are portrayed as more strictly controlling women’s sexual behaviour than men’s. The solution to the problem of female chastity was the creation of what the authors’ saw as a modern ethos of the relationship between women and men which involved new constructions of femininity and masculinity in these texts. The subject of the next chapter is the three authors’ discussion of a new way of structuring female and male relationships within the family which they believed would affect social relations and eliminate problems of uncontrolled (male) sexuality, thereby allowing women freer access to the public domain.
CHAPTER FOUR
WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION AND ROMANTIC LOVE

The following chapter will examine representations of women's experience of love in Srpuhi Dussap's novel Siranush (1884), Sibyl's play Harse [The Daughter-in-Law] (1918) and Zabel Esayian's novel Venin Bazhake [The Last Cup] (1917). The question may arise, "Why discuss love?" the answers are manifold. Medieval Armenian poetic portrayals of love contemplated divine and earthly love. Descriptions of earthly love focused on two aspects of love: the physical beauty of the beloved woman with no reference to the woman's character or intellect, and the male poet's unrequited love.¹ In contrast to the medieval tradition, by the nineteenth century Armenian women writers began to explore the theme of women's experience of love. Love in the three aforementioned texts was connected with modernity and new ideas about how women and men should behave, specifically their interaction with each other. Consequently an examination of their representations of love increases our understanding of how these three women viewed the place of the Armenian woman in the "modern" late nineteenth and early twentieth century world, as well as the problems they identified and the solutions they offered.

Love was considered a taboo topic in Armenian society and the fact that these writers chose to discuss and defend such a risqué subject is indicative of their sense that they were creating something new and rejecting many traditional ideas about women. In these texts love and marriage are central. In a discussion of French women writers of the same period Jennifer Waelti-Walters has said:

There is no place in French society for single women to live with dignity, autonomy, and a sense of themselves, so the issues of feminism and the position of women have to be considered within a context where men and obvious heterosexuality always prevail.²

This is true too of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Armenian society in which all young women expected to marry, customarily through the practice of arranged marriage. In her work on the Armenian family Mazian has suggested that in the countryside the practice of arranged marriage was becoming less common by 1914 as male

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villagers were exposed to different cultural customs as they migrated to cities and abroad in order to work. The writings of Dussap, Sibyl and Esayian, however, demonstrate that opposition to arranged marriage was not simply something happening due to external factors. Their writings show that Armenian women were active in questioning traditional customs. The concept of romantic love enabled these writers to offer alternatives to the traditional custom of arranged marriage although not to the institution of marriage. In Armenian feminist discourse marriage was considered normative and desirable. What was new in this discourse was that the writers articulated a vision of equality and companionship between the partners based on romantic love which they hoped would enable women to attain happiness and a sense of self in order to benefit women and society. Susan and Clyde Hendrick's work on romantic love has suggested that historically the Platonic concept of love as the desire for the possession of the good or the beautiful resulted in the striving towards goodness, causing self reflectiveness which stimulated the development of the idea of selfhood. This vision of romantic love as both good and related to the development of the individual is found in the writings of all three Armenian writers. In their texts love is constructed as a moral force superseding societal laws which are viewed as based on vile motives such as greed, envy and domination. Since romantic love is a personal emotion, the moral authority of love is located in the soul or self of the individual female character. Authority is not located outside of the self but within it; thus the importance of the individual is elevated. The frequent use of the term hogi (self, soul) which is a gender neutral term indicates that the authors were also anxious to construct the moral authority of love as available to all human beings regardless of gender, unlike societal laws which gave the male authority over the female. The authors, however, did not portray love as hedonistic abandonment. If real authority lies in the loving soul, that soul must also be a moral one. It is in the creation of the new moral woman and man and the criticism of traditional morality that we see how each author envisioned the ideal modern

person and ultimately the ideal new world. While Armenian intellectuals other than these authors spoke of love or modern society, these authors' emphasis on the equality of women in this formulation was unique.

The novels reflect an urban, middle-to-upper class sensibility and are representative of the fact that in the Western Armenian context the earliest discussions of the position of women in Armenian society took place among the female and male intellectuals of Constantinople and these literary texts reflect the social and educational status of the authors and audiences. Literacy among Armenians of this period tended to be low in urban and rural areas. In 1851 an article in the journal Banaser complained that ninety percent of the Armenian population was illiterate and only two percent of the population was in school in Constantinople. Although the numbers of literate people would have been greater by the 1880s and 1900s the audience for these literary works was still restricted to a small elite in the capital and larger towns. There was some contemporary criticism of the urban nature of the novels of Dussap, for example A. Arpiarian, writer and literary critic, stated in a critical allusion to Dussap’s urban novels: “The Armenian woman is on Armenian soil, whoever wants to defend her cause must first study her life by living with her.” Arpiarian’s criticism, which ignored the reality that many Armenians, including Arpiarian, did not live in Armenia, reflects a prominent vision among the Armenian intelligentsia that the true locus of Armenian identity lay in the Armenian peasantry living in historic Armenia. By the nineteenth century, however, Constantinople was the economic, political and cultural centre of the Western Armenian community with a well-established Armenian population.

While never denying the importance of the Armenian population in historic Armenia, these three authors believed that the issues facing urban Armenian women had relevance in terms of the structure of Armenian society. Many of the issues these three authors discussed, for example arranged marriage and parental authority, affected Armenian women of all classes and localities.

6 Cited in Arpik Minasyan, Sibyl, 81.
In Esayian’s autobiography, *Silihtari Parteznere* [Gardens of Silihdar], the author gives us an inkling of the affect of Dussap’s novels on young urban Armenian women of the 1880s and 1890s. Esayian noted that many of her female friends lamented the fact that they had little freedom; they “wanted to be educated, to participate in ordinary life, go out with male friends, meet, travel, etc.” They regarded Esayian as fortunate because she had an “enlightened father.” Esayian notes that the girls did not know how to change their circumstances and often became depressed and together they “began to read the works of Mme. Dussap and in the feminist author’s works we tried to find a solution to our disturbing questions.”

Esayian’s description illustrates that the problems and issues outlined in Dussap’s novel were viewed by contemporary young women to have relevance in their own personal lives.

The chapter is divided into three parts. Each section explores an aspect of romantic love that is central to the author’s construction of the relationship between romantic love and women’s emancipation.

**Siranush: Love as Modernity**

An important feature of Sruhi Dussap’s discourse was the question of modernity, particularly its relationship to Armenian society’s construction of gender and class. Her three novels seem to pose the questions, ‘What is modernity and what is its relationship to tradition? How do modern people behave? How does modernity affect women and social class in Armenian society?’ The answers to these questions which Dussap provided in the novels were meant to guide Armenian society in the process of creating a just society. Dussap believed, as did Sibyl and Zabel Esayian, that the betterment of the condition of the Armenian woman would result in the improvement of the Armenian nation as a whole.

Although Dussap’s first novel *Mayda* began to address the aforementioned questions, it is in her lesser-known, second novel *Siranush* that Dussap constructed a more fully developed theory and argument of modernity. In *Siranush* Dussap explored the issue of modernity and its relationship to gender through the prism of romantic love, and indeed romantic love is closely connected with the modern in her discourse. In the following

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8 Zabel Esayian, *Silihtari Parteznere* [Gardens of Silihdar], 525.
I will explore Dussap’s theory of romantic love, as expressed in *Siranush* and discuss what it reveals about gender and class according to traditional and modern mores.

The story of the novel *Siranush* centres around the heroine, Siranush, who falls in love with Yervand, the son of a poor artisan. Because she is the daughter of a wealthy amira she is not permitted by her father to marry Yervand and instead is married to Mr. Darehian who like Siranush’s father is a wealthy amira. Siranush’s and Yervand’s doomed love is contrasted by the author with the happy love of Siranush’s friend, Zaruhi, who is Yervand’s sister and her lover, Hrant, who because they belong to the same social class are allowed to marry. Siranush’s and Darehian’s marriage is a failure because each character is representative of opposing and conflicting modern and traditional values. It is through the dilemma of Siranush’s love affair and later marriage that Dussap explored modern values, the traditional position of women and the inequality of women in marriage and the social hierarchy.

At the beginning of the novel *Siranush* Dussap describes the contemporary Armenian ruling elite as being divided into three competing groups, the amira, bureaucratic officials and the intellectuals. She states:

> Eventually the bureaucratic official gained prominence over the amira and this resulted in a new elite, based on the state bureaucracy, which competed for influence with the wealthy merchant class. And the third class, the intellectual class, competed for existence with the other two classes. This was a struggle over position, gold, and enlightenment.  

Dussap characterizes the bureaucratic class as dependent, the amira as independent and the intellectuals as progressive, adding, however, that while the intellectual class had some strength it was not as powerful as the other two groups. Dussap’s description of the

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9 The amira usually acted as bankers or moneylenders in the Ottoman taxation system. They were permitted to wear clothes reserved for Ottoman officials and ride horses, privileges denied to non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire. Due to their power at court the amiras had a great deal of power in the Armenian community, including the election of the patriarch. See Hagop Barsoumian, “The Dual Role of the Armenian Amira Class within the Ottoman Government and the Armenian Millet (1750-1850),” *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, Vol. 1. ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1982), 171.

10 Srpuhi Dussap, *Siranush* in *Erker*, (Erevan: Sovetakan Grogh Hratarakchutiun, 1981), 155. All subsequent references to this text are from this edition of the novel.

11 Ibid., 155.
different aspects of the ruling classes reflects the political situation of the period. From 1810 to 1845 through their control of the Armenian patriarch, who was the spiritual and civic leader of the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire, the amira dominated the Armenian millet. The amira were frequently generous patrons of schools, hospitals and churches within the Armenian community, and thus facilitated the cultural revival of the nineteenth-century. The source of their wealth and prestige in the Armenian millet, however, was dependent upon their role as intermediaries between the state and the Armenian millet. They were frequently seen by their contemporaries as not protecting the Armenian population in order to retain their position within the Ottoman state. A challenge to their power occurred in 1838 when liberal Armenians and members of the guilds had demanded a voice in the government of the community. The result of this conflict was the creation in 1860 of the Armenian National Constitution which governed the internal affairs of the Armenian community. The new representative government was composed of lay and religious members which curtailed some of the power of the clergy and the amiras.

In Siranush Dussap reveals how this political conflict is manifested on a personal gendered level. She depicts the conflict between the amira class, represented by Siranush’s father and husband, and the new intellectual class, represented by Siranush, as a family conflict between father and daughter, husband and wife. Siranush’s education and way of thinking, which made her part of the intellectual class, is contrasted with the figure of Siranush’s father, Mr. Haynur. Mr. Haynur is the son of a wealthy amira family, he is portrayed as uncultured, and as not valuing anyone who does not have wealth or position in the bureaucracy. Her future husband is described in a manner that is reminiscent of Dussap’s portrayal of Siranush’s father. He too is from a wealthy family, a high ranking official who “possesses a pride which is the product of having inherited wealth.” He is also known to behave “immorally” by consorting with prostitutes, but despite this is considered

12 Hagop Barsoumian, “The Dual Role of the Armenian Amira Class within the Ottoman Government and the Armenian Millet (1750-1850),” 179, 181.
14 Dussap, Siranush, 155.
by Siranush's father, and other wealthy families, to be a good match for their young daughters due to his wealth.  

The connection between Siranush's father and husband is also made clear by the fact that both are referred to as Mr. Haynur and Mr. Darehian respectively, and never by their first names, unlike the other characters in the novel, who are drawn from the intellectual and artisan classes. Their roles indicate that Mr. Haynur and Mr. Darehian are the patriarchs and the upholders of tradition and of male authority in the novel.

While the differences between Siranush and Mr. Haynur and Mr. Darehian serve to illustrate the differences between the intellectuals and the amiras, Dussap, who never lost sight of the category of gender and its relationship with class, demonstrated that what also divided Siranush from Mr. Haynur and Mr. Darehian was the position of women in the amira class. As the daughter and wife of amiras, Siranush could be considered part of the amira class and yet she is not; Dussap firmly allies her to the intellectual class. By demonstrating the alienation and powerlessness which both Siranush and her mother experience the author questioned the extent to which women belong to any social class when they do not have the same power in it as men. The inequality of women is made clear by Dussap in the conflict over Mr. Haynur's decision to marry Siranush to Mr. Darehian. Without asking for either Siranush's or his wife's consent, Mr. Haynur agrees to Darehian's proposal. At this point Dussap interjects into the text in a mocking tone:

After all isn't he the father? Doesn't he have absolute authority over his child's fate, particularly in this sort of illustrious case?

When Haynur finally informed his wife of his decision, he was surprised to discover that she was not pleased, arguing that the groom's debauched lifestyle was not in harmony with her daughter's tender feelings:

Mr. Haynur roared: “Our daughter will live in luxury and greatness, she will be the reigning queen of her house and in the face of all this you want to raise obstacles based on this elevated individual's youthful behaviour? Men are free and no one can meddle with their lives.”

Mrs. Haynur replied: “Yes, they are free, while they have no wife, while there is no fear of wounding a tender heart. But from the day a holy, pure soul becomes their

15 Ibid., 178.
16 Ibid., 180.
life’s companion, a soul who searches for her happiness in love and in mutual love, I say, from that day onward men cease to be free. From that day marital duties should weigh upon men as they do upon women and they must give up unfair ease and concentrate their desires and dreams in the marital state.”

“For centuries men have enjoyed their freedom,” her inflamed husband responded, “and have lived happily with their wives.”

“You are incorrect, familial harmony is achieved only when men reject lechery, when they are decent and faithful to their wives. Look also at us, how everything has changed. When Armenians maintained their honour, when women were jealous of their honour and lived loyally according to their class, what calm prevailed in family life, what virtue, what peace! But because men began to raise the flag of [their sexual] freedom in marital life, inner bliss was destroyed and lawlessness reigned absolutely.”

“Women’s contemporary demands for equality is a new disease which has affected the well being of the family. When a woman lives in wealth and glory what more can she desire?”

“She can desire a faithful heart, a heart which will be a companion to her joys and grief.”

The dialogue between Siranush’s parents reveals the conflict between the modern and the traditional. Siranush’s mother argues in favour of marriage based on mutual love and respect while Mr. Haynur represents traditional expectations of male and female behaviour in marriage among members of the amira class, and particularly the subordination of women within that system. Men were allowed sexual license both before and after marriage while women were not. In return for their compliance women were supported financially. The connection between female acquiescence and male financial power is made clear in the novel when after her marriage Siranush returns home one evening to discover her husband and his mistress in her house, Siranush is very angry and demands that the woman leave immediately. The next morning Darehian attempts to give Siranush a valuable diamond ring as a form of compensation. Siranush rejects the ring, saying:

You men think that woman is your plaything who is there when you want her and can be cast aside when you don’t want her, and then taken up again when that is your will. You are wrong, women have hearts and honour. She continues, “Darehian you will never occupy a place in my heart, I wanted to respect you as my life’s companion and to make you happy. But you are a man who doesn’t know how to respect his wife, and instead rubs her face in the mud.”

By rejecting the ring and refusing to acquiesce to Darehian’s behaviour, Siranush rejects the traditional balance of power between the sexes in marriage. The tragedy of Siranush is

17 Ibid., 180.
18 Ibid., 247.
that while Siranush and her mother argue against the idea of marriage as an economic transaction, favouring the idea of marriage as a union of companionship, their protests remain unheeded. Mr. Haynur is unmoved by his wife's opposition to the marriage with Darehian and as a consequence bullies her to such a degree that Siranush feels compelled to marry Darehian in order to protect her mother from her father. After her marriage Siranush's situation worsens; she is virtually a prisoner in her home, spied upon by servants and subject to her husband's jealousies while he is free to visit his mistress. But Siranush and her mother are not compliant; instead they verbally protest, but because they are women they do not have access to the wealth and public position which are the origins of amira power and status. Women are regarded in society as possessions of male amira to be exchanged between amira families through marriage. As such they are powerless and cannot ameliorate their situations despite belonging to the powerful amira class.

Dussap did not attempt to conceal her contempt for the amira class, specifically its customs and mores which she identified as harmful to women. In her preface to Siranush Dussap criticized the amira saying,

[they] live in a sordid [moral] atmosphere and at the same time demand to be loved and respected by their wives. Love! Respect! What an astonishing ambition, a foolish dream. To be loved it is necessary to love and to respect.

In contrast to the amira's devaluation of women, Dussap saw the intellectual class as being the locus of progress and the hope of women's emancipation. Unlike the amira class the intellectual class is portrayed by Dussap as being much more fluid. In her novels admittance into the intellectual class was not achieved through the possession of wealth or social standing but through the intellect, the world of art, commitment to progress and the modern and was not restricted to men alone. The new standards of the intellectual class had the potential to undermine the traditional amira evaluation of human worth. In the novel when Yervand decided to go to Rome to further develop his talent in painting, he did so because he wanted to improve his social position in order to be considered worthy of marrying Siranush in the eyes of her father. He believed that his success in art would

19 Ibid., 279.
20 Ibid., 281.
21 Ibid., 146.
elevate him to her social level because "intelligence is the highest equality." The belief that intelligence is the highest equalizer had the potential to subvert the old structure which was based on hierarchy determined by wealth, social position and gender. The intellectual class's emphasis on knowledge as the basis of merit and value rather than gender and birth was potentially inclusive of women. While Dussap understood that Siranush and her mother could not participate in decision making as members of the amira class because that class subordinated women to men, and did not allow women access to the wealth and employment which formed the basis of value in amira society, the same is not true of her portrayal of the intellectual class. Dussap depicted Siranush as a member of the intellectual class through her description of Siranush's education and interests:

To study was a beloved dream of Siranush's, particularly the study of ancient and modern national [Armenian] history and the literature of other nations too. She loved to study the causes of national progress and decline, and she wisely noted that the intellectuals gave people life, while vice and ignorance brought only death.

In Dussap's portrayal of Siranush she created a young woman who is able to read, study history and literature, and is interested in improving the condition of her people. This portrait not only demonstrates that Dussap viewed the intellectual class as working less for personal profit than for the good of the nation, but also is indicative of the emancipation offered to women by the intellectual class. As an intelligent young woman with intellectual interests Siranush could and clearly desires to participate in the movement for national progress. The fact that she is prevented from doing so in the novel is the result of her weak position as a woman within her upper-class family.

It is the character of Zaruhi, not Siranush, who is more fully able to actualize the benefits offered her by membership in the intellectual class. A member of the artisan class, upon her parents' death, Zaruhi was adopted by Siranush's mother who provided the girl with the same education as Siranush. Although Zaruhi and Siranush received the same education their fates are quite different due to their different social standing. In the novel Zaruhi is able to use her education and work after marriage because she is not a member of

22 Ibid., 172.
23 Ibid., 156.
a class which enforces female idleness. The author states that Zaruhi was versed in the French and English languages and possessed musical and literary talents. After her marriage Zaruhi is able to utilize her education by teaching and doing translation work.24

Dussap knew, however, that some elements of the intellectual class would reject women’s participation in the public sphere, which they saw as their domain. Her preface to Siranush acknowledged the opposition she herself experienced from some male intellectuals. She responded to the controversy her first novel Mayda had invoked and anticipated further opposition to her second novel Siranush:

When Mayda appeared many males were excessively upset and also scandalized. Why such upset? Why that outrage? If my pronouncements are legitimate then I am serving the cause of justice and instead of fear and anger I should inspire gratitude.25

The opposition Dussap experienced did not make her lose hope in the intellectual class as the group most likely to support women’s emancipation. She advocated that women and men continue to actively promote women’s emancipation. Indeed Dussap viewed this as a moral duty. She wrote:

They will criticize me for these declarations but what is audacious to them is to me a duty. To see evil and to hide it, fearfully striking at it, certainly does not reveal the spirit’s courage.26

Dussap’s three novels are impassioned but reasoned pleas for Armenian women’s emancipation and unhindered participation in the work of the intellectual class.

Dussap thought women’s emancipation could be achieved only by abandoning traditional gender constructions in favour of a more inclusive system which allowed women to exercise their talents in areas traditionally restricted to them. As shown above she viewed the intellectual class with its rejection of old belief systems as the class most likely to support women’s liberation. She utilized the theme of romantic love to formulate her concept of the need for a new basis for the relations between women and men. While Dussap was an ardent supporter of women’s education and paid employment, she

24 Ibid., 168-9.
25 Ibid., 147.
26 Ibid., 146-7.
perceived romantic love as an important basis of women's emancipation because the majority of women in her society married and it was this personal relationship between women and men which had the greatest impact on women's lives.

Many Armenian intellectuals of the nineteenth century equated modernization with progress and enlightenment and believed that modernity would result in an improvement in the conditions of the Armenian people.27 For Dussap, as for most Armenian intellectuals, modernity meant progress in the realm of the intellect, education, social relations, economics, and agriculture. France was the model of modernization the Armenian intellectual elite emulated.28 Dussap who wanted women to be able to participate in this movement towards modernity constructed romantic love as a sign of modernity.

In 1863 Charles Baudelaire published an essay in the French newspaper Le Figaro in which he used the term "modernité" to articulate a sense of difference from the past and to describe a peculiarly modern identity. The modern, in this context, does not mean merely of the present but represents a particular attitude to the present.29 Baudelaire's association of modernity with new values and realities was a unique concept.30 Armenian intellectuals took their conception of the modern from the French intellectual tradition. In addition, in the Armenian context modernity was associated with opposition to tradition.31 For Dussap the expression of romantic love was a means of altering the traditional institution of marriage and women's place within this system and to facilitate women's participation in the modern world. By doing this she was attempting to create a "sense of difference from the past" and attempting to shape a new vision of women's identity. Modernity was not confined simply to Dussap's feminist theory; it was also a feature of her writing style. Vahe Oshagan noted that in her three novels Dussap made "a genuine effort,

28 Vahe Oshagan, "Cultural and Literary Awakening of Western Armenians, 1789-1915," 58.
in form and content, to revitalize and modernize the genre.” The epistolary form she used in 
*Mavda*, although experimented with by Mamourian, was relatively new in Armenian 
literature.32 Although I have chosen not to discuss literary style in this dissertation in 
order to concentrate on content, Dussap’s use of modern literary forms is an interesting 
aspect of her commitment to modernity which is amply demonstrated by the content of her 
novels.

The story of *Siranush* is the story of the conflict of traditional and modern values 
regarding women in nineteenth-century Armenian society. Viewing this conflict through 
the question of women and love is useful because expression of female love was 
considered shameful in traditional Armenian society. Dussap’s discussions of this issue 
reveal how love and modernity were linked in her intellectual thought and how Dussap 
understood the connection between women’s emancipation and modernity. Dussap’s 
connection of love to the modern is revealed in *Siranush* during a discussion between 
Siranush and her father over the issue of love and attaining happiness:

Mr. Haynur says: “Siranush you are young and you don’t know what happiness is 
and how it is formed.”

“Father, if I don’t know what life is, I am not ignorant of what the heart is.”

“The heart is an unreal word, a youthful delusion that in reality means nothing.”

“But Father a heart which is content, which is full of sympathy and trembles with 
happiness, that is the true wonderful life.”

Mr Haynur responds that it is by material comfort that one achieves happiness. Siranush 
replies:

How can I enjoy that beauty and luxury when it’s as if I’m offering my heart as a 
sacrifice on the same altar, where it is my fate to be taken by an alien hand. When 
my heart is dead how can I enjoy luxurious surroundings?33

Mr. Haynur bases his refusal to countenance Siranush’s belief that a love match would 
bring her marital happiness on the fact that Siranush is young. Twice in the paragraph he 
tells her that she is young and her feelings are simply the result of “youthful delusion.” In 
the text love is associated with youth, but also represents another way of looking at the 
world. The old vision of marrying for money is replaced by a vision of marriage in which

32 Oshagan, “Modernization,” 68.
women and men would experience emotional fulfillment. The marriage between Siranush and Darehian, based on the traditional custom of marrying in order to ensure financial security is a failure. In the course of the novel Siranush is proved correct; marital happiness is not achievable without love.

The love match was a radical idea in the nineteenth century since most Armenian marriages of that period were arranged ones. Memoirs by Armenian women born at the end of the nineteenth century confirm that a woman was expected to accept the husband chosen by her parents. The traditional arranged marriage among Armenians was based on an conceptualization of marriage as an alliance between families and clans, rather than an alliance between individuals. Although this did not always preclude individual preference, the final decision was made by the family. The fact that such marriages were commonly against the preferences of the bride was acknowledged in folk songs, such as the following one sung by a reluctant bride and her mother:

Mother: Bride, don’t cry, don’t cry, your eyes will hurt. May he who married you so young, may his household topple.
Girl: Why should I not cry, Mother? You fooled me. You didn’t give me to the one I loved; you have made my heart yearn.
Mother: He is young and poor; he has no house, no position, nothing.
Girl: His condition is good; what should I do with a house? If you had given me to my loved one, I would have been satisfied with my loved one.

Despite such evidence of popular aversion to the practice of arranged marriage the love match carried with it the taint of immorality. Writing of the social mores of her family and

34 See Diruhi Kouymjian Highgas, Refugee Girl, 163 and Elise Hagopian Taft, Rebirth, 13. These authors born at the beginning of the twentieth century were from medium sized towns and described the practice of arranged marriage as commonplace in their towns.
35 Susie Hoogasian Villa, Armenian Village Life Before 1914, 72.
36 Ibid., 74. For example Villa’s informants state that a boy could sometimes influence his family to select the girl he preferred. In some families girls had the right of refusal as demonstrated by a case described in 1900 by the American missionary Theresa Huntington. Huntington described the case of a Armenian woman whose parents had accepted her refusals of all suitors until she was 24 years old, at that time, however, they insisted on arranging her marriage to a suitor she did not like. In Theresa Huntington Ziegler, Great Need Over the Water, ed. Stina Katchadourian, 170.
37 Villa, Armenian Village Life Before 1914, 80.
neighbours in the Constantinople of the 1880s and 1890s, Zabel Esayian states:

These were the customs of the capital Constantinople. Young people who perhaps spoke to each other, exchanged looks and with feelings of mutual love wanted to marry, but did not have wealth or sufficient means, were regarded as shameful. In my teenaged years I heard of families who “had married for love” spoken of with disapproval.\(^3^8\)

Esayian’s description of attitudes to love matches during the 1880s and 1890s is significant because it enables us to see how radical the ideas expressed in the novel Siranush published in 1884 would have appeared to a reading audience and explains the fervour caused by Dussap’s novels.

Dussap’s emphasis on love in Siranush reflects her desire to alter traditional social customs in favour of a modern, individual-oriented, urban vision of social behaviour, by questioning traditional notions of morality and creating new ones for the women of her society. Dussap’s vision of her society as being urban and experiencing change resembles Baudelaire’s contention that the:

modern in art [is] related to the experience of modernity— that is, to an experience which is always changing, which does not remain static and which is most clearly felt in the metropolitan centre of a city.\(^3^9\)

Dussap expressed her sense of modernity by rejecting traditional customs. While according to traditional mores Siranush’s love for a man before marriage was scandalous and immoral behaviour in a woman, Dussap challenged this conviction by contending that true corruption was treating women as if they were possessions to be passed from one man to another without regard for the woman’s desires or feelings. In the following scene Siranush has confessed to her husband that she has always loved Yervand and only consented to marry him (her husband) because she feared for her mother’s well-being:

Darehian said: “Your behaviour is unconscionable.”

Siranush replied: “But you never bothered to inquire if my heart was free or if I could love you, you were content with my father’s consent. You wanted my person and you got my person, but you don’t have the right to complain if I kept my heart for another and I will keep it until the end of my life.\(^4^0\)

Siranush’s answer to Darehian’s accusations of immorality demonstrates the new social

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\(^3^8\) Zabel Esayian, *Silihari Partezner* [Gardens of Silihdar], 405.
\(^4^0\) Dussap, *Siranush*, 293.
morality Dussap was trying to construct. She identified the true locus of conflict as being one of patriarchal thought which allowed women no feelings and thoughts independent of what men desired them to have rather than women’s subversion of traditional customs as conservatives would argue. It is because of this belief system that when Darehian felt attracted to Siranush he could simply ask her father for permission to marry her, without considering if he was desirable to her, without wondering if she had committed herself to another man, and without knowing much about her character or thoughts since he had only spoken with her once. Siranush’s aforementioned reply defied the unspoken assumptions of patriarchal thought, by repudiating the notion that men have a right to expect behaviour from women when it does not take into account women’s thoughts and feelings. Through Siranush’s statement that, “you don’t have the right to complain if I kept my heart for another,” Dussap asserted women’s right to have control over their emotions and thoughts irrespective of patriarchal rites of ownership which legitimized the passing of women from fathers to husbands, demanding chastity and loyalty to both. Dussap made it clear that the fault in this situation is not Siranush’s for forming a bond with another man prior to marriage as traditional mores would posit, but that the fault is Darehian’s and society’s because both her husband and society did not regard Siranush as a rational human being who had the right to make decisions about her own life. In this novel traditional morality is disregarded, while the modern morality of love prevails. Nor was modern morality restricted to women alone. Dussap extends her social criticism to challenge the traditional acceptance of male sexual freedom. Darehian attempts to justify the different standards of male and female sexual freedom, saying:

Don’t you know that man is free and that upon him the stain doesn’t show, while it stains the woman in a way which cannot be erased?41

Siranush refutes this statement by answering that behaving in an immoral manner leaves a stain upon men too.42 The implication in this novel that men should be subject to the same moral standards as women, is similar to arguments against the double moral standard found

41 Ibid., 295.
42 Ibid., 295.
in European feminism of the same period. For example, the French feminist Madeleine Pelletier criticized the custom of restricting women's freedom of movement and social interaction in order to ensure the unmarried woman's virginity. Pelletier argued that male sexual license had severe social consequences in the form of unwanted pregnancy, illegitimate children and prostitution.43 Historian Lucy Bland has noted that from the 1880s the feminist demand for a single standard became central to the English women's movement:

Feminists sought transformed sexual relations between men and women in which women were equal and independent and men took responsibility for changing the oppressive aspects of their sexual behaviour. ... Feminists wished for the eradication of women's experience of sexual objectification, sexual violence, and lack of bodily autonomy, to be replaced instead by a new sexual morality in which men lived by the same ethical precepts as women.44

Like feminists in England and France, Dussap argues, throughout the novel, that women and men should share the same ethical principles in the realm of sexuality. She argues that while men may not bear physical marks of sexual activity, their morality is reflected in their daily behaviour. It is due to Darehian's suspicious attitude that Siranush cannot love him. The author clearly shows that it is his suspicious attitude, which is a result of his association with prostitutes, that causes him to view all women as being like prostitutes, which is constructed as a sign of his moral decay despite his claim that "the stain doesn't show" upon the man.

Through the character of Siranush and the theme of love Dussap attempts to create a comfortable space for Armenian women in the modern world. It is a process which she believes Armenian women need to control in order to ensure positive roles for women. For this reason Dussap created as a model a moral woman who has her own particular sense of self and honour. In traditional Armenian society what constituted personal honour [badiv] was gendered. For a man his honour was shown by his ability to earn money and command his household.45 For a woman her honour was demonstrated by her chastity

43 Jennifer Waelti-Walters and Steven Hause, ed. Feminisms of the Belle Époque, 184.
44 Lucy Bland, Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885-1914, xiii.
45 For this reason Zaruhi is accused of compromising her husband's honour by working for money, which suggested he could not support his family through his own effort. Dussap, Siranush, 169.
before marriage and faithfulness to her husband after marriage.46 While Dussap accepted
the idea that women should be chaste, she abhorred the fact that men were not subject to the
same restrictions of chastity and frequently caused a woman’s disgrace:

She thought that women’s honour had become a sacred issue in society, such that
one stain became the subject of accusations, criticisms and judgments, and many
times women’s conduct and thoughts were misrepresented and dishonourable aims
were presumed. Without scruple and with every ease they struck a blow against
women’s honour without the male perpetrators being subjected to punishment.47

But Dussap went beyond simply deploring the fact that men and women were not subject to
the same restrictions concerning sexual behaviour. She constructed a new vision of
women’s honour which had nothing to do with sexuality. In her construction women’s
honour was related to a woman’s personal sense of self and right behaviour, which is not
enforced but freely acted upon. This is demonstrated by the following scene when Darehian
tells Siranush that she must never meet with Yervand again and adds:

“... if you act against my will you will never receive forgiveness from me.”
Siranush answered: “I will never ask for forgiveness, my honour and blameless
conduct don’t need pardon.”
“But who will guarantee me that you won’t act against my will?”
“I will.”48

Siranush’s statement that she alone will be responsible for her own behaviour indicates
Dussap’s contention that women are rational beings who are able to take responsibility for
their own actions.

The concept of love as a moral force is given legitimacy in Dussap’s discourse
because she regards love as a part of the natural world. Love in Dussap’s discourse is an
aspect of the natural world and therefore ensures perfect harmony without the artificiality of
societal laws. Dussap’s construct of love in Siranush is the perfect union between the souls
of a woman and man. The lovers should be equal, sharing the same ideas and morals as in
Siranush’s relationship with Yervand which Siranush describes thus:

46 In rural areas proof of virginity at the time of marriage was demonstrated by displaying bloodied sheets
from the marriage bed. The presentation of a bloodied sheet at this time was said to have brought honour to
the girl and her family. Villa, Armenian Village Life Before 1914, 85.
47 Dussap, Siranush, 304.
48 Ibid., 297.
From my childhood I have been accustomed to living with Yervand, to living by his ideas and feelings, making merry with him, sharing grief and joy with him.49

Dussap argued in *Siranush* that if spiritual, romantic love prevailed in relations between women and men, instead of the love of profit, which dominated amira marriages, oppression of women would not exist. According to Dussap:

The woman is heart and reason, with one she lives, with the other she thinks. If the mind defeats the heart, it is death to the devoted angel who is martyred for love.

The man who with overt or covert violence owns the heart which is not free only dominates the victim and woe to that marriage!...Like everything else the heart has its own rules and the attempt to prevent it is idiocy because natural law cannot be altered.50

Her conclusion that love ensures equality is based on her conceptualization of love as an expression of the “natural,” which in turn is closely intertwined with the idea of the modern.

Dussap’s theory of nature is part of her adherence to the European romantic movement’s emphasis on the individual, the emotional and the imaginative. Anne Mellor asserts in her study of European Romantic women writers that these writers differed from male Romantics in that they celebrated “the workings of the rational mind, a mind relocated—in a gesture of revolutionary gender implications—in the female as well as the male body” and advocated social change that extended the “values of domesticity into the public realm.”51 Dussap’s theory of nature closely resembles Mellor’s description of European Romantic women writers’ texts in that Dussap is careful to describe a woman’s rational capabilities, as well as her emotional ones, and to advocate a model of peaceful relations between human beings in the private and public spheres. In Dussap’s discourse if the rules of the “natural world” dominated, social harmony between different genders and classes would exist:

In nature everything is in harmony. Where power is equal there is no oppression, there is no exploitation, there is no abuse, there is no perversion of nature’s laws and when power is balanced everything works calmly and efficiently.52

When society is based on “natural behaviour” love is able to blossom:

49 Ibid., 183.
50 Ibid., 146.
52 Dussap, *Siranush,* 198.
When people don’t have to be unjust, when they don’t have the goal of domination, when they don’t lie for financial gain, when they don’t snatch the child away from the mother’s breast in a river of blood, natural behaviour, like this cloud which embraces the moon ... causes people to embrace each other, shelter and protect each other.53

Through the characters of Hrant and Zaruhi Dussap portrays her ideal of natural harmony which enables love to freely develop. She makes it clear that the union between Hrant and Zaruhi is loving and harmonious because the balance of power between the two is equal, and they can live in a state of natural harmony. This is demonstrated when Hrant says to Zaruhi:

Zaruhi do you know why we are happy? Because there is equality between us, because we both come from humble families, we are both penniless and we rely on each other, we protect each other, we care for each other, we are tender to each other.54

Because Zaruhi is bound to her husband by love, she is able to act as a free responsible human being. When Zaruhi realizes that the burden of supporting both of them is difficult for Hrant, she decides to obtain employment despite societal disapproval of women’s paid employment. Although Hrant is initially reluctant to accept the need for Zaruhi to work, he is persuaded when Zaruhi explains why she wants to work and what type of employment she desires. During their discussion Hrant asks Zaruhi if working would not impinge upon her freedom to visit her family and friends. Zaruhi’s reply: “I will never be a prisoner, don’t fear that” is in deliberate contrast to Siranush’s declaration after her forced marriage:

Look at my fate,” she said gesturing to her dwelling place, “look at my jailers,” she pointed to the working gardeners, “my spirit which breathed love and freedom, is now deprived of both”...[men] “are free to travel, to cry, to work or not to work, to appear or to disappear, but it is stubbornly demanded from me that my actions, my tears, my activities and my coming and going must be controlled, because societal laws give me a master. I have to live with a man whom I don’t love but to whom I am duty bound to honour and care for.55

By contrasting Zaruhi’s and Siranush’s situations, Dussap asserts that Zaruhi’s unusual behaviour, working despite societal disapproval, is actually conducive to Zaruhi’s, and by

53 Ibid., 198.
54 Ibid., 198.
55 Ibid., 169, 281.
extension all women’s, happiness and freedom, and is the result of a balanced relationship with her husband based on natural laws and love. One the other hand, Siranush, whose life was viewed by society as successful because she is married to a wealthy man who financially supports her, is in reality the victim of extreme oppression and suffers great unhappiness. Her marriage is not based on love and is therefore contrary to the laws of nature. Dussap describes Siranush’s condition after marriage as one of isolation:

her social relationships and her personal mobility were severely limited because Darehian had a jealous character and was suspicious of every relationship.\(^56\)

Societal endorsement of Siranush’s marriage and subsequent oppression is indicative of the ways in which Dussap viewed her society as oppressing women. Dussap’s goal in *Siranush* was to propose the idea of marriage for love as a system which would ensure women’s personal happiness, marital harmony and thereby true societal harmony. The author argued that arranged marriages, like that of Siranush and Darehian, created personal and societal conflict because the partners frequently revealed “irreconcilable natures” after marriage which resulted in enmity between the partners and frequently led to adultery on the part of the male which Dussap saw as disrupting marital and societal harmony.\(^57\) Dussap sought to legitimize her purpose which was viewed as scandalous by many elements of Armenian society at that time by arguing that love was part of natural law whereas arranged marriage based on “love of gold” was part of societal corruption which often masked what Dussap considered base desires and unmanly conduct. For example in her discussion of societal disapproval of married women’s paid employment she exposed societal hypocrisy which viewed a working woman as compromising her husband’s honour, while viewing a husband’s living from his wife’s dowry as perfectly acceptable.\(^58\)

In Dussap’s discourse women are depicted as rational and responsible human beings. Romantic love and the choice of a suitable mate become the means by which woman can actively participate in deciding her future. Traditional relationships are depicted

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56 Ibid., 231.
57 Ibid., 145.
58 Ibid., 226.
as isolating women within the house in order to prevent interaction with people outside the family. The problem as outlined in Siranush is that a modern woman like Siranush can be ruined by traditional attitudes to women. Siranush was forced to marry without love and her resultant grief and final death are depicted as caused by tradition and familial obedience. While Dussap viewed modernity and the emerging intellectual class as creating more opportunities for women’s participation in activities outside of the traditional sphere, she portrayed these two new entities as weak and unable to combat traditional, patriarchal customs. The force of patriarchal custom, first articulated by Dussap, is a theme found in subsequent texts by Sibyl and Esayian, indicating that it continued to be a problem for Armenian feminist theorists.

The Daughter-in-Law: Love and the New Woman

Much like Dussap’s novel Siranush, Sibyl’s play Harse [The Daughter-in-Law]59 challenged traditional categories of proper and improper female behaviour. The play is set in the context of the traditional Armenian family structure which was patrilocal, with the daughter-in-law living upon her marriage with her husband’s extended family.60 In Harse [The Daughter-in-Law] Sibyl used the familiar setting of a young woman’s entry into her husband’s extended family to contrast traditional and modern mores by introducing her ideal “New Woman” through the character of Arousiaq, the daughter-in-law of the title. I use the term “New Woman” to indicate that Sibyl believed, as Dussap and Esayian did, that in order for Armenian women to develop as individuals, to achieve the ideal of companionate marriage, and even to have careers women had to replace certain traditional values with new ones. While the term “New Woman” was not used by Dussap or Sibyl, the figure of the “New Woman,” had entered Armenian literature before she had a name. The first reference I have found in Armenian to “Nor Kine” [new woman] is in an article dated 1903 by Zabel Esayian in which she discussed the application of this term in Europe.

59 The Armenian title of the play “Harse” means bride and daughter-in-law in English usage. I have decided to translate the title “Harse” as The Daughter-in-Law rather than bride as I think the former term better captures Sibyl’s emphasis on the relationship with the extended family rather than the personal relationship between wife and husband. There is, I think, some deliberate irony in Sibyl’s choice of this title as Arousiaq turns out to be rather different than the traditional daughter-in-law.

Esayian states that the term was sometimes used in Europe to describe a sexless, selfish and immoral woman, but that this is a misrepresentation. Citing European feminists such as Mme. Marya Cheliga, and the head of the International Council of Women, the Marchioness of Aberdeen, Esayian describes the true “New Woman” in Europe as a woman who worked for international peace, female education, charitable organizations for the poor, was highly educated herself and was employed, sometimes serving as a doctor or a nurse, and used her wage earnings to support herself and her family.61 This vision of the New Woman as a moral force and socially useful figure is important as it is found in the texts of all three women writers in contrast with other versions of the New Woman in Armenian literature which represented her as an immoral figure. In the works of the playwright Hagop Baronian for example, the New Woman was an immoral figure who was a threat to the patriarchal family structure. Sibyl by contrast saw the Armenian New Woman, like Esayian’s moral New Women in Europe, as a virtuous figure and in the play Harse [The Daughter-in-Law] she molded her characteristics and carefully constructed her desired moral values according to this model.

A comparison of Hagop Baronian’s play Paghtasar Aghbar [Brother Paghtasar] and Sibyl’s Harse [The Daughter-in-Law] reveals two very different contemporaneous treatments of the question of love and the New Woman. In Baronian’s play Paghtasar Aghbar [Brother Paghtasar] the husband discovers that his wife is committing adultery and demands that she appear before the Judicial Council on charges of immorality. The action of the play revolves around his attempt to prove his wife guilty, a task which proves impossible because society is portrayed by Baronian as protecting women’s rights more than men’s. To confuse the honest but stupid Paghtasar the lawyers talk nonsense and use unfamiliar legal terms, which they explain in French, Italian, German and Greek before being persuaded to use Armenian.62 This play is called a “satirical farce” and much of the “humour” of it relies on the assumption that the simple, basic right of a man to punish his wife for adultery in order to cleanse his honour is thwarted. The reason why he is prevented by society and the law from receiving satisfaction is because punishment of a

61 Esayian, “Nor Kine” [The New Woman], Tsaghik, 141-2.
62 Hagop Baronian, Paghtasar Aghbar [Brother Paghtasar], in Erker [Works], (Erevan: Luys, 1987), 256.
woman for adultery is regarded as “contrary to the enlightened spirit of the century.”

The adulterous wife in the play uses language which is found in the texts of Dussap; she rebels against women being regarded “as slaves,” and justifies her love for her lover on the basis of the feelings of her heart. But Baronian’s New Woman is deceitful and immoral because she is represented as knowing that her adulterous affair is wrong by society’s values as demonstrated by her desire to deny that she has been unfaithful:

Even though by loving you, I have only surrendered to the feelings which rebelled in me, even though I knew it was impossible to resist the impulses of the heart, even though I am blameless in this affair, I don’t want people to think that I was your lover. I want them to think that I have always been faithful to my husband.

Baronian’s representation of the New Woman is different from Dussap’s and Sibyl’s New Women in several notable ways. In Dussap’s and Sibyl’s texts the women are honest about their feelings of love and do not have extramarital sexual relationships. They do not lie, and are not concerned with public opinion because the authors are careful to demonstrate that it is societal rules which are unjust and not women’s feelings. Therefore the women in Dussap’s and Sibyl’s texts do not feel they have to justify their emotions. Published in the journal Khikar in 1886-1887, following the appearance of Dussap’s first two novels, Mavda (1883) and Siranush (1884), Baronian’s play Paghtasar Aghbar [Brother Paghtasar] reflects the playwright’s anxiety about the changing position of Armenian women in society. Baronian had read Mavda and was extremely critical of the novel.

Baronian’s New Woman who is deceitful but uses the language of Dussap’s New Woman is a parody of the female characters found in Dussap’s works. While Dussap, Sibyl and Esayian portrayed their female characters in a variety of familial relationships, such as daughters, daughters-in-law in extended families, and as wives and mothers, Baronian’s adulterous woman and her husband inhabit a world peopled only by lawyers, members of the Judicial Council and servants. The lack of familial and social relationships in the play

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63 Ibid., 263.
64 Ibid., 263.
65 Ibid., 245.
66 Sharuryan, Srpuh Dussap, 133.
indicates that this play is not concerned with a serious examination of women’s position in the Armenian family but rather is concerned with exposing the threat that social change, of which the position of women is one visible sign, represented to traditional Armenian society.

In contrast to the lack of familial and social relationships in Baronian’s Paghtasar Aghbar [Brother Paghtasar], Harse [The Daughter-in-Law] is concerned precisely with the position of women in the extended family structure. The daughter-in-law Arousiag lives with her husband, Arshag, his widowed mother, Mrs. Diruhi, and his unmarried sister, Hanumig. Traditionally the daughter-in-law had the least power in the extended family, while the mother-in-law had great authority over her children, especially her daughters-in-law, giving the younger woman orders on how to perform chores and how to rear her children. In Sibyl’s play the daughter-in-law is a hostile stranger. According to the mother-in-law Mrs. Diruhi: “A daughter-in-law is not one’s own child. She’s an enemy” who must be treated as such: “Now we have a stranger in our house, so let’s not act dishonourably to her.” The tension of this play revolves around the fact that while Arousiag is always polite and good-natured in contrast to the hostility and ill-temper shown by her mother-in-law and sister-in-law, the traditional subordination of the daughter-in-law has been subverted because Arousiag’s and Arshag’s marriage is a love match and hence the daughter-in-law does not have to fear her mother-in-law. As a consequence, traditional rules governing the status of the daughter-in-law have ceased to have power or meaning, a fact shown to be well understood by Arousiag’s mother-in-law when she states:

Akh, what can I say to my Arshag now, since he didn’t even ask for my permission but simply went out and hastily got married? If I had been there I wouldn’t have given permission!

Mrs. Diruhi’s lament demonstrates the threat that love was seen as having upon traditional structures of power and the potential threat to the authority of the extended family. In

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69 Ibid., 17
70 Ibid., 10
Armenian society, the overt expression of love was regarded as shameful. In many families a woman was forbidden to talk to her husband in front of his parents. Villa suggests that the reason for the prohibition against displays of affection was because members of large households had little physical privacy, which they compensated for by formal behaviour in order to maintain psychological distance; therefore, family members were not supposed to show signs of hostility or affection. Mazian’s work indicates that this type of behaviour was a sign of deference which is indicated “by a general posture of respect, obedience, and submissiveness and is typical of unequal relationships.” Signs of deferential behaviour include hand kissing, bowing, kneeling, speaking in a low voice, not arguing or contradicting, not joking with the person in authority. In this social context Mrs. Diruhi’s outrage at Arousiag’s expression of love for her husband is another sign that Arousiag’s conduct corrodes her mother’s-in-law authority. Mrs. Diruhi complains:

“I love my Arshag,” she brazenly says to me! I’ve also been married and looked after a husband but never once did such shameful words pass my lips.

The threat to the extended family posed by a love match is made clear by Arousiag’s wish that she and her husband live separate from his family:

I would have preferred a small apartment of my own, decorated according to my tastes, with lots of plants and flowers, and everything prepared by my own hands. They threaten me with having to work in the kitchen but to me it would be a pleasure if I could be alone with my beloved husband, without being endlessly

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75 Ibid., 20.
attacked by those two critics. This wish is one which Arousiag could only express to herself; she does not utter it or make any plans to divide her husband and herself from his family. Although love is a potentially destructive force to the extended family, Sibyl does not allow this potential to come to the forefront in this play possibly because she was concerned with legitimizing the concept of a love match and trying to make both it and the moral new woman appear positive rather than destructive. When Sibyl’s New Woman does to a certain extent undermine the patriarchal family structure, she only does so for the best reasons because the system is corrupt and does not benefit society any longer.

In this text Sibyl created and contrasted two female characters: Hanumig, who represents tradition, and Arousiag, who embodies Sibyl’s ideal New Woman. Through a comparison of these two figures it is possible to see how the author challenged traditional categories of proper and improper female behaviour. Sibyl’s rejection of traditional mores and values is shown both by the weakening of the mother’s-in-law power and by her criticism of traditional female virtues represented by the character of the sister-in-law Hanumig. Sibyl endows Hanumig with all the virtues expected of a traditional woman. She can sew, she lies “out of politeness,” she doesn’t do anything that could be gossiped about, doesn’t bother with men’s business affairs, tends to the housework, wears dark colours and is careful not to speak to strangers. In contrast Arousiag wears bright clothing, sings, plays the piano for guests, writes romantic novels, goes out visiting frequently, and becomes involved with men’s business affairs. In the course of the play, however, Sibyl demonstrates how Hanumig’s traditional virtues are meaningless in contrast to Arousiag’s true moral character. Hanumig’s lying “out of politeness” is shown to merely mask her hypocrisy. According to Mrs. Diruhi:

The other evening, the night of the dance, she could have asked me to go with the rest of you, couldn’t she? You said ten times: “Mum, you should come with us.” But she didn’t open her mouth once. Not that I wanted to go, of course. When Arshag saw that I was upset he said, “Mum, Arousiag is not a hypocrite. She knows you don’t go to dances. Why should she ask you silly questions?”

77 Ibid., 33.
78 Ibid., 9-10, 24, 35.
79 Ibid., 7-8, 25.
80 Ibid., 9.
Mrs. Diruhi and Hanumig are portrayed as valuing the appearance of respect even if it involves lying. In contrast Arousiag is portrayed as seeing beyond appearances to the truth; and therefore she does not lie “out of courtesy.” Through the behaviour of Mrs. Diruhi and Hanumig, Sibyl demonstrates that adherence to outward forms of tradition is an empty concept when there is no corresponding moral belief.

The principal conflict between Hanumig and Arousiag is a clash between traditional and modern concepts of women’s roles and abilities. In the play Arshag works to support himself, his wife, mother and sister. He discovers, however, that his sister has been taking some of the money he had given her for household expenses and keeping it in a bank account of her own, despite the fact that she already has income from a summer house the family owned. For this reason, and because his mother and sister always complain that his wife spends too much of the household money (ignoring the fact that much of this money is actually Arousiag’s because she brought a large dowry when she married Arshag), Arshag decides to test his mother’s and sister’s professed loyalty to him. He tells them that he had lost all his money and begs for their help in paying his debts. His mother and his sister refuse to help him. Hanumig explains, “We’re women. Women can’t interfere in business affairs.”

It was the custom for the eldest male of the family to control all economic assets while women of the family were supposed to be ignorant of financial matters. Arousiag rejects this tradition of female passivity when Arshag tells her that he has lost all of his money and has a debt to pay. She immediately offers to sell her jewelry to pay the debt. Arshag then turns to his mother, saying:

Women can do something if they truly love. Both of you have at least a thousand gold pieces worth of jewelry between you. But you wouldn’t offer even one piece of it to help pay my debt.

In contrast to Mrs. Diruhi and Hanumig who rely on a man to support them, Arousiag questions the custom which dictates that men financially support women while women are not allowed to work for pay:

How horrible social customs are! A man works, tires himself, struggles to earn a

81 Ibid., 24.
83 Sibyl, Harse, 26.
living, while we three women sit comfortably at home, without a care. Why?
Because that's the custom! The senseless, absurd custom!84

While the message of *Harse* [The Daughter-in-Law] is subtle, Sibyl has made it clear that adherence to traditional doctrines of proper female behaviour could mask immoral behaviour. Mrs. Diruhi’s and Hanumig’s cheating of Arshag is not something endorsed by traditional or modern mores but the outward appearance of traditional proper female behaviour makes it difficult for Arshag to recognize their deceit:

For years I lived like a blind man. I believed in their [Mrs. Diruhi’s and Hanumig’s] devotion, their love, their decent, pure and sacred womanhood, deceived by the appearance of womanly care and housekeeping, I lived in trust and happiness.

Mrs. Diruhi and Hanumig hide behind gender roles. They act in ways expected of them, such as appearing devoted and loving, they clean the house, they fuss over Arshag and fetch his slippers, but, as the story demonstrates, this behaviour merely hides their true actions and feelings. In the play their deceit accentuates the falsehood of traditional gender roles and implies that the adhering to outward forms of patriarchy did not really ensure loyalty or respect for men. Patriarchy and tradition are empty concepts in this play, while it is the modern woman Arousiag who is the true companion to her husband. The latter point is significant. Through her new woman and the new style of marriage based on companionship and love rather than arrangement, Sibyl offered an alternative to the patriarchal system. In this play this system is portrayed as hypocritical, false, detrimental to men and women and ultimately Armenian society as a whole. In contrast to Baronian’s *Paghtasar Aghbar* [Brother Paghtasar] which portrayed the New Woman as a lying, deceitful character and love as adulterous and destructive, Sibyl’s play *Harse* [The Daughter-in-Law] is a celebration of the New Woman, who is portrayed as honest and true. In contrast, the more conventional Hanumig is seen as empty and corrupt. Love is portrayed in this play not as adulterous and clandestine but the source of a happy, equal marriage. The quest for happy, equal love continued in Esayian’s novel *Verjin Bazhake* [The Last Cup].

*Verjin Bazhake* [The Last Cup]: Love and Power

While Dussap’s novel *Siranush* depicted a woman caught between traditional and modern

84 Ibid., .37.
mores and offered romantic love as a solution to the problem of women's position in marriage, Zabel Esayian's novel Verjin Bazhake [The Last Cup] (1917) published thirty-three years later portrayed a world in which many of the traditional restraints had disappeared without a corresponding improvement in the position of women within the institution of marriage. In Verjin Bazhake [The Last Cup] Esayian explored why romantic love failed to provide a solution to women's problems in society through an examination of the connection between power and love in male-female relationships. A reading of Verjin Bazhake [The Last Cup] makes it clear that Esayian understood more than had Dussap that personal relationships were not simply a matter of individual character or the result of differences in social class; they were also subject to social conventions and legal restrictions, which circumscribed the options available to women.

I make the comparison between Dussap's and Esayian's literary representations of women's problems in society quite deliberately. Most critics of Armenian literature, like Hagop Oshagan, who prefer Esayian's work to Dussap's, have emphasized Esayian's debt to French literature and realism, while ignoring Dussap's influence.85 While it is true that Esayian's literary style in particular owes much to French literature and realism, and that Esayian's characters in contrast to Dussap's more one-dimensional characters, reveal complex and varied psychologies, the content of many of Esayian's works, and especially her concern with the position of women in Armenian society, was influenced by the novels of Srpuhi Dussap. In the autobiography of her formative years Esayian mentioned by name only two writers who had a great impact on her during adolescence: they were the Armenian romantic poet Bedros Tourian (1851-1872) and Srpuhi Dussap.86 Elsewhere Esayian publicly acknowledged her respect for Srpuhi Dussap.87 The particular influence of Siranush on Verjin Bazhake [The Last Cup] is evident in Esayian's discussion of love as a solution for women's problems in marriage and through her portrayal in the novel of the ideal male lover, who closely resembles Dussap's Yervand in Siranush. This feature will

85 Hagop Oshagan, Hamapatker Arevmatay Grakanutyun [Panorama of Western Armenian Literature] Vol.6, 252.
86 Esayian, Siliharti Parteznere [Gardens of Silihdar], 523, 525.
87 Esayian, "Mer Kinerun" [To Our Women], Tsaghib (April 26, 1903): 151.
be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

*Verjin Bazhake* [The Last Cup] is written in the form of a letter from the heroine, Adrine, to her lover, Arshag Seropian. It describes, with particular emphasis on her feelings and thoughts, Adrine’s courtship and marriage to Mikayel Hovsepian, her erotic attraction to an unnamed Turkish officer, and her meeting with Arshag and their resulting affair. Through these three relationships Esayian explores how issues such as women’s legal and social subordination and the oppression of the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire affect women’s experience of romantic love. In Esayian’s portrayal of Adrine’s life some of the traditional customs which Dussap had identified as the cause of women’s problems in *Siranush* have been eliminated by the author.88 Unlike Siranush, Adrine was not forced by her father into marriage; instead, she was seemingly free to choose her husband.89 The manner in which Esayian portrays the courtship and marriage of Adrine and Mikayel, however, reveals a disturbing distribution of power which makes Adrine’s apparent freedom appear illusionary. Adrine first meets Mikayel when she is seventeen years old, and he is several years older and a lawyer. Her first response to him is one of revulsion. Adrine describes him as the opposite of any girl’s dream lover: he had a “harsh, almost cruel face,” and “when his gaze met mine, with a harsh severity, even in his most romantic hours, I felt that for him everything had an almost religious solemnity.” She notes his intolerance of human error: “[he] always followed the straight road, without looking right or left, and without recognizing the pleasure and bitterness of humanity’s sins, he was intolerant and strict towards others.”90 This description early in the novel is a foreshadowing of Mikayel’s cruel judgment of Adrine’s refusal at the end of the novel to behave in accordance with his and society’s demands. In the early days of their courtship Mikayel proved difficult for Adrine to ignore, despite her dislike of him: “His speech was

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88 It is difficult to say if this is reflective of a change in social customs. There is much evidence from memoirs to suggest that arranged marriages were common at the time of the novel’s dramatic action (c.1914). There is also evidence to suggest that many families allowed their daughters a say in whom they married.

89 Esayian, Zabel. *Verjin Bazhake* [The Last Cup], (K.Polis,1924), 10. All page references to the novel are from this edition.

90 Ibid., 11.
concise, peremptory and indisputable, it wasn’t possible for him not to command attention and he caused a sort of deferential fear in me.”91

Mikayel is often seen by critics as a positive character. Tololyan says of Adrine: “She rightly refuses to identify her husband as responsible for her malaise; he loves her and is devoted to her and to their children,”92 a view which overlooks the oppressive nature of Mikayel’s “devotion” to Adrine. In making the above statement Tololyan is responding to Adrine’s statement in the text which seems to absolve Mikayel of any wrongdoing in the marriage:

Sometimes it happens that unwittingly women in order to exonerate themselves portray with sad and tragic tones their lives and especially their marriages. I won’t do this.93

Esayian’s portrayal of Mikayel’s and Adrine’s relationship, however, is replete with images of hunting, trapped prey and a suggestion of masochism which underscores the true balance of power between women and men in society of this period. While Esayian portrayed Mikayel as admirable figure, calling him a “true man” because he was honest in a world where people lived according to societal demands rather than the inclinations of their natures,94 if the imagery used in connection with him is analyzed it is apparent that Mikayel is a brutal figure in the novel. The balance of power between Mikayel and Adrine is revealed in the imagery of hunter and prey. Describing Mikayel’s desire to marry her Adrine states:

To be free from his pursuit [hetapndum] I was prepared to fall into any marriage and I tried several times, every time a new suitor appeared I pretended that my attention was on the new person. Mikayel’s face would take on an expression of greater sad severity, his pained and reproachful glance would fall heavily upon me with an expression almost of hostility, and with that dominating gaze I would feel that I was trapped prey [tkar wors] that I was already in his hands, despite my feeble attempts to avoid him and these feelings caused fear in me or even anger but also a type of sharp and painful delight.95 [italics mine].

91 Ibid., 12.
93 Esayian, Verjin Bazhake [The Last Cup], 20.
94 Ibid., 14.
95 Ibid., 13.
The use of the words *pursuit* and *trapped prey* evoke images of Mikayel as a hunter and Adrine as the prey, revealing a world in which love is constructed as oppressive. Adrine's experience of fear and anger, but also a type of painful pleasure reveals how women have been conditioned by society to venerate male aggression despite the fear and anger it causes. In a society which legitimizes men's pursuit of women, women's power to defend herself is shown to be severely limited. Esayian clearly thought Adrine's power to use love for her own benefit was limited, as the following passage shows:

> Love in him was strong, and I felt power...with great patience and trouble he bore my ever changing and whimsical regard, sometimes he remained hunting in my face for a smile, a polite smile, then he left immediately as if frightened that my disposition would change, I could alter that moment of happiness. How he loved me and how I shuddered, thinking about that love and reflecting that I could bow down before that fearful power.\(^6\) [italics mine]

While the passage seems to indicate that Adrine had power because Mikayel loved her as illustrated by the statement “Love in him was strong, and I felt power,” the limitations of the power of women’s allure is made clear in this passage by the final sentence. Adrine conceived of Mikayel’s love for her as a force outside of herself, not something she could control. His love was something that compelled her to “bow down before that fearful power.” Due to the force of that “fearful power” Adrine married Mikayel and the images of hunting intensify as Adrine continues to allude Mikayel’s control:

> After ten years of marriage he still loved me with the same ardour, the same passion, what can I say? He continued to pursue me because, despite the fact that we never discussed it, he felt that my soul eluded him, that a part of me, the best and essential part of me wasn’t united with him.\(^7\) [italics mine]

The model of love depicted in the relationship between Adrine and Mikayel is ultimately rejected by Esayian because it was based upon the narrow concept of men as active and aggressive in pursuit of women, who were then positioned as passive and submissive in this construct, a construction which could not facilitate companionship and understanding between women and men. One of the aims of Armenian feminist discourse was the reconstruction of marriage as a form of partnership. As Mary Maynard notes in nineteenth-century English feminist discussions of marriage, women of that period disagreed with the

\(^6\) Ibid., 12.
\(^7\) Ibid., 19.
wife's subordination in marriage and instead emphasized the need for an egalitarian relationship. 98 Dussap, Sibyl and Esayian had a similar expectation of marriage. These authors believed that wives' and husbands' roles should be complementary and equal, with each partner achieving emotional fulfillment from the marriage. The union between Adrine and Mikayel which is based on dominance fails to satisfy either characters emotional needs and therefore is represented as a disaster.

As Gisela Bock and other historians have noted, women's activities have been perceived in academic scholarship to be "natural" and "unchanging," and as a consequence outside of the rules of history and society, making them appear unworthy of scholarly, political or theoretical interest or inquiry. 99 Women's novels and the stories they tell have received the same kind of treatment. They are often dismissed as personal accounts of women's lives, separate from social and political concerns affecting society as a whole. The study of women's history has taught us how erroneous this perception is for women's experiences clearly cannot be separated from social and political contexts. In the body of her writing Esayian is careful to demonstrate that the status of the individual, female and male, is connected to the individual's place in the social and political structures of her/his society and are therefore subject to change and can be changed. In the novel Verjin Bazhake [The Last Cup]Esayian made it clear that the issue of women's experience of love and marriage was related to the social and political structure of Armenian society. Esayian indicated that the reason the flawed courtship of Adrine and Mikayel resulted in marriage was due to the prevailing social construction of Armenian society which she viewed as being weak and clinging to outmoded custom out of fear. Throughout the text Esayian uses images of sleep to describe Armenian society and Adrine's state of being throughout her life until her meeting with her lover Arshag. She indicates that the reason Adrine, and the people around her, are asleep is because they are divorced from knowledge of themselves as a result of social conventions:

Human beings, male or female, don’t reveal who they really are and that false representation which they receive is unconscious. They choose a role in life and they fulfill that role, sometimes the role they choose is their own, because they find it right, but often they choose the role which others regard as right.100

As a consequence:

The human soul with which everyone enters the world is thus crippled from childhood, the soul doesn’t die of course but it coils up and hides in a corner and is no longer brave enough to reveal itself. There are people whose life in this or that hour reveals their soul and they become their own masters, but there are those people whose souls are always numb and never awaken again.101

What distinguishes Adriane from the society around her is her desire to awaken from slumber and free herself from the social conventions she instinctively understands as detrimental to individual freedom and happiness. She says of her soul “[it]wanted to awaken, to reveal itself and live with all its power.”102

The affect of society’s numbing effect on the individual is demonstrated by Adriane’s behaviour. She marries Mikayel in order to feel something, even if it is only hate. She wrote:

That game [her relationship with Mikayel] kept me busy and filled my life and emptiness sometimes, my soul had strong violence, which remained unused and fruitless, and except for maternal feelings, which only partly occupied me, I had no other outlet and wasted my spiritual strength.103

Esayan shows motherhood as being the only means of fulfillment available to women and in this text it fails to satisfy. Esayan makes it clear that although both women and men experience spiritual slumber (which resulted in lack of social progress), the consequences of societal stagnation affect women and men differently. The consequence for women’s lives is demonstrated by the unequal balance of power assigned to Adriane and Mikayel in society. After their marriage Mikayel is extremely possessive of Adriane:

He was jealous of those people who took my attention away from him and he was jealous of my acquaintances and new friends. He was doubtful, censorious and had an almost unhealthy vigilance of the people around me.104

The result of Mikayel’s jealousy is Adriane’s feelings of entrapment:

100 Esayan, Verjin Bazhake [The Last Cup], 14.
101 Ibid., 15.
102 Ibid., 25.
103 Ibid., 22.
104 Ibid., 22.
At that time my tired nerves tormented me, I was hopeless and wept for hours, pitying myself. I made feeble efforts to free myself but chains fettered me.105

The society surrounding Adrine tacitly endorsed Mikayel's jealousy. Adrine comments: “Everyone knew of Mikayel’s suspicions and were careful not to wound him.”106

In the novel Esayian does not portray society as recognizing the pain Adrine experienced in her marriage, subject as she was to the extreme possessiveness of her husband. Instead society is solicitous of Mikayel’s feelings of jealousy. That society and the law protect men’s rights at the expense of women’s is shown in Verjin Bazhake [The Last Cup] by Esayian’s treatment of physical violence and custody of children. Deciding to free herself from societal falsehoods Adrine tells Mikayel of her love for Arshag. He responds by calling her insulting names, vilifying her and finally hitting her, which causes Adrine to fall down and lose consciousness.107 When Adrine regains consciousness she discovers herself in bed with a swollen head and vision problems. Adrine is confined to bed for weeks, cared for by servants and her doctor.108 The social response to Adrine’s confinement is characterized by indifference. Not once do any of the servants or doctor ask Adrine how she was wounded. The only visitors mentioned by the author are Adrine’s two children and Mikayel.109 Through the absence of social support Esayian demonstrates that society offered women no assistance even in cases of blatant physical violence.

The powerlessness of Adrine’s situation is emphasized in the text when Mikayel gives Adrine an ultimatum; in order to separate her from Arshag she has to consent to leave Constantinople with him and the children:

I will leave with my children. It’s us or him. You must choose. We are leaving immediately and if you hope for news and information [of the children], you know that you will encounter inflexible strictness from me. I will consider you a worthless mother...110

As the father Mikayel had the legal right of sole custody of his children. As a woman

105 Ibid., 23.
106 Ibid., 23.
107 Ibid., 72-3.
108 Ibid., 74.
109 Ibid., 78.
110 Ibid., 82.
Adrine had no legal right to her children if she did not live with their father. Although Adrine initially did not accept Mikayel's ultimatum, deciding instead to remain in Constantinople without Mikayel and the children, ultimately she concluded that she could not bear to be separated indefinitely from her children, nor could she bear to think she was causing them pain through her absence. She therefore resolved to rejoin Mikayel and her children. The consequence of this decision is her return to playing the restricted role of mother, which for a woman who struggled to find a place for herself outside society's prescribed roles, can only mean the death of Adrine as an individual woman. The final desolate image of the novel described through Adrine's eyes illustrates her powerlessness and hopelessness, “This night had no stars, no dreams and in it there wasn't even a threat of a storm.”

In this novel Esayian is concerned with the forces of oppression. Adrine is unable to live as a free and independent individual because social conventions support male aggression and female passivity which results in the suppression of the female self. Societal rules and laws, for example the father's right to custody of children at the expense of women, are identified by the author as obstacles to the development of female subjectivity.

In *Verjin Bazhake* [The Last Cup] the legal and social subordination of the Armenian woman is mirrored by the legal and social subordination of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Gender inequality is part of a system of hierarchies by which people are divided into groups with varying degrees of power based on categories such as gender, class and race or ethnicity. In the Ottoman Empire Armenians as a group suffered oppression based on religious and ethnic identity. Armenian feminists understood that in order to ameliorate their own condition the position of Armenians as a group had to improve. Esayian, more than Dussap or Sibyl, looked to political solutions to improve the position of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. The Armenians of the Ottoman Empire, like the women of Esayian's novels, were subject to events and laws outside of their control.

Encoded in the novel's argument against social convention is Esayian's critique of

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111 Ibid., 87.
the oppression of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. At the beginning of *Verjin Bazhake* [The Last Cup] the author declared that this story is a break with tradition, that instead of the usual literary practice she will write differently, “What do I care about tradition, about literary method?” 112 This declaration signifies that much of the novel is concerned with the breakdown of structures of authority, which include literary method, women’s “proper” roles, and finally political authority. Esayian elaborates her theory that the soul of each individual should not be subject to societal laws, which she saw as being false:

... *every man and every woman* is not acquainted with her/his soul, clearly they don’t know their own desires and individual laws, therefore they are blind to themselves, and intolerant and strict towards others. People don’t know that in them there is a limitless and constantly changing thing, with its separate and unknown rules, which are different from humanity’s forced rules. It’s an endless sea whose shores we cannot even see and whose storms and calm we carry within us and enjoy without knowing why or how.

But particularly never, never forget the fact that there is no government upon our souls and that it acts for reasons that are outside of our will and thus we must not criticize each other, instead we must be infinitely and honestly forgiving of each other. 113 [italics mine]

This statement is a call by the author for freedom from oppression of two kinds, the oppression of gender hierarchy, signified by her specific mention of “*every man and woman*,” and from political oppression in the words “there is no government of the soul.”

In *Verjin Bazhake* [The Last Cup] Esayian illustrated the conflict of gender and ethnic subordination through Adrine’s relationship with an unnamed Turkish officer. In this relationship, imbalance of power destroys the potential for love as it did in the relationship with Mikayel. Whereas the imbalance of power between Adrine and Mikayel was based on gender conventions and hierarchy, in her portrayal of Adrine and the Turkish officer Esayian demonstrates that the imbalance of power in this relationship is based on both gender and ethnic domination. In the following scene Adrine is walking alone in the hills on the outskirts of Constantinople. The ensuing encounter between Adrine and the Turkish officer depicts the vulnerability of Adrine’s position as both a woman and an

112 Ibid., 6.
113 Ibid., 38.
Armenian:

I was alone...A feeling of fear gripped me, everywhere was deserted, the hills, valleys, in front of me and behind, it was all empty of human life, a strange silence reigned. 114

In this environment:

Various thoughts, fear and anger, past events, future crimes, victorious hopes, a particular fanaticism of unequal struggles, all passed through my mind with alarm. 115

She is frightened, but too proud to admit her fear. In this frightened, alone state, she saw the Turkish officer she had known since childhood:

Suddenly I saw him on the other side of the hill mounted on a black horse. Why didn’t I immediately leave? Why did I stand there alone upon the hill until the pleasant evening wind blew the veil from my head, why?

I felt him coming towards me, with great speed the horse’s hooves shook the incline and the ground and pounded towards me. 116

In this passage Esayian depicted a scene both frightening and familiar to an Armenian audience. She suggested danger by describing Adrine alone in the wilderness, vulnerable, a Turkish horseman riding towards her with the suggestion of untamed sexuality. This image conjures up the rape and abduction of Armenian women by Turks, which was a feature of the massacres and Genocide committed against the Armenians. 117 That this was a period of political instability is alluded to in the text by a reference to the massacres of the Armenian population of Cilicia in 1909. 118 When the Turkish rider reaches Adrine, however, the text moves away from suggestions of danger to portray mutual erotic attraction:

When he reached my side he immediately dismounted the horse and with great respect and in the manner of their custom he greeted me. He had newly returned from his unsuccessful expedition, a tired and hopeless man’s thoughtful sadness was written upon his face. His eyes, wide with affection and admiration, enveloped me. My glance turned from him and fixed on a vague point, my blood was pounding in my head and I felt throbbing in my temples.

“In these troubled times, you’re not afraid to be alone in this solitude?”

“No, I’m not afraid of anything.” Despite myself my voice was my enemy and it seemed to me that there was a sound of foreign accents.

114 Ibid., 27.
115 Ibid., 27-8.
116 Ibid., 28.
118 Esayian, Veriin Bazhake [The Last Cup], 30.
“But it was very reckless, your actions ...” He fell silent and bewildered. My lowered eyes saw that his hand shook on the whip. “I saw you from afar,” he said like a song with a tender and harmonious voice, “I couldn’t see you clearly but I felt it was you ... And my heart and my horse galloped to you ...”

A wave of warm blood rose to my cheeks, my forehead ... I felt a furious blushing and bravely I raised my head and courageously fixed my eyes upon him...

“You can’t imagine,” he said quickly, “how beautiful you are at this moment, a disturbing beauty ...” 119

How can I explain my precipitous feelings? It was as if his nervous fingers were touching my heart and I felt a sharp pain, a sort of grief. It disturbed me, I couldn’t comprehend whether I was pleased or displeased... I had lost sense of reality as if with one great blow reality had fled through my soul’s doors. It caused a dizzy sensation in me like that caused by wine, he continued talking but only certain phrases reached my ears....The horse suddenly neighed several times and the wind became gusty, covering my face with my undulating veil.” 120

The dominant imagery in this scene evokes sexual attraction in the man’s words, in Adrine’s physical reactions, in the images of Adrine’s veil covering and uncovering her face, and even in the horse’s neighing, (the word used, vrnchel, meaning literally ‘to neigh’, and according to a dictionary from 1879 has the slang meaning “to lust after.”) 121

In the text the relationship between Adrine and the Turkish officer cannot develop because each character represents irreconcilable divisions based on the social and historical interaction of Turks and Armenians. The action of the novel indicates that it takes place after the massacres of the Armenians of Cilicia in 1909 and after the Turkish Balkan War of 1912. Based on the internal evidence of the text I would date it as being set in 1914, slightly before the Armenian Genocide in 1915. Esayian describes that period in which the encounter took place as one in which, “The entire nation [Armenians] betrayed fear, waiting from one minute to the next for frightening events.” 122 As the text explores the possibility of love in three male-female relationships, the relationship between the Turkish man and the Armenian woman is emphatically rejected because of the political domination of the Turks over the Armenians, and specifically its gendered form of rape and abduction of Armenian women, overshadows individual inclinations. This feeling is expressed by

119 Ibid., 29.
120 Ibid., 30.
122 Esayian, Verjin Bzahake [The Last Cup], 30.
Adrine:

Sometimes with favour and even tenderness I reflected upon that intangible and durable presence [meaning the Turkish officer’s presence], but often I saw him as an enemy. 123

Throughout her life and writing Esayian explored the idea of Armenian and Turkish rapprochement through individual interaction but was forced, after the Genocide of Armenians in 1915 and the failure of the post World War I treaties to return lost land to the Armenians, to conclude that this was impossible. 124

The third and final male-female relationship Esayian presented in Verjin Bazhake [The Last Cup] is the only relationship in the novel in which male-female equality is achieved because neither Adrine nor her lover Arshag dominate the other. In the relationship’s harmonious balance it resembles Dussap’s portrayal of the natural harmony existent between the characters Zaruhi and Hrant in Siranush. The type of relationship Adrine has with each man is symbolized in the text by the state of nature when the two meet. In scenes between Adrine and Mikayel it is often raining suggesting gloom, in the scene with the Turkish man it is windy and a storm is brewing, indicating wildness and danger, and finally when Adrine is in the company of Arshag the sun is shining, the natural world is beautiful evoking harmony. Arshag is described as a talented musician who became a doctor. 125 He is “a man of great sensitivity.” Adrine writes to Arshag that she has heard that:

[you] had been married for several years, and were close to your family and children, the youngest of whom because of its delicate health, is a specially worrying patient, you were sincere, decent and pure towards your family and society and that you always performed your duties with scrupulous attention. 126

Esayian’s emphasis on Arshag’s moral qualities and artistic sensibility resembles Dussap’s discussion in Siranush of the moral qualities and artistic sensibility of Siranush’s lover Yervand. Esayian’s portrayal of love as an equal union of souls resembles Dussap’s

123 Ibid., 32.
124 A series of works written after 1915 by Esayian explored the possibility of accord between Armenians and Turks, they include, Meliha Nouri Hanim (1928), Semin Vra (1924), and her autobiography Silihat Partezner (1935).
125 Esayian, Verjin Bazhake, [The Last Cup], 44.
126 Ibid., 45.
concept of romantic love:

two souls, two separate worlds...[meet] who knows by what mysterious and
divine force, breaking down all obstacles, all oppressions and fog, they are able to
meet and find two drops of light that are the same and light each other.\textsuperscript{127}

Both authors thought that as a prerequisite for the type of love which would ensure
equality and harmony between women and men, a new type of woman and man had to be
created. The new man had to be one who was artistic, since art signifies both culture and
sensitivity in these texts, and one who was not a slave to patriarchal customs like Mikayel
and his jealousy nor Darehian and his extramarital affairs. Esayian’s portrayal of artistic,
and indeed many other qualities, as inherent to both women and men reveals the way in
which she, and Dussap and Sibyl, collapsed some of the boundaries of the feminine and
masculine by emphasizing shared characteristics regardless of gender.

The characters of Adrine and Arshag are portrayed as sharing many of the same
thoughts and concerns which is meant to show how they are the equal of each other. When
they contemplate leaving their spouses for each other, they recognize that they have the
same problems:

My eyes met your eyes. You also are married and have children whom you love
very much. Your loving but troubled gaze met my thoughts.\textsuperscript{128}

In the course of the text Arshag never tries to dominate Adrine or persuade her to act in
accordance with his wishes. When Adrine decides that she has to return to her children,
although described as “grief-stricken” Arshag accepts her choice.\textsuperscript{129}

As in Sibyl’s play \textit{Harse} [The Daughter-in-Law], implicit in Dussap’s and
Esayian’s creation of new women and new men is the creation of a new morality.
Esayian’s sense of morality was somewhat different than Dussap’s and Sibyl’s as she
allowed Adrine to have an extramarital affair (something Dussap did not allow Siranush),
while still representing Adrine as a decent, honest woman. In Esayian’s text Adrine and
Arshag are ethical because they are true to their feelings rather than empty and corrupt

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 43.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 63.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 87.
social conventions. Indeed in Esayian’s text love is constructed as a force which breaks down barriers, both traditional barriers of morality and empty social conventions:

No one and nothing can ravish my soul, in which love, like an eagle triumphantly soars. In my happiness I feel so complete, so free, that which I’m not brave enough to reveal, it’s as if I have thrown out humanity’s rules and fate.130

Love is freedom for women in this text because it assists in the process of self development. The society around Adrine, however, does not acknowledge Adrine’s individual freedom and punishes her by allowing Mikayel to take her children away. While Esayian was concerned with the question of female subjectivity as Dussap had been, she was also concerned with portraying the obstacles which hindered self-development. While Dussap and Sibyl’s works were meant to be inspirational to women, Esayian’s works focused on identifying the complex structures of oppression which hindered women’s emancipation.

An examination of Siranush, The Daughter-in-Law and Verjin Bazha Ke [The Last Cup] reveals some striking similarities between the authors’ visions of romantic love and women’s emancipation. Implicit in all three constructions of romantic love is the idea that love is a powerful force with the ability to break down structures of authority viewed by the authors as oppressive to women; in place of oppressive structures the authors constructed romantic love as a transformative force which would create a harmonious, equal relationship between lovers to ensure marital harmony. Romantic love based on companionship, similar values and thoughts between the lovers, was understood as an alternative to the situation of possible incompatibilities between partners in arranged marriages. Romantic love was viewed as a means of allowing women access to the world outside of the home because the authors believed that romantic love would create trust and loyalty between lovers which would eliminate feelings of jealousy and the need for female confinement in the home. For this reason the concept of trust and like-mindedness between the lovers was emphasized in the texts. In order to create a social environment of trust in women the authors constructed a vision of a New Woman who was at once rational, feminine and moral. The new morality constructed by the authors was based on concepts

130 Ibid., 60.
of morality that were linked to current ideas of the natural and the world of emotion; self knowledge and true morality were believed to exist within the individual’s soul. These alternative sources of authority, which were also articulated in European romanticism, were liberating to Armenian feminist theorists as it enabled them to locate authority outside of custom and current legal restrictions in order to advocate change.

The tenacity of patriarchal custom, however, continues to be visible in the texts. In Dussap’s and Esayian’s writings while the main characters, Siranush and Yervand, Adrine and Arshag, embody the ideal of equality based on romantic love, neither author portrayed these relationships as coming to fruition with a successful ending. Instead the relationships end in separation because custom, paternal authority, and law overpower romantic love. The failure of romantic love to attain success in the texts suggests that the authors believed that the ideal of an equal relationship between women and men was not achievable in contemporary society. While Sibyl’s play portrayed romantic love as existing in marriage, the focus of the play is how this relationship was constrained by adherence to the patrilocal family structure, a tension that was not resolved by the end of the play.

In Hay Nor Grakanutyun Patmutyun [The History of Modern Armenian Literature] the author states that while Dussap was accurate in her critique of women’s lack of rights and in her description of prevailing social norms, she revealed “sentimental ethical deficiency when she proposed that the question of unequal rights and freedoms can be resolved by women’s individual determination.”131 This statement misses the point of much of Dussap’s, and the other two authors’, emphasis on the individual woman. As the discussion of the authors’ treatment of the themes of female education, employment and the experience of romantic love has shown, underlying these sociological issues is a concern with the development of the female self. The authors believed that in order for women to participate in new roles and enter new domains women had to develop a sense of the female self which was distinct from the patterns and traditions of Armenian femininity of the immediate past. The authors’ focus on Armenian women of various social classes and circumstances created a variety of images of Armenian womanhood which challenged the

representation of the urban Armenian woman as simply frivolous and the rural Armenian woman as silent and passive. Armenian feminist texts challenged social constructs of femininity through a process of examination, rejection and reinterpretation of traditional customs in order to offer a new vision of Armenian femininity and the self through the creation of the New Armenian Woman. The authors’ conviction that change in women’s status cannot occur without a corresponding change in society’s conception of what constituted proper female and male behaviour demonstrates an awareness that gender roles are social constructs and must be altered before other kinds of change can occur. Instead of being a weakness, the three authors’ portrayals of the limitations of individual struggle can be regarded as a call for societal support in redefining women’s place in Armenian society.
CONCLUSION
THE NEW ARMENIAN WOMAN

From 1880 when Srpahi Dussap published her first article on women’s employment until 1915, theories of Armenian women’s liberation were formulated and discussed by Armenian women. The focus of this dissertation has been on three well-known Armenian feminist authors who discussed feminism in both fictional and non-fictional formats. The discourse they created and articulated constitutes an important aspect of the Armenian intellectual tradition as well as being part of the nineteenth-century international movement for women’s rights. Armenian feminist discourse reflects a concern with the idea of the rights of the individual which is a product of the French Revolution of 1789. Armenian intellectuals, male and female, applied these concepts to their position as a minority within the despotic Ottoman state but women intellectuals took these ideas farther and applied them to the status of the Armenian woman. Armenian feminists used the concepts of fraternity, equality and liberty to argue for women’s rights, as European feminists Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) and Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793), had done. Their engagement with European ideology should not obscure the fact, however, that these authors were particularly concerned with the circumstances of the Armenian community within the Ottoman Empire. The authors viewed the amelioration of the status of the Armenian woman as entwined with the status of the Armenian nation. They recognized that Armenian women could not achieve emancipation without a corresponding advancement in the overall conditions of the Armenian people, while at the same time they asserted that the Armenian community could not progress without a change in the status of women. It is due to this understanding of the mutuality of female and national efforts for advancement that Armenian feminists advocated greater female participation in all aspects of Armenian community life. The concepts of women’s education and national loyalty in Armenian history, especially the story of the brave Armenian women of Vartan Mamigonian’s period, were emphasized in Armenian feminist discourse in order to demonstrate the connection between Armenian national autonomy and Armenian women’s liberation.

At the beginning of this thesis two questions were posed: What issues did
Armenian feminists identify as being important to Armenian women? What solutions did the authors Srpuhi Dussap, Sibyl and Zabel Esayian formulate to solve the problems they saw facing Armenian women? Based on a reading of these three authors’ fictional works it is clear that Armenian feminist discourse was concerned with the issues of redefining the relationship between women and men in marriage and with expanding women’s opportunities in the public sphere, particularly in areas traditionally seen as the domain of men, such as the national movement and employment. The solution proferred by the authors to these sociological issues was the redefinition of Armenian conventions of femininity through the creation of the New Armenian Woman.

In her work on the Armenian community in Cyprus Susan Pattie states that the image of the Armenian family prior to mid-twentieth century as patriarchal and authoritarian is based on “the outward face of protocol and the organized side of the community or national affairs” which obscures the power women held in the home. Although Pattie’s thesis is an intriguing one and the ways in which women exercised power in the family is worthy of consideration, much of the writing of these three authors reflects a concern precisely with women’s restricted access to the public sphere and the “organized side of community or national affairs” mentioned by Pattie. Armenian women’s desire to participate in the development of the modern Armenian community is demonstrated by the theoretical constructions of the three women writers, Armenian activists like Marie Beylerian, founder of the feminist journal *Artemis*, the many women who founded benevolent organizations devoted to female education and the teachers who staffed these schools. Armenian women’s political involvement, is also illustrated by the activities of the co-founder of the Hnchak party Maro Vartanian (1864-1941). Involvement in establishing schools, a political issue considering that education in this period was designed to foster a sense of patriotism and to assist in the development of a ‘modern’ sensibility, indicates Armenian women’s desire to participate in the shaping and direction of the future of the Armenian community. The three writers’ discussions of education and employment is an

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attempt at an intellectual level to justify female education and at the same time to create a theoretical basis to infuse the themes of female education and employment with radical implications. The authors advocated education as a means of enabling Armenian women to participate as full members in debates on the future of the Armenian nation and as a means of preparing Armenian women to enter into paid employment. These goals went beyond the purpose of female education envisioned by early male intellectuals who had conceptualized education as simply training women to be better, more knowledgeable wives and mothers of sons for the nation. In Armenian feminist discourse, the role of Armenian women is that of an active, equal partner engaged in non-traditional activities.

The authors recognized that in order for the Armenian woman to participate in the public sphere and alter existing patterns in marital relations a new concept of Armenian femininity had to be articulated: one in which Armenian women were portrayed as equals to Armenian men and one in which Armenian women's participation in national affairs and the economic and political spheres was not viewed as unnatural but as legitimate. The remainder of the chapter will examine the construction of a new Armenian femininity embodied in the figure of the New Armenian Woman found in these authors' texts.

The development of a sense of self is crucial to the authors' discussions of education, employment, romantic love and marriage. The fact that in these texts the theme of self-development transcends sociological issues reveals the authors' belief that women had to have a developed sense of self which was separate from societal roles, before women could achieve success in the public sphere and alter the existing balance between women and men in the home. The limitations of social roles are illustrated by Dussap when she stated:

When there are such variances among women, how is it decided, I wonder, in what light she should present herself? How do we want to see her? A housewife or student? Slave or free? A woman of society? A citizen? A mother? Is it clear how she should be? No.\(^2\)

In this passage Dussap asserted a sense of female self independent of societal roles. A

\(^2\)This translation of Dussap's text is from Elise Antreassian's article, "Srpoohi Dussap: The First Armenian Feminist," 13.
woman can be a housewife or a student, a citizen or a mother but these roles do not seem to answer the question of who the woman is. Dussap's emphasis on the self and its relationship to society is in part based on her reading of Greek philosophy, particularly the Platonic emphasis on the relationship between the individual, society and the virtues which are supposed to govern each entity. Dussap applied the elements of philosophy and the self to women's relationship with society and concluded that women were hindered by social constructions in developing independent selfhood. Dussap stated that:

The pitiful condition of women has always distressed me. These sad victims of society are ashamed to be loving lest they reveal that they have hearts; ashamed to utter the word "injustice" lest it reveal that they have rights to declare; ashamed to explore religious and social corruption lest it demonstrate that they possess conscience and reason. They are even ashamed to reveal their deepest selves, to declare: 'This is who I am, I am also to be reckoned with...'. Heads bent, they live from hand to mouth, passing from the world, without voice, without presence; the more unobtrusive the path, the more it is commended.3 [italics mine]

In order to redress the injustice Dussap saw around her, the author wrote to illuminate how society's rules contributed to women's oppression. Society in Dussap's formulation falls short of its ideal. In her texts Dussap advocated altering social constructions in order to develop female selfhood. This is a just concept which transcends time and space for Dussap and resembles Plato's (428-347 B.C.) idea of the eternal good. Dussap believed that when women were accepted as fully functioning members of society this would lead to women's personal happiness and productivity which would benefit the family and society. Not only did the authors construct subjectivity as a precursor to social change, they revealed what form they thought female self-development should assume through the creation of a New Armenian Woman.

I have called this vision of the female self the 'New Armenian Woman' to emphasize how this figure was conceived of as modern, intrinsically Armenian and gendered. Although the authors' did not use the word "new" to describe this figure, they frequently did use the term "hay kin" [Armenian woman], which includes both the appellation of national identity, "Armenian," and gender, "woman." This term reflects the three writers' concern with both the development of a sense of the female self and the

3 Ibid.,11.
female self as an Armenian self which both shaped Armenian culture and history and was at the same time affected by the political and social circumstances of the Armenian community in the Ottoman Empire.

The New Armenian Woman was essentially a modern phenomenon. In an article published in 1903 Esayian stated that the Armenian woman of that period was significantly different from her mother and grandmother in terms of “emotions, customs and progress.” The customs she identified as having been altered were the prohibition against the expression of romantic love and the notion of arranged marriage as the only possible form of marriage. Esayian attributed the change between generations of women as the result of the modern age, the spirit of which facilitated acceptance of female learning and emergence into the public sphere, a phenomenon she saw as a direct result of the learning and worldview of the intellectuals of the Zartonk. 4 Esayian’s aligning of the altered status of women with progress or modernity reflects the Armenian intellectual concern with participating in the modern through literature and ideology. Armenian feminists extended the engagement with the modern to include discussions of women’s position in the modern world in general and the modern Armenian world in particular.

In part the Armenian feminist concern with modernity reflects a similar concern in fin de siècle Europe with the New Woman as a vanguard of modernity. By virtue of her ‘newness’ the New Woman in Europe was seen as a ‘modern’ figure, “committed to change and to the values of a projected future.” 5 Armenian women authors saw the New Armenian Woman as committed to change through her rejection of past customs deemed harmful to women and through her commitment to future values embodied in their themes of female education and employment and romantic love as the basis of marriage. These themes were viewed by the authors as essentially modern because they enabled Armenian women access to spheres of influence that had been denied women of the immediate past.

The conscious break with past customs was one of the goals of the Zartonk and by

extension Armenian feminism. This is why Esayian identified the modern Armenian woman as distinct from her grandmother. The despised past in this intellectual milieu refers largely to the immediate past which was associated with foreign occupation and the imposition of foreign customs upon Armenian material culture (the wearing of the Turkish Islamic yashmak and feredje by Armenian women is an example of this) rather than the ancient Armenian past which was valourized and constructed as intrinsically Armenian and progressive. The phenomenon of the ancient past as embodying progressive values in Armenian intellectual discourse is exemplified by Sibyl’s speech in which she implied that to ignore female education, which she stated had existed in eighth-century Armenia, would be to ignore the progressive elements of the Armenian cultural heritage and would in fact demonstrate that twentieth-century Armenian society was less advanced than the eighth-century society.6

While creating such connections with the ancient Armenian past these three authors’ were essentially modern in orientation both in terms of their literary form and in content. The novel was a literary form borrowed from France. The first appearances of the novel, the short story and drama appear in Western Armenian letters between 1850 and 1875.7 What is not widely acknowledged in histories of Armenian literature, however, is that the novel in Armenian was still experimental by the time Srpuehi Dussap published Mayda in 1883. Dussap is therefore one of the founders of the modern Armenian novel. Vahe Oshagan states that Mayda was particularly unique as it is epistolary in form, a style not widely employed in Armenian literature.8 Dussap’s innovation both in adopting the epistolary style and in experimenting with the novel marks her as a modern author.

The novel had radical implications for women, especially in circumstances in which women’s access to the public sphere were restricted, as it seems to have been a literary form which facilitated women’s entry into the public, intellectual sphere. In 1862 Robert Buchanan stated:

6 Sibyl, Azganyer Hayahik [Patriotic Armenian Women], 160.
7 Vahe Oshagan, “Modernization in Western Armenian Literature,” 67.
8 Ibid., 68.
The birth of the novel has given speech to many ladies who must otherwise have been silent.9

In fact the novel did more than enable women to have a voice in public space, it seems to have stimulated activism in many of the authors. Sally Ledger observes in the English context that there was a close association in New Woman’s fiction between novel writing and feminist activism as the very act of writing became a liberatory activity.10 Jane Eldridge Miller in Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel takes this concept even further suggesting that:

...in revealing the constructed nature of society’s essential concepts of gender, the feminist novel also reveals not only the provisionality of its own procedures and assumptions but also the provisionality of social organization, the family and, ultimately, essential concepts of identity and self.11

In Armenian feminist fiction too the act of writing is often portrayed as a liberating activity which subverts social conventions, especially traditional notions of femininity. In Sibyl’s play Harse [The Daughter-in-Law] the New Armenian Woman writes novels, an activity which asserts her sense of self, and enables her to escape the restrictions of conventional feminine behaviour. In Zabel Esayian’s Verin Bazhake [The Last Cup] the main character’s writing about her life is presented as an emancipatory act which enables her to further explore her subjectivity and even, as Khachik Tololyan suggests, her sexuality.12

The content of these novels, particularly the rewriting of Armenian notions of femininity, distinguishes the novels as modernist. As Jane Eldridge Miller states:

... modernism constitutes a break with tradition; it involves the questioning of the most basic certainties which provide the foundation for social organization, morality, and concepts of self, among other things. ... to challenge ideals of femininity and maternity, to depict women as active participants in the public sphere, to write about women’s desires for power and autonomy, entailed a radical break with social and cultural traditions.13

10 Ledger, 27.
13 Jane Eldridge Miller, Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel, 7.
As stated in chapter four Armenian feminist texts are modern in their treatment of women's relationship to standards of femininity, social class and romantic love because the texts challenge many social and cultural traditions in ways similar to those described by Miller. Armenian feminist texts challenged social constructs of femininity through a process of examination, rejection and reinterpretation of traditional customs and finally offered a new vision of Armenian femininity through the creation of the New Armenian Woman. The process of examination, rejection and reinterpretation is evident in their textual treatment of the idea of marriage. Dussap's treatment of arranged marriage in Siranush is illustrative of this process: she examines the system of arranged marriage and especially the practice of trying to secure a wealthy husband for a daughter and she rejects this system because she interprets arranged marriage as an exchange of goods. The purpose of arranged marriage, which traditionalists would argue is to ensure familial stability, is reinterpreted by Dussap as a mercenary transaction irrespective of the partners' compatibility. Dussap states:

> Today marriage is not based on moral qualities but on gold. They don’t ask about the person’s character, but rather ask how much does he own? They don’t look for a decent human being but merely for wealth. What a surprise then when the spouses don’t like each other, when their wills aren’t in harmony with each other, and when instead of accord there is discord, and instead of love there is indifference and even hatred! 14

In the place of arranged marriage Dussap advocated the love match. However, Dussap posited that conventions of femininity had to be altered before a corresponding change could occur in social institutions such as marriage. Women had to believe that they could make choices and had to learn to trust their knowledge and reason. It is for this purpose that Dussap continually emphasizes in her texts self-knowledge and women’s ability to reason. For Dussap the New Armenian Woman was essentially a rational figure. Dussap portrays the character of Siranush as rational and intelligent, stating that:

> [Siranush] loved to study the causes of national progress and decline. She observed with great ability that intellectuals gave people life, while vice and ignorance brought only death. 15

Dussap’s construction of the New Armenian women’s rational capacity became further

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14 Srpuhi Dussap, Siranush, 226.
15 Ibid., 156.
developed in her third novel *Araksia Kam Varzuhiq* in which the main character is described as follows:

*Araksia studied Armenian and then French but she particularly loved ancient and modern philosophy. She compared, she examined, she thought and finally that reading helped her, instead of blindly following established customs, thoughts and prejudices, she formed within herself a powerful determination and influenced others. She showed people the path where they must proceed, she wanted to have the freedom [as a woman] to think and to work.*

Dussap’s portrayal of Siranush and Araksia portrays both women as highly intellectual and concerned with Armenian national development. The study of philosophy has an important function in Dussap’s texts. The study of philosophy is understood to teach women to interpret and question tradition and to recognize that established customs are not natural but socially constructed. This questioning of custom and perceived truths is applied to the category of gender. Dussap’s New Armenian Woman is not content with traditional gender constructions, she is educated and wants to work and participate in social issues. This is shown in the texts by the fact that of the two most recent quotes both depict women’s knowledge as being directed to societal change: Siranush is said to want to develop her intellect in order to help her people and Araksia’s reading of philosophy is used to show “people the path where they must proceed.” For Dussap personal and social progress is always intertwined. She is at pains to illustrate that just as Armenian women could not progress without corresponding progress in Armenian society, Armenian society could not progress without the input of Armenian women.

Dussap’s New Armenian Woman is highly intellectual, artistic and at the same time profoundly ethical. Her ethical stance is shown by her obedience to her parents (*Siranush*) and financial support of her family (*Araksia Kam Varzuhiq*) and her faithfulness to her lover and loyalty to her (female) friends. Dussap’s New Armenian Woman rejects many of the gender divisions viewed as normative in society. This is particularly clear in the author’s treatment of sexuality. In *Siranush* Dussap argued against the double standard of sexuality which legitimized male extramarital sexual activity while demanding female chastity before marriage and absolute faithfulness to the husband after marriage. Dussap

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rejected the notion that sexual behaviour was rightfully differentiated by gender arguing instead that both women and men should be subject to the same restrictions in order to ensure greater social harmony. This was a very important concept to first wave feminists in Europe also. In France, the feminist Madeleine Pelletier argued against the double moral standard in which middle-class women were required to be virgins upon marriage while men were allowed sexual freedom before and after marriage. Pelletier noted that this system did not hold men responsible in any way for their sexuality. Their extramarital partners tended to be working-class women who bore the responsibility of the consequences of such liaisons, namely pregnancy, which usually resulted in loss of employment and entry into prostitution as one of the few jobs available to such “disgraced” women. Pelletier like Dussap argued for the exercise of greater control of male sexuality in order to redress such inequality and to alleviate the resulting social problems.17 Dussap’s discussion of the same standards of sexual behaviour for women and men is indicative of the fact that Dussap envisioned the creation of a new Armenian man who was a suitable partner for the New Armenian Woman. Although in Dussap’s texts the new Armenian man is a less developed figure than his female counterpart some of his basic characteristics are evident. Dussap’s most fully developed new man is found in the novel Araksia Kam Varzuhin [Araksia or the Governess]. He is well-educated, intelligent, artistic and, most important of all, recognizes women’s intellectual capacity and is supportive of women’s education and employment.

Dussap located her New Armenian woman and man as members of what she termed the intellectual class. In Dussap’s description of class in Armenian society she identified the ruling classes as being divided into three distinct sub-classes: the amira, the bureaucrats and the intellectuals. In Siranush Dussap implied that women could not truly be members of the amira class or the bureaucracy (despite being the wives and daughters of men of these classes). In these groups women were subject to male familial authority, demonstrated by arranged marriage in which female consent was not elicited, and women were denied access to the means of making money and obtaining government positions.

17 Jennifer Waelti-Walters and Steven Hause, ed. Feminisms of the Belle Époque, 184-188.
through which men of these classes attained status. In contrast to the subordinate position of women in the amira and official classes Dussap posited the intellectual class as the locus of female emancipation. Admittance into the intellectual class was not achieved through the possession of wealth or on the basis of social standing but through the intellect, the world of art and commitment to progress and was therefore (theoretically) open to women.

Dussap was aware that in practice male intellectuals might attempt to hinder women’s entry into the intellectual class. She had witnessed the hostile reaction by the Armenian intelligentsia to the publication of her first novel Mayda which had asserted women’s equality with men and had particularly emphasized women’s intellectual abilities. She later warned the young, aspiring writer Zabel Esayian of the difficulties Armenian women experienced when trying to achieve a position in the Armenian literary community. Despite the opposition Dussap herself had experienced, in her novels she focused on the intellectual class as the class most likely to advance women’s rights. She saw this happening, however, through women’s own efforts: through women attaining education and by rejection of many of the inequalities inherent in Armenian social practice. A significant aspect of Zabel Esayian’s visit to Srpuhi Dussap, and one which should not be overlooked, is that while Dussap warned Esayian she would encounter difficulty, at the same time Dussap encouraged Esayian to continue to write and to fight to create a place for herself among the Armenian literati.18 Dussap’s advice to Esayian is in keeping with her view that Armenian women had a duty to forge an equal place for themselves in society.

In the preface to Mayda Dussap made it clear that she viewed her novels as political statements written for the purpose of facilitating women’s emancipation. She stated that she had always despised injustice and prejudice and noted that she had observed:

> the chains with which women are so enslaved that neither their words, nor their actions, nor their slightest movements are natural or true. [...Therefore she] wanted to tell the truth in a compelling way and this was the chief stimulus for my writing.19

Dussap sought to demonstrate through her New Armenian Woman that women were the

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18 Zabel Esayian, Silihtari Parteznere [Gardens of Silihdar], 527.
equals of men and capable of exercising reason. She argued that if women did not live as equals to men it was not because they were less capable but rather because society deliberately constructed obstacles in women’s path to achieving equality with men. Dussap saw women’s inequality as socially constructed and therefore able to be altered. The idea that social constructs could be altered was what was so compelling about Dussap’s thought to her contemporaries. Her suggestion that social roles are man-made and therefore alterable resulted in a new way of thinking and discussing women in Armenian society. It is this concept which began Armenian feminist discourse as subsequent women writers, such as Sibyl and Zabel Esayian and others, would examine women’s relationships with traditional institutions from the perspective that these institutions were not unchanging but subject to historical and social circumstances which could be changed if society desired to do so.

Sibyl’s portrayal of the New Armenian Woman owes much to her reading of Srpuhi Dussap’s work. Sibyl’s New Armenian Woman is also intelligent and enters the public sphere through the realm of the intellect. This is demonstrated through the main character, Arousiag, in the play Harse [The Daughter-in-Law]. Arousiag writes novels, an activity which reveals her education and intellectual pursuits, in contrast to her sister-in-law who spends her time hemming serviettes. Sibyl’s New Armenian Woman is characterized by her honesty: she does not speak hypocritically, she experiences real emotion and she does not pretend emotions she does not feel. Her honesty is sometimes threatening to the harmony of her husband’s extended family because her ethical stance does not permit her to lie out of politeness.

Sibyl’s awareness of the social construction of femininity is demonstrated in her work by her contrasting of conventional Armenian representations of femininity with her ideal, alternative vision of femininity. Conventional femininity in the play Harse [The Daughter-in-Law] is portrayed as adherence to customs viewed as innately feminine: sewing, staying at home and outward deference to men. Ultimately Sibyl shows such conventions serve to mask repressed desires and feelings. In contrast the New Armenian Woman is open, honest and, most importantly for Sibyl, these qualities enable her to
embark on a new style marriage: marriage as a partnership.

One of the goals of the Armenian feminist theorists was to alter the existing balance of marital relations. They believed that without a sense of companionship between spouses marital harmony was not possible and therefore personal and social harmony was threatened. Dussap had said that marital disharmony had social repercussions. She believed that a happy, companionate marriage would be better for the children of the marriage and would ensure societal morality as men would be less likely to commit adultery if married to women they loved and were compatible with.\textsuperscript{20} Sibyl’s portrayal of the New Armenian Woman’s experience of marriage attests to Sibyl’s concern with creating characters who were able to sustain a marriage based on partnership. Sibyl’s New Armenian Woman is able to be a companion to her husband because her femininity is in harmony with the New Armenian Man’s masculinity.

In \textit{Harse} [The Daughter-in-Law] Sibyl portrayed the traditional balance of power within Armenian society in terms which agree with Susan Pattie’s observation that women exercised power within the family while men exercised power in the outward national and social realm. Sibyl represents the mother as having power over her son, because of deference to parental authority, while the son is occupied with the world of business and money making, a realm the women do not enter but do benefit from by receiving financial support. All three of the authors acknowledged women’s potential and actual authority within the extended family but ultimately rejected this traditional balance of power because the authors believed that rigid distinctions between femininity and masculinity prevented individual development and therefore companionship in marriage and ultimately social progress. In place of the traditional situation they advocated a new balance of power which gave women status in both the public and private domains.

The three authors saw existing patterns of Armenian marriage as being atrophied by rigid gender conventions which did not allow the partners to know themselves or each other. For this reason the authors’ works tend to collapse the boundaries between the feminine and masculine. In their texts the New Armenian Woman is given qualities

\textsuperscript{20} Sruhi Dussap, \textit{Siranush}, 145.
customarily attributed to the masculine: she is portrayed as rational, able to grasp sciences, mathematics and business matters and can participate in the public sphere through education, employment and intellectual activities such as writing and other forms of artistic endeavour. The New Armenian Man is given qualities which are traditionally associated with the feminine: he is emotional and sensitive. The qualities of emotion and sensitivity are shown in the texts by the New Armenian Man’s ability to understand his female counterpart and through his creativity. Art and creativity are primary attributes of both the New Armenian Woman and Man. While in Siranush Dussap portrays Siranush’s lover, Yervand, as a gifted painter, and Sibyl’s Arousiaq in Harse is a novelist; it is in the texts of Zabel Esayian that the quality of creativity as a primary attribute of the New Armenian Woman and Man is developed.

Zabel Esayian’s portrayal of the New Armenian Woman and Man shares many features with the figures created by Dussap and Sibyl. We know that Esayian read Dussap’s and Sibyl’s works and as demonstrated in chapter four, many of her characters resemble characters in the other two authors’ works, most notably characters from Dussap’s novels.21 Esayian’s New Armenian Woman differed somewhat from Dussap’s model, however, in that Esayian was less concerned with rationality than with feeling. Whereas Dussap, whose theory of women’s emancipation in many ways closely resembles that of the English feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, was concerned with reason and the rights of human beings, Esayian was occupied with women’s emotional state as illustrated by women’s involvement with art.22 In Verjin Bazhake [The Last Cup] the main character is writing her life story and in Hogis Aksorial [My Soul in Exile] the main character, Emma, is a gifted painter. In Esayian’s texts the production of art is related to the development of the self. She portrayed art as a means of self-expression and particularly a means by which

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21 Esayian’s reading of Dussap is mentioned in her autobiography. Her reading of Sibyl is attested to in numerous journal articles in which she mentions Sibyl or comments on her writing. For example she mentions Sibyl’s writing in Mer Kinere [Our Women] Tsaghik (April 26, 1903), 150.

22 Ironically although there is no evidence to show that Srpushi Dussap had read Mary Wollstonecraft’s work, there is evidence that Esayian was familiar with Wollstonecraft’s writing. In an article, Nor Kin [The New Woman] Tsaghik, (April 26, 1903), 142 published two years after Dussap’s death Esayian quoted Mary Wollstonecraft, but was generally was less concerned with women’s rational capacities than Dussap and Wollstonecraft had been.
contradictions and anxiety within the self can be worked out. In Hagi Aksorial [My Soul in Exile] Emma states that through her painting: “I want to reflect and acquaint myself with my troubled inner world.” Art becomes the means of self expression; a character who is artistic is constructed by Esayian as someone who is aware of her/himself. Since the goal of much of Armenian feminist discourse was the creation of a modern female self, distinct from traditional conventions of femininity, the attributing creativity to the New Armenian woman was a means of highlighting this figure’s developed subjectivity.

Esayian’s portrayal of artistic, and indeed many other qualities, as inherent to both women and men reveals the way in which she and Dussap and Sibyl collapsed some of the boundaries of the feminine and masculine by emphasizing shared characteristics regardless of gender. This is not to say that the three authors rejected all constructions of femininity and masculinity. They accepted some gender distinctions; for example, the concept of maternal feeling, particularly in Dussap’s works, is invested with a semi-sacred reverence and is seen as exclusively characteristic of women, while fatherhood is not represented in the same sacred and innate terms in these texts. When the authors’ subversion of conventional constructions of femininity and masculinity occurs, it is designed to facilitate women’s participation in societal development, in engagement with the modern world, in the intellectual realm, and in the Armenian national movement. And on a more individual level the construct of the New Armenian Woman was designed to encourage women to enter schools, find employment and function as full equal partners with their spouses.

The New Armenian Woman is a textual construction, which is not to say that she had no basis in reality. The Armenian woman of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is a neglected figure in current historiography. There are no scholarly works to give us statistical evidence on how many Armenian women went to school, how many were employed outside of the home, how many children on average women gave birth to and other such issues which would help us in determining what conditions effected women’s lives and what was changing in this period. Nevertheless we have some clues as to the conditions of Armenian women’s lives in this period through oral records, family  

23 Zabel Esayian, Hagi Aksorial [My Soul in Exile], 134.
stories and memoir literature written by survivors of the Armenian Genocide of 1915. The authors of these histories and memoirs frequently supply information about their families, customs and social institutions prior to 1915 and are therefore an invaluable source of information about Armenian women. Where possible in this dissertation I have used memoir literature to highlight similarities and differences between these sociological accounts and what is portrayed in the texts written by Srpouhi Dussap, Sibyl and Zabel Esayian.

Although the writings of these three authors, especially Srpouhi Dussap, are often dismissed by literary critics (for example Vahe Oshagan) as "too radical" to have attracted much attention in the Armenian cultural milieu I disagree with this interpretation.24 The memoir literature portrays Armenian women in a variety of roles: for example Serpoohi Jafferian’s portrayal of her youngest aunt’s opening a shop in the early part of the twentieth century by herself and her eventual migration to Egypt independent of her family. The memoir literature also expresses rebellious feelings towards social customs such as arranged marriage, as in Dirouhi Highgas’ portrayal of her aunt’s marriage and separation from her husband in the pre-1915 town of Konya.25 As this dissertation elucidates, many of the situations and feelings which are found in the memoirs were first expressed in Armenian feminist literature written by Dussap, Sibyl and Esayian.

The lives of the authors in many ways resemble the New Armenian Woman they created in texts. Srpouhi Dussap ran a literary salon with her husband and acknowledged his support in her literary efforts in her preface to her first novel Mayda, saying of her husband:

With a rich mind that had freely explored the world, he was a natural enemy of narrow-mindedness and prejudice; he left me free to think and to criticize. Today I publicly convey my gratitude to my husband, who understood the needs of my soul and encouraged me...26

24 Vahe Oshagan, “Cultural and Literary Awakening of Western Armenians, 1789-1915,” 66.
Dussap's description of her husband's support resembles her construction of the New Armenian Man who encouraged female intellectual endeavours. Sibyl's close collaboration in writing school textbooks with her second husband, Hrant Asatur, suggests a working partnership that is similar to her conceptualization of marriage as being a balanced partnership between the spouses. Esayian was able to study abroad, participate in salons devoted to discussing the Armenian national movement and work as a writer and later as a university lecturer. Esayian's actual educational and employment opportunities were seen by all three of the authors as integral to the New Armenian Woman's development.

Journals also introduce us to the concerns and issues experienced by Armenian women of this period. The Kanants Bzhine [Women's Section] in the journals Tsaghi and Aragats attest to Armenian women's interest in women's issues and feminism. One of the most fascinating examples of Armenian women's interest in feminism is Marie Beylerian's avowedly feminist journal Artemis founded in 1902. Although this journal was published for scarcely two years, it addressed Armenian women's concerns, informed them of the activities of feminist movements throughout the world and printed letters from Armenian women residing in various countries attesting to the journal's widespread distribution.

Although there is evidence of widespread interest in women's issues and changes in women's roles and duties in this period, possibly brought about by increased literacy, education and access to employment, the New Armenian Woman discussed in this thesis is a textual construct. This is indicative of the role the authors assigned to fiction. The New Armenian Woman represents an ideal woman. But at the same time the social conditions which she encounters are based on real social issues facing Armenian women of the period. Randi Warne's remarks on the purpose of Canadian feminist Nellie McClung's writing, which Warne says was meant to be inspirational are applicable to Armenian feminist writing too. Warne states that:

[McClung's] skill as a storyteller became a potent weapon in her struggle to have

women's work recognized and rewarded, as she attempted to infuse her readers with a feminist and religious vision which would empower them to the work of social change.  

Like McClung the three Armenian authors attempted to infuse the reader with a feminist vision in order to empower the reader to work for change. Dussap, always the most outspoken of the three, stated that her aim was to "point out the most important elements of social corruption by telling a story." The novel enabled the authors to describe social problems and their consequences on women. Through the creation of the New Armenian Woman they attempted to inspire their readers to redress identifiable issues.

The authors' portrayal of social problems and their projected solutions provides a fascinating glimpse into the social concerns, women's issues, feminist ideology and class divisions of urban Armenian society from 1880 to 1915 from the perspective of a group of contemporary Armenian women. The novels illuminate women's experiences of this period and enable us to present a more accurate and detailed vision of the Zartonk intellectual and cultural movement which has been represented until the present as exclusively masculine.

28 Randi Warne, Literature as Pulpit, 4.
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