

PHILOSOPHICAL-ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONCEPTS OF SUBJECT AND SUBJECTIVITY AS A GENESIS OF WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION

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Abstract: The study examines the problems existing in the Ottoman Empire of the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, which are related to the philosophical-anthropological categories of subject and subjectivity in male-female relationships, the identification of female-female identities, to the internal domains of their coverage, as well as the possibilities of women's emancipation and realization of their rights in a patriarchal society.

The philosophical concepts of woman-subject and subjectivity were studied based on the philosophical-anthropological-feminist contexts of the works of Western Armenian female authors who were engaged in literary activities in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, as well as the contexts of socio-cultural and conceptual transformations of women's emancipation.

Their manifestations and changes in society are viewed as the genesis of women's emancipation. This is an interdisciplinary study, so the material has been analyzed in the context of mutual connections and relationships between Philosophy, Literary Studies and Anthropology. The research is unprecedented since analysis of this kind has been attempted for the first time. It is also important and up-to-date in terms of analyses of women's issues in the scope of Armenological Studies.

Keywords: philosophy, subject, self-consciousness, man-woman relationships, genesis of emancipation.

Introduction

Women's literature, concepts of *subject* and *subjectivity*, *identity* (identification) and *self-consciousness*, as stable categories, are directly related to the issues of education, upbringing, emancipation and independence. Woman's biog-

raphy, writing, literature reading are self-contained and independent semantic concepts that are the subjects of investigation of various fields of science, philosophy and sociology, in particular (Hambardzumyan & Parsadanyan, 2022).

The interest towards women's issues in the field of philosophy is especially connected with

the symbolic orders (categories) of changes in concepts (as a whole) characterizing the woman-*subject* and female *subjectivity*. Examples of their analysis, at all times, can be found in all Eastern, American, European academic milieu, ranging from the issues of women's emancipation to narrow-gender formulations. In this sense, in addition to the observations of the classical philosophical culture of the history of the problem in question (Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, etc.), modern anthropologist-philosophers' and sociologists': Roland Barthes (1989), Jacques Derrida (Kamuf, 1991), Julia Kristeva (1981), Juliette Mitchell (1975), Jacques Lacan (2011), Elaine Showalter (1979), Robert Solomon (2005) studies and justifications from other perspectives are also important, especially when they refer to the *issues of female subjectivity* and the functionality of the concept of *subject* used in society, in general. The *aim of the study* is to investigate the bases, manifestations and changes of the philosophical categories of *subject* and *subjectivity* as a genesis of women's emancipation. The *problem of the study* is to show the transition of the non-classical (multiple and decentralized) model of women's subjectivity to the classical one (progressive, non-decentralized, rational woman subject) through identifying and distinguishing certain features of the mentioned philosophical concepts, turning to Western Armenian female authors who lived and worked in the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the 19th century and some of their works. The concept of *subject*¹ (Solomon, 2005) borrowed from philosophy endows man with the features of freedom and independence, because only human-specific life activity is tangible in the domain of realization of mental and material capacities.

Through a rich contemporary philosophical tradition, it is possible to distinguish separate gender features in the structure of the philosophical system of subjectivity. This also determines the actuality of the research. In this context, the woman-subject is no longer condemned to the idea of having a traditionally emphasized

and imposed monolinear identity, but is capable of demonstrating the various manifestations of her identity and not letting any force or factor have an impact on her life in terms of making decisions for her and controlling her life. In the present research the above-mentioned problems are studied in the context of geopolitical, historical, literary-cultural processes, social transformations and their expressions that took place in the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the 19th century.

Self-Recognition of a Woman's Identity in the Domain of Culture

It is known that the classical model of subjectivity corresponds to the *mind-body* opposition, in which *mind* (intelligence) is characterized by positive features: intelligence, spiritual domain, activity, and, according to some analysts, characterizes masculinity (the man). Meanwhile, *body* is associated with a number of negative characteristics: sensuality, emotionality, unconsciousness, irrationality, which are traditionally attributed to the woman in philosophical anthropology. Besides, in classical philosophy and philosophical anthropology, the masculine is viewed and evaluated from the perspective of the *subject*, while the feminine – from that of the *object*. According to Luce Irigaray (1985), the concept of femininity in general exists “due to male discourse models, as it becomes its mirror reflection” (pp. 122-130).

The question was also discussed in the domain of social philosophy, and the focus was turned to the domain of social and literary-cultural transformations of the patriarchal society of the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the 19th century, to the main processes of *individualization* and transformations of female authors from *an object* to a *subject*. The focus was also turned towards the discovery of the traditional and closed dialogue between men and women dominant in the Ottoman dictatorial society, where woman's *self-realization*, *self-recognition* and *identity-consciousness* in the realms of the concepts *literature* and *culture* were hindered and prohibited.

This phenomenon was observed in the examples of the works of Elpis Kesaratsian, Srubhi Tyusab, Sipil, Zapel Yesayan, who were en-

¹ A subject - narrowly meaning an individual who possesses conscious experiences, such as perspectives, feelings beliefs and desires, a being who has a unique consciousness and/or unique personal experiences, or an entity that has a relationship with another entity outside itself (called an object). A subject is an observer and an object is a thing observed.

gaged in social and cultural activity in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, as well as in the context of some of their publicistic articles, essays (Kesaratsian, 1862a, 1862b) and analyses (Tyusab, 1881a, pp. 452-458, 1881b, pp. 344-349). In their essays, Elpis Kesaratsian (1862a, 1862b) and Srбуhi Tyusab (1881a, 1881b) put forward the issues of women's social rights, their role and significance in society, education and upbringing, as well as their economic independence. Meanwhile, in their novels "Mayta", "Siranush", "Araksia or the Governess" (Tyusab, 1883, 1884, 1887), and "A Girl's Heart" (Sipil, 1891) Tyusab and Sipil raise the issue of the status of a woman as a victim in a closed patriarchal system and the issues of finding ways out of it. In Yesayan's "Gardens of Silihtar" (1935) the situation is a bit different, although in the novel she also tells about the status of women living in the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the 19th century. The key word that characterizes the Ottoman dictatorial society, in this case, is not *traditional* or *conservative*, but *patriarchal* and *closed*, as was in the beginning, and as a result, the possibilities of not only recognizing the phenomena, but also ever opening, seeing, naming and materializing them were wasted.

Moreover, the importance of the philosophical interpretation and theorization of the concepts of *subject* and *subjectivity* is not only in making sense of the existence of a woman as a *subject* in a patriarchal society, as well as emphasizing and realizing it as an existential significance, but also in proving that in that patriarchal society, the woman was practically not recognized as a bearer of literary, cultural, historical and political, and even more so, philosophical knowledge and an active subject (Zherebkina, 2007, pp. 157-159) realizing that knowledge, as was the man, but only an object identifying the latter's needs and serving those needs. All these issues were being solved and materialized, of course, against the background of the reforms taking place in the Ottoman Empire after the proclamation of the Tanzimat² in the second half

of the 19th century, but didn't they also exist before the Tanzimat? So, what was going on?

Essentialistic Perceptions of the Concepts *Woman-Subject* and *Female Subjectivity*

In general, the philosophical theory of feminism proposes the issues defining the concepts *woman-subject* and *female subjectivity* at two levels and directs them towards women's emancipation: a. essentialistic, according to which a woman's subjectivity and experience are considered as a whole and are analyzed in a single discourse, b. anti-essentialistic, according to which identity (identification) is considered in the realms of multiplicity, and experience in the realms of contradiction and decentralization.

French anthropologist and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1956) puts forward the perceptions of woman's thinking, subjectivity, experience and writing. Beauvoir's philosophy also gave rise to a number of European and American anthropologist-philosophers examining women's subjectivity: Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Sarah Hoffman, Rosi Braidotti, Louise Passerini, Judith Butler, Joan Scott, etc., who began to examine the question in the domains of new dialogues and new practical approaches. But in philosophical anthropology Simone de Beauvoir's literary legacy was the first to make a conscious attempt to express the phenomena of woman's thought, subjectivity, experience and writing. Unlike the previous feminist theorists, the innovation of her work on women's status and dependence on the *Other* was that Beauvoir grounded her theory through the categories of individual psychology and the unconscious rather than women's dependent socio-political and economic statuses. For carrying out such an analysis, Beauvoir relied on the ideology of Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophical theory of existentialism, according to which, "The existential subject is the subject of choice, because man is always what he chooses to be. The choice of the subject is never predetermined and never equals to socio-economic or psychological determinism, it never ends and is never stable" (Sartre, 2009, pp. 361-922).

the Ottoman Empire in 1839-1876, at the same time the first constitution of the Empire was adopted.

² Tanzimat - In the Ottoman Language, Code of Reforms, the Basic Principles of which were set out and published in decrees *Gulhan, e Hatt-i Serif* in 1839 and *Hatt-ı Hümayun* in 1856 which envisaged reforms which were not implemented. Tanzimat was admitted to

Hélène Cixous (1976) writes that through writing more than ever, a woman has the opportunity to show her originality, objectivity and subjectivity, meanwhile, in that context without suppressing her bisexual nature (pp. 875-893). She criticizes all the written texts that are marked by stereotypes found in male writers' texts and are characterized by false, implausible female characters. Cixous urges male authors to write about men, and female authors to write about women (Cixous, 1976, pp. 875-893). Thus, the feminine writing was also becoming an opportunity to express the awareness of the subjectivity and experience of the woman through writing.

Identifying Subjectivity as the Genesis³ of Emancipation

Emancipation is the subject's autonomous action aimed at his/her own liberation. According to the famous sociologist Max Weber (1990), emancipation is accompanied by *fascination*, rationalization of the world image. *Humanization* is the mandatory part of such rationalization, and in its inner domain the semantic changes of man-woman relationships are featured. These relationships gradually transform from perceptions of subordination and dominance into domains of mutual responsibility or responsible love. They are observed not on the principle of complementarity, but that of reciprocity.

In the second half of the 19th century, the cultural, historical, political, social changes and developments taking place in Europe and the Ottoman Empire, Constantinople, in particular, also manifested themselves through mass processes of women's emancipation. They were effective not only in terms of aesthetically expressing the differences between man and woman, love, femininity and masculinity in literature and culture, but also in terms of philosophically interpreting and formulating that aesthetics and recording the development processes in literature.

Later, in the 40s and 50s of the 20th century, Simone de Beauvoir (1956) wrote in this respect: "The more individualized a man is, the higher a

man's desire for individualization, the sooner he will recognize the woman's rights to individuality and freedom" (p. 274). Simone de Beauvoir connected the general process of individualization of a person, finding his personal destiny, with liberation from the burden of patriarchal customs and traditions.

The reformation processes taking place in the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century had a key impact on similar processes recorded in the 20th century. In this context, noteworthy are the works of Armenian women authors, who lived and worked in Constantinople in the mentioned period: collected essays by Elpis Kesaratsian, "Collection of Letters to the Reading Armenian Woman" (1879), the novels "Mayta" (1883), "Siranush" (1884), "Araksia or the Governess" (1887) by S. Tyusab, "A Girl's Heart" (1891) by Sipil, "Gardens of Silihtar" (1935) by Zapel Yesayan⁴. These female authors *succeeded in demonstrating their female thinking, voice, experience, writing, that differed largely from male stereotypes and models of the interpretation of reality*, despite the fact that they lived and worked under the Ottoman dictatorship, where every thought or action was censored (Kharatyan, 1989, pp. 5-7) and nothing escaped the keen eye of the ruling elite (Hambardzumyan & Parsadanyan, 2022, pp. 40-47).

They began to search for unique ways of self-realization through literature and social, charitable works, to demonstrate female self-awareness, at the same time affirming their own identity and boldly declaring about education, upbringing, gender relations, women's socialization, work and other issues. They began searching for original ways of self-realization through literature, social and charitable work (Hambardzumyan, 2022; Hambardzumyan & Parsadanyan, 2022), to demonstrate female self-consciousness, hearby asserting their own identity and boldly declaring about issues related to education, upbringing, man-woman relationships (Kesaratsian, 1862a, 1862b) women's socialization, work and others (Hambardzumyan, 2021; Hambardzumyan & Parsadanyan, 2022).

For Western Armenian women authors living and working in the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the 19th century, the categories of

³ Genesis is a method developed by Michel Foucault based on Friedrich Nietzsche's "Genealogy of morality" (Nietzsche, 1994).

⁴ Before the Armenian Genocide of 1915, Zapel Yesayan was involved in literary activities in Constantinople, and after the Genocide - in Soviet Armenia.

freedom and independence became the axiological high points of the value system, through which they presented themselves to the society, revealing the secret of femininity. During the same period, in Western European societies, these developments led to the maturation of new democratic values, which were full of ideas about human rights, and in the Ottoman dictatorship it was never overcome.

The Genre of Autobiography as the Subject's Self-Representation

Autobiography, along with the genres of diary and memoir, is subject to the literary rules of *Great Literature*. The main problem of a woman's autobiography, as defined in the feminist literary criticism, is not only the problem of self-representation of the female *self*, but also that of *establishment of identity consciousness*. A woman first realizes her identity, and only then takes the path of self-representation. In this sense, the traditional concept of *auto-gyno-graphy* (Wilson, 1982, p. 53) in feminist literary criticism is replaced by that of *auto-bio-graphy*, with the acceptance of subjectivity typical of women in autobiography. And what are the main criteria of the genre of female autobiography, which stand out in feminist literary criticism?

In a woman's autobiography, her whole life is described, and not this or that stage of it. In terms of content, one of the main themes of a woman's autobiography are those of home and family, because especially the family is seen as the main model for the *shaping one's identity*. In this regard, Zapeł Yesayan's autobiographical novel "Gardens of Silihtar" is noteworthy, which differs from the classic autobiographies of women by the distinctive features of the content and its internal philosophy. Yesayan speaks about the *body* and *sexuality* not through secondary observations (as a supplement), but neutralizes and weaves them into the main autobiographical plot of the novel: "The homes we called on were a completely unfamiliar environment to me. They were families of prosperous salespeople, whose words, behavior, and the things they served were calculated and predetermined forever. The women, young women and even children of those families lacked any

spontaneous expression. Everything was in strict order. For them there were things that "were right" and there were things that "weren't right". And their long conversations were venomous criticisms of other families like them, who made a slight deviation from the established laws, did something that "wasn't right". ...They carefully followed the Parisian fashion, and followed or thought to follow the orders of such announcements point by point. Especially young women spoke with fiery enthusiasm when the topic was discussed" (Yesayan, 1935, p. 99).

The distinguishing feature and peculiarity of Yesayan's autobiographical novel is the presentation of the collective experience through the personal one, which contrasts the conscious or unconscious content of the woman's inner private world with the world history. And although in the women's autobiographical texts it is often not possible to determine in principle which historical era it belongs to, the period (second half of the 19th century) and the place (Ottoman Empire, Silihtar) are thoroughly described in Yesayan's "Gardens of Silihtar"). This rejection or challenge of history through the presentation of home, kitchen-work, family life, creation of the characters of family members, themes of childhood experiences and illnesses, socio-political morals are recognized as a conscious feministic characteristic of women's autobiography. In the structure of the text, emotionality is paralleled with the narrative sequence of events, and the author's internally affected stories are paralleled with the eventfulness of the great (empire) history.

In Western Armenian women's works the experience that is in the domain of marginality is opposed to traditional biological, social and role stereotypes created and accepted by men. The distinctiveness of a woman's writing has always been and remains in the meaning, form and purpose of writing, which is focused on the manifestation of her *self-determination* and self-identification. In this context, female and male phenomena are shaped into a particular worldview as objective and subjective systems of women's works, which characterize the nature of the female author's consciousness, appearing through manifestations of female-male behavior, writing style, gender space, and genre peculiarities.

Identity-Consciousness as the Genesis of Emancipation

Michel Foucault (2010) also had a great impact on the formation of the concept of women's autobiography. Analyzing the different forms of madness as an experience (isolation of the insane, legal acts and medical treatises, fictional images and prejudices, the author examines the formation of modern concepts of *madness* and *mental illness*, which are distinguished from the irrationality typical of the classical era as a deviation from the general standards of social and ethical ones. According to feminism researchers, a woman as a socially marginalized object is characterized by an act of confession and as a confessing being, a woman always notes that she is censored and forbidden to speak, and a complete picture of women's social identities is formed. Foucault pays special attention to the fact that the discourse of cognition in the culture is always the discourse of sin, and the characteristic figure of the embodiment of sin in history is the woman (Foucault, 2010, pp. 439-443).

The studies of women's literature by Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar also prove that their main form traditionally is autobiography as an original writing-genesis of *identity-consciousness* and *self-recognition*, on the basis of which genres are differentiated: novel, short story, diary, memoir, poetry. Elaine Showalter applies the methodology of Foucault's analysis of marginal practicalities as a self-confession of femininity based on the analysis of female sexuality in different spheres of reality⁵ (Showalter, 1977).

And although the contents of the subjective concepts may change throughout different historical eras, nevertheless, in the domain of culture, the gender inequality of the representative politics of women and men, according to Showalter, remains unchanged even when the phenomenon of the irrational is represented by a man (confessions of sins, pathology or sexual perversions in the discourse of male confessional prose of the

⁵ His main conclusion concerns the inevitable disproportion between men and women in culture: if the concept of femininity is always mentioned as a symbol of the irrational and a sin, the ultimate expression of which is the labeling of *madness*, then the masculine is inevitably intertwined with the concepts of *reason* and *rationality*.

late 19th and 20th centuries). So, at the symbolic level, within the male subject, the inevitable (madness or sensuality of femininity) (Showalter, 1985) can also emerge (or does emerge). Feminist theorists tending towards man-woman difference argue that women-specific discourse, including the autobiographical one, as an alternative form of cognition is simultaneously revealed as an alternative to subjectivity.

According to them, the woman who confesses (her sin) is not only an object of power, but also a speaking subject, who also uses her body language, which, as a cognitive reflection of language, at the same time is in the domain of prompting signs: will, desire, and self-enjoyment that shatter the foundations (traditions) of the patriarchal culture. In that respect, women's autobiographical discourse, according to them, cannot be interpreted in the scope of the traditional-patriarchal discourse of men, in which it inevitably acquires secondary signs. In this context, it is also necessary to develop the criteria for the analysis of women's autobiographies.

Conclusion

In the study, the philosophical-anthropological categories of *subject* and *subjectivity* were examined in the context of the historical, literary and cultural processes, education and upbringing reforms, social transformations and their expressions, that took place in the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th early 20th centuries.

In this context, the mentioned categories contrasted with traditional models of the closed society of the Ottoman Empire. They met the requirements of the transforming society and were focused on the realization of a civil, legal, economic subject that could take responsibility not only for the social process, but also for his/her own life. It has also been discovered that traditional and patriarchal morals recorded in the works of famous European and American theorists, philosophers, anthropologists and sociologists, are in the base of the formation of non-democratic stages of the societies of the late 19th, the beginning of the 20th centuries and modern societies, as well as of their historical and geopolitical developments.

Having studied the manifestations of identity awareness in the fictional works of Western Ar-

menian female authors, it can be concluded that their formulations have not been studied at all in Armenian literature. In the 1870s and 1880s, their literature, social and literary-cultural activities developed vertically thanks to Elpis Kesaratsian, Srubhi Tyusab, Sipil, Zapel Yesayan and other Western Armenian female authors. Thus, when interpreting a woman's subjectivity, considering it in the context of the proposed concept of *subject-object* is worthy of note. And although the prose of Western Armenian women engaged in creative activity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries served as a basis for our study, it can also be extended to women's literature of the 20th early 21st centuries.

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