Feminist Philanthropy
Stories of Resilience
Feminist Philanthropy: Stories of Resilience

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Graffiti art by one of our grantee partners - Aghunik Ter-Stepanyan. Aghunik is a young artist and with this graffiti she tried to show the importance for a woman to speak up. Her initiative was supported by the WFA.

You can find Aghunik on Instagram: @aghtstep.
For women, the need and desire to nurture each other is not pathological but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that our real power is rediscovered. It is this real connection, which is so feared by a patriarchal world.

Audre Lorde

A few years ago, we started a discussion in regards to the establishment of a local feminist fund in Armenia. During that point in time, we had hardly ever heard of the concept of feminist philanthropy. In point of fact, it would be fair to say that we practiced feminist philanthropy for a long time without overtly naming it as such. The main idea that dominated our collective mind was the following: there should exist another approach to the funding, such that it will enable the women’s movement to challenge dominant social and cultural narratives and oppressive norms. We had not only spent a considerable amount of time passionately brainstorming various theoretical approaches and methods of mainstream donors but also how often said approaches were and are not inducive for the development of the feminist movement. The aforementioned reality makes things more bureaucratic, less flexible, and less responsive to the needs of women, girls, and queer communities.

There is one story from years ago that always calls to mind what a donor shouldn’t be; namely, being insensitive, exercising power over partners, and controlling.

In 2005, one of the projects that came out of our brainstorming sessions was a potential project for the benefit of girls from
orphanages and boarding schools in Armenia. We wanted to talk to the girls about their rights and prepare them for life within the context of having come from an orphanage. After several revisions, our project was eventually approved. We were so excited to start a new project. We consequently went to sign an agreement. Now, everything was going well until we got to the topic of the budget. Mr. R, a below-average height and bald man, looked at us through his large-sized glasses and said with an ironic tone in his voice, “Three hundred United States dollars? As a monthly salary? Have you ladies forgotten what the color of your passports is?” We left the office in a very sad mood. It was the first lesson of power exercise from a donor; namely, the politics of a particular passport’s color. It left us with a lingering feeling of injustice and unfairness.

The twofold questions of power and social justice have always loomed in our internal online and offline conversations.

We debated a lot about the word “project,” and especially in the light of women’s movement building. Should we implement projects and therefore take money from donors, while creating a space, some resources, and more opportunities to help more women at the same time? Or should we take ourselves out of this “neoliberal game” completely? Incidentally, we’ve been accused of championing neoliberalism on many occasions. Yet those who accused us had never established any organization nor experienced the pressure of sustaining it, and never felt the responsibility of not having the option of giving up since doing so would mean
the end of providing crucial services to women and girls who
need it. In general, this is an interesting discussion; namely,
how relevant is it to use the terms and concepts of liberalism,
radicalism, and even Marxism in our context? What do we
mean by the word “neoliberalism” when referring to a small
women’s organization in Armenia? Neoliberal feminism is
certainly on the rise in the US, and is very well articulated in
neoliberal feminism manifestos, such as Sheryl Sandberg’s
Lean In and Anne-Marie Slaughter’s *Why Women Still Can’t
Have it All*. But do we, an organization with an annual budget
of $200,000, fifteen employees, and small office space, really
fit into a neoliberal agenda of “work-life balance” or “MeToo”
movement? And do the people that are accusing us of being
neoliberals really understand how socioeconomic and
cultural dynamics shape the lives of women from various
social, economic, and educational backgrounds?

As Elisabeth Prügl argues in her article *Neoliberalising
Feminism*, “the neoliberalization of feminism took a form of
women’s empowerment project which is run by transnational
consumer products companies, typically in partnership with
public development actors. Under the label of ‘corporate
social responsibility,’ these companies invest in women in
their supply and marketing chains, seeking to empower
them within a neoliberality or government.”¹ But we never
advocated for the main concepts of neoliberalism, such as
rationalism, heteronormativity, or hyper-individualism. Most
importantly, we never put the responsibility for “having it all”

¹. http://www.bgu.ac.il/~rottenbe/The%20rise%20of%20neoliberal%20feminism.pdf
². https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2014.951614
on an individual woman, for example, living in a low-middle class household in a small city of Armenia with an abusive partner, with two adolescent kids, with parents who think that “whatever happens in the family should stay in the family,” and a boss that can take advantage of her situation at any time. If anything, we have always stressed the importance of providing a safe space and a voice to women from vulnerable and underprivileged groups. If anything, we tried to redefine the neoliberal notion of success and “having it all” in our own cultural, socio-economic, and geopolitical context. We tried to advocate for a critical understanding of a power dynamic, intersectionality, and social pressure.

It was never an easy choice, but one thing was clear to us; namely, we always choose to work with donors that have feminist values and a solid working understanding of justice. It turned out that it’s possible to do so despite the color of your passport. Moreover, we became that feminist donor years later. Prior to starting the Women’s Fund Armenia, we conducted a feasibility study.\textsuperscript{3} It reinsured us of the importance of having a local feminist fund. The major challenges mentioned by local organizations and grassroot initiatives were the same challenges that we faced fifteen years ago; namely, power dynamic, often unrealistic expectations from donors, comprehensive application processes, cumbersome and lengthy reports, lack of human and financial resources, emotional burnouts, among many other things. But the most important concern raised by local feminist groups was the

\textsuperscript{3} \url{https://womenfundarmenia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Feasibility-Study-English-converted.pdf}
loss of a spirit of social movement, feeling of alienation, apathy exacerbated by attacks from nationalist and radical anti-gender groups.

Feminist philanthropy is inseparable from feminist solidarity. The type of solidarity that creates emotional bonding with the Other, a type of solidarity that is based on “feeling-with” the Other.⁴ As Sandra Bartky mentions, “feminist solidarity is conceived as the overcoming of bias and working actively to eliminate rather than share the other’s misery.”

Our approach to solidarity is inspired by Jodi Dean’s understanding of inclusion and affirmation. Solidarity as a way to reassure another that we will stand with her, solidarity that is reproduced in the communicative act and engagement with one another (Dean).

When we started a local feminist philanthropic endeavor in Armenia, we knew that it was going to be difficult, yet we had and have the passion and courage of our convictions which has sparked the fire to our very exciting journey thus far. Firstly, it was very important for us to understand the lived experiences of women from various backgrounds in the feminist movement. From their forms of organizing to their voices and methods of resistance against patriarchy. Secondly, we are determined, in both physical and digital spaces, to enable the empowerment of our collective actions as well as the collective actions of women’s groups.

Being feminist philanthropists means constantly checking our own privileges and power, reflecting on the tone of every email, a call for proposal, a format of capacity-building activity, networking events, etc. Positioning ourselves as feminist philanthropists means a never-ending self-education and self-analyses of our own identities and values. Most importantly, being trailblazers of feminist philanthropy and feminist solidarity in Armenia means supporting the development of co-healing and co-learning feminist spaces that will bring together various identities and groups.

In this collection of articles from our sister funds from various parts of the world, we would like to share with you our collective feminist struggle, love, and passion for feminist philanthropy. A type of philanthropy that brings changes in our own lives, as well as the lives of our partners around the world.
MY JOURNEY FROM SHIRKETS TO WOMEN’S FUNDS

By Lara Aharonian
During the initial stages of setting up a local women’s fund in Armenia, I sensed a deep familiarity with the concept – a group of women gathering, supporting, and empowering one another, both psychologically and economically, felt quite natural to me. It never crossed my mind that this familiarity derived from my upbringing and my early childhood years as part of an Armenian diaspora community in Beirut, Lebanon.

The first meeting, which was held two years ago with the collective of the women’s fund, was organized around a table with coffee and food accompanied by a discussion on the importance of supporting each other and other women in our community. That’s when I suddenly remembered my grandmother and her shirket – a non-formal cooperative by women for women.

Shirket is a Turkish word, perhaps derived from the Arabic word, sharika, meaning company or association. This tradition dates back to the Ottoman era. Armenians formed their own shirkets within their communities serving a variety of purposes; like resolving community issues or assisting women with urgent or domestic matters, etc..

As a result of the Armenian Genocide of 1915, the communities dispersed all around the world. Armenian women, like my

5. Shirket is a Turkish word that means association or cooperative. The unique feature of this type of structured visiting is that the shirket is organized around a well defined economic goal: cooperative saving of money for use in time of need.
Source: Arpi Hamalian, Shirkets: Visiting Patterns of Armenians in Lebanon, 1974
grandmother, continued this ritual. My grandmother’s family, surviving the massacres, fled to Lebanon. I remember my grandmother often telling us how hard it was to start anew in a foreign land, where there was little or no support. My grandmother’s first recollections of re-establishing the *shirkets* were through her memories of her own mother in the refugee camp. She would see her mother gathering with other Armenian refugee women. They visited each other regularly to establish a sense of community after being uprooted from their homes and losing all social structures. They would almost always gather around coffee and food. They told and listened to each other’s sorrows, losses, and challenges of survival in the new country. My grandmother continued recollecting how sometimes they would trade food among the members of their *shirket*, like eggs, sugar, or rice in exchange for other food items. This is how they helped each other in the camp. It was mostly organized in designated groups based on the proximity of the dwellings or friendships. At that time, money was scarce and in the camps, it was difficult to find basics, so they relied on mutual support.

Years later, in her adopted new home in Lebanon, my grandmother, like many women of her generation, started her own *shirket* with her neighbors and friends. The ritual continued but adapted to the realities of their time. As a young child, with both parents working, I spent much of my time at my grandmother’s house. I was a firsthand witness to those gatherings. Children were allowed to these meetings on rare occasions, as long as they kept silent without disturbing the conversations. I eventually realized that these *shirkets* were
not only for coffee, breakfast, and chats, they also served a therapeutic and economic purpose. During their weekly gatherings, each member of the shirket contributed a certain amount of money collected in a box by one designated member. The system was non-hierarchical, and there was no particular leader. An organizer was elected, as well as an accountant and treasurer to safe keep the collected money. These roles were often assigned on a rotating basis and given to women who had good managerial skills in their household. The use of the collected amount rotated among members, a kind of participatory decision model, where members decided on whom to allocate the funds to every week. Often it was the ones who needed it the most, such as buying a sewing machine, attending an event, undergoing surgery... In times when and in societies where it was difficult for women to have access to bank loans and credits, the Shirket had become an essential self-organizing mechanism. It was some sort of self-help financial lending or support group. A Shirket’s management varied. Some combining moral support, conflict resolutions, or financial assistance. Some, organizing it on a weekly or monthly basis. Some memberships were based on proximity or friendship and family relations. Some were mono-ethnic or multicultural.

Now that I am involved in developing the Women’s Fund in Armenia, I am inspired by the Shirket model and all that I have learned from the legacy of my grandmother’s generation. Thus, some earlier models of women’s funds and feminist philanthropy were developed in the seldom visible global south, where I come from.
An in-depth anthropological study conducted by Dr. Arpi Hamalian in 1974 entitled “Shirkets: Visiting Patterns of Armenians in Lebanon”⁶ was based on interviews held among 20-25 women from different Shirkets. She studied the history of this ritual and its transformation over the years as one of the earlier forms of self-support fund development. As Hamalian noted, most of these Shirkets were secretive in nature because they not only served as a network for women to get financial support but also as a space for group therapy and peer-to-peer counseling in the event of family conflicts, marital problems, or other interpersonal matters. The women, the members of each group, never discussed secrets with anyone outside the circle of their Shirkets, not even with their own families. Husbands would often know that their wives were part of a Shirket without any details about other members and decisions.

As Joanne Rando Nucho mentions in her book, “these relationships [in the Shirket], however, were about much more than just fondness for each other; they were about being part of a valuable network of things and people that provided not only resources and services but also a sense of meaning and belonging.” This makes me think of all the collective care discussions we hold in our local women’s fund and among our grantee partners; the importance of nurturing, self-care, and well-being. Nucho adds that “collecting and pooling money is an important part of the Shirket activity, and the participants take it very seriously. Given the level of

⁶ Ṣhrīḵet: Wissṭamrāpi ʿArmeniānān fī Lībān, Ḥamāliān ʿArpi, ʿIrshādūn Ṣhīrkhātān, Ṣīrāj ʿArpi, University of Wisconsin, Anthropological quarterly, Jan. 1, 1974
informality surrounding the gathering and the feeling of a close friendship between the women, I was surprised by the elaborate ritual surrounding bookkeeping.”

Women like my grandmother and my mother’s generation continued these rituals in their communities in Syria, Egypt, Palestine, Kuwait, and even in soviet Armenia. We often forget the struggles of these women who secretly organized and created their own systems of resistance. A system to overcome oppression following war, persecution, genocide. A system to counter conservative and patriarchal societies. We often exclude their ingenuity on how to mobilize all available resources and networks for the survival of their communities. The healing and philanthropic spaces created by these women are often unseen within mainstream feminist movements. Our role is to bring these voices forward and tell their stories. We can be surprised at what we can learn from these models while including them in the transnational feminist philanthropy movement.

WOMEN IN PHILANTHROPY: FOSTERING ENGAGEMENT

By Anna Atoyan
Gender matters in philanthropy. In modern times, when we are witnessing progress in gender equality and defense of women’s rights, the advancement of women’s engagement remains focal in the field of philanthropy. Moreover, research-based data show evidence that women have gained influence and power leading to donor-behavioral changes which should be taken into account by fundraisers and nonprofits. Kathleen Loehr, in her book “Gender Matters: A guide to growing women’s philanthropy,” addresses the importance of women’s active engagement in philanthropic activities. The author develops a discourse focusing the attention on women’s great potential that has not been on disclosure.

The increasing number of women in the workplace and the growing number of movements centering on their experience has made women’s giving a subject of study by professionals in the nonprofit sector and by academics and researchers. Women in the modern era not only have more earnings but also have formed the respective networks to engage more people. Hence, if approached strategically, women can make a difference. “Women are more visible in philanthropy today because of the women who have been fighting for a seat at every table, across every industry, for decades,” (Priscilla Chan, NY Times, 2021).

Although our societies evolve, and by the time more women manifest engagement in philanthropic activities, there are still some common myths that prevent fundraisers from reaching out to women donors for their campaigns. These myths are inherited from decades past when women didn’t have equal
Among the most common myths about female donors are:

- Women give less.
- Women volunteer their time but hesitate when it comes to money.
- Women do not like to be asked for financial support.
- If women make a significant contribution, then they expect a leadership role in the organization.

All of the above mentioned are myths that have been reproduced for many years worldwide, preventing fundraisers and organizations from advancing women’s engagement in philanthropic activities.

Yes, men and women give differently, but that difference should not be an obstacle for the fundraiser for making an ask. Moreover, it is essential for an organization, before designing the strategy, to consider the core differences of men’s and women’s donorship.

**Women’s giving characteristics**

As already mentioned, one of the key points that should be under focus when applying a gender approach in designing a fund-raising strategy is that women give differently than men. Academics draw attention to this aspect, enlisting the key behavioral differences of men and women in giving:
Men are prone to make one-time donations of a large amount, while women prefer giving periodically but in smaller amounts.

Women donors are long-term contributors. One of the key omissions of reports by nonprofits is that men are mainly approached with their one-time, large-amount contributions kept in mind. This is an unconscious action that is being reproduced in the field. If organizations focus on research when working on their strategic planning, the discoveries will be life-changing.

Women are more likely to donate than men. Research has shown that, with the right communication, women are more likely to give for a cause in comparison to men. Moreover, if we take a look at the decision-making in a household, we will see that the decision to donate was made mainly due to the active engagement of the female family member. Moreover, in the long run, women also are the ones passing on those values to the next generation in the family. From this statement, it can be derived that the next generation in a donor’s family is more likely to repeat the same behavior.

Women and men distribute their contributions differently. Studies show that gift distribution differs for men and women. Women are more likely to support religious, international, health, social services, education, and community causes, while men show a stronger preference for contributing to sports and adult recreation. The 2019 Charities Aid Foundation UK Giving Report found that animal charities are the most popular cause for 31% of women, against 20% of men. They are
also slightly more likely to give to projects benefiting young people and the homeless. (CAF UK Giving, 2019)

- **Women prefer to take leadership roles.** Referring to women’s engagement and designing the strategic plan for the organization, women’s presence in leadership roles should not be overlooked. In comparison to men, women donors are looking for a long-term relationship and engagement. Studies have shown that female donors undertaking important roles for a cause have shown dedication were more likely to give again.

- **Women are relational.** In comparison to men, women give more when there is a strong relationship and deep trust. Working with female donor prospects is all about building life-long, strong relationships. Moreover, women tend to network. Therefore, the more engaged female donors are, the more the perspectives of a growing number of women engaged for the cause.

- **Women mainly give to and for women.** Compared to other donors, women tend to make more contributions to causes concerning women and girls. This is explained by women’s connection to the cause and feelings of empathy. Women and donors, in general, are more likely to make a significant contribution to a cause that is per their values and beliefs.

There are three core phases of the donor-fundraiser relationship that should be considered by the fundraisers while working on the strategic plan:

1. Decision-making
2. Donation process
3. Aftermath/Maintaining relationships
In the decision-making phase, the organizations should, first of all, consider what motivates women’s perspectives to contribute. The “Six C’s of Women’s Giving” (Women and Philanthropy: Understanding and Engaging a High Potential Audience, 2002) can serve as a guide for preparing first communication with a potential female donor.

Motivations: The Six C’s of Women’s giving

**Change**
Women have a desire to make a difference rather than preserve the status quo.

**Create**
Women place value on their involvement in the creative process of developing charitable solutions.

**Connect**
Women want to establish a relationship with the organization that goes beyond the request and receipt of a donation.

**Commit**
Women are committed to giving, traditionally expressed through volunteer work and increasingly through financial support.

**Collaborate**
Women understand the necessity and enjoy the process of working with others to solve problems.

**Celebrate**
When women enjoy the process of giving and asking for charitable contributions, the process becomes more than an obligation or a responsibility.
When there already is consent from the donor, it is important to keep her updated on the progress. The latter also characterizes women donors while rarely relates to men’s perspectives. Maintaining contact with the female donor and providing updates on the fundraising not only helps to build trust but also forms the foundations for a long-term, strong relationship.

A third, important component of growing women’s philanthropy that should be taken into account is communication strategy. It is due to a well-designed communication plan that your ask will resonate with high-net-worth women philanthropists. No less are the cases when women haven’t made a significant contribution, simply because they haven’t been asked. Guided by the myths and the belief that women aren’t prone to make bold donations, fundraisers often don’t reach out to prospective female donors when it comes to contributions of a larger amount.

Let’s take a deeper glance at the “communications”. Women want to be heard. They need to feel a connection with the cause, the mission. In addition, women are more likely to respond to a request when the asking person is from their network. Communication through friends, colleagues, or acquaintances will lead to full engagement and dedication of women to the cause. No less important is to build new networks. In fact, they are less likely to respond to mass communications, generalized e-mails, or letters. Moreover, an important component of communications is the acknowledgment of the contributions that have already been
made. In addition to the common “thank you” notes, donors can be acknowledged by being assigned leadership roles, by undertaking responsibilities and more actively being engaged in the organization.

Another key component for the success of long-term engagement lies in building a new network. Your organization can form a network with women donors who will bring new donor perspectives.

In addition to the above-mentioned, organizations should also focus on a no less important aspect of developing women’s philanthropy, that is Metrics.
Kathleen Loehr emphasizes the role of metrics and data maintenance in women’s philanthropy. No matter what strategy is being designed, data collection and maintenance are the keys to a successful approach. Loehr mentions the following list of criteria to refer to when developing the organizations’ metrics:

- **Basic data metrics**
  - Overall giving by women
  - Increase in the number of women giving
  - Percentage of women making increased gifts
  - Percentage of women in the organization’s donor portfolios and the percentage change
  - Percentage of women asked and the change in that percentage

- **Advanced metrics**
  - Knowledge of decision-making in the household
  - Percentage of women making their largest gift
  - Number of bold funding opportunities that resonate with women
  - Number of collaborative funding opportunities to present to women

(K. Loehr, 2018)

Metrics allow for understanding the organization’s standing point. Moreover, data collection and comparative analysis will form a base for picturing the real-time involvement of women in the organization’s activities.
Summary

In the modern era, thanks to equal educational opportunities for men and women, increased income of women, the fostering of women’s philanthropy, and the engagement of women in philanthropic acts are under the focus of researchers and representatives of the field. By this time, a number of nonprofits and fundraisers have witnessed that women’s active engagement can play a game-changing role for tangible results. However, to reach success and grow the number of women donors engaged, the organizations should take into account that there are gender-based differences in the philanthropic behaviors of men and women. Therefore, to design a well-planned strategy, the organizations should review history and academic research to gain empirical data about women’s involvement and the evolution of female philanthropy. Organizations should cultivate a targeted communication plan, considering the female perspective’s motivations for donorship while collecting data and designing metrics that will show a clear picture of the difference-making involvement of women in the philanthropy field.

References

FEMINIST PHILANTHROPY IN SERBIA: A VIEW FROM THE IN-BETWEEN

By Djurdja Trajković and Galina Maksimović
To find oneself as a feminist in philanthropy is strange and paradoxical; strange because the relation between the two is fraught with difficult histories. Any feminist knows that the love of humanity, phil and antropos, is a difficult obligation since humanity has rarely been kind to women, to say the least. And yet, to learn to love humanity anew has always been at the core of feminist thought. It is also paradoxical since philanthropy is usually thought to be outside of the political. Giving is giving, loving is loving! And yet, it is structured around and by politics, doing the work of politics: money, private and public sphere, redistribution, decisions. And when and if philanthropy outdoes politics, it marks the end of it. The more successful philanthropy is, the less there is politics. However, historically, philanthropy has had many shapes and goals, but the field in which feminist philanthropy intervenes reflects elementary principles that feminism in general works on equality, freedom, and justice for all. The ways in which these principles shape practices are not abstract at all. Let’s see how they work with our fund, the Reconstruction Women’s Fund from Serbia.

Founded in 2004, we were the first and, until today, remain to be the only local women’s fund in Serbia. But what does that mean? Since its beginnings, RWF has been supporting the feminist platform against war, nationalism, militarism, racism, and any form of wrong-doing against women. All of these phenomena are deeply under-addressed in our context, ignored, trivialized, or manipulated. And yet, we think that they are really the only ones worthy of our attention. Serbia is a strange country in that sense, constantly in crisis without
change. In the last 30 years, it went from real-existing socialism to savage capitalism. The transition took place via a war that was not addressed but forgotten - as one should not speak about it, manipulated - as Serbs were portrayed as victims or celebrated - as part of the long narrative of Serbian mythical past of heroism.

If these complex phenomena sound difficult for us to oppose, resist, and change, it is so, because we not only address the root causes of the phenomena (culture of violence, authoritarianism, lack of democratic participation, patriarchy and its avatars) but we also think of how to change these structures without reproducing more sameness. And this is the most difficult task of all that demands deep thinking, analysis, and alternative genealogies of knowledge. Atypical of traditional philanthropy, feminist philanthropy oftentimes thinks in terms of paradoxes, contradictions, and how to displace or resolve them. Therefore, our task is always to insist on and support the historicizing and politicizing of the feminist movement in our context. Without it, we are left with little projects, simple implementation, and reproduction that today seem to be a dominant form of philanthropy in Serbia, whether we are talking about international aid agencies, international, national, or local governments, or other foundations. Furthermore, any feminist philanthropy worthy of its name also knows that those who make knowledge, those who think and act within the field, activists, artists, academics, affected citizens, need time, space, autonomy, and solidarity. Thus, RWF supports women’s groups, formal or informal, with flexible and core funding maintaining the
grassroots and organic work of the groups and respecting the autonomy of decisions, and managing the resources. Given the principles and obligations we have toward the world, we oftentimes go beyond grantmaking. When and if possible, we support capacity building, intergenerational and collective leadership, and the transmission of memory and knowledge. As for other types of support? Sure, we give a few pieces of advice here and there if we can. We run to forward emails with essential information, but – above all – we listen. We may not always directly contribute to solving the problems our partners may face, but the least we can do is to actively listen
to them and take their voices into account when envisioning how to advance our support, be it financial, non-financial, or even emotional to some degree.

Bearing in mind all of the above, the RWF is often seen as part of the feminist movement in Serbia and the region. As much as we are proud of that perception, we work hard not to fail the corresponding expectations, and at times, it can become a burden of responsibility that we must endure. As one of our partners defined us, “Being a feminist is an attitude, being RWF is a revolutionary way of funding.” What a demand from us! We understand that our work is part of a wider struggle and that the change we want to achieve, if sustainable, is long and difficult, bringing with it occasional disappointments.
And yet, we do it, and we insist on it because to do otherwise, to imagine a world without peace, justice, freedom, joy, and laughter, would be unbearable... and who would want to live like that?!

Neither we nor the communities we work with! The feminist philanthropy we practice is not limited to institutional donors. In fact, we try our best to create new philanthropic playgrounds that will welcome more and more individual donors. From fundraising parties connecting activists and communities, or activists across the movement, to an annual festival of arts and activism conquering forgotten public spaces, we try to inspire people to support women’s movement with small donations. Even those who, due to a lack of resources, cannot...
donate directly, indirectly contribute by purchasing at least one drink at our event, since a percentage of the price of the drink goes towards a donation. The very gesture of support is even more appreciated by both us at the fund and the groups that we work with than the financial aspect. Just knowing that you are not alone in struggles that can be long and frustrating sparks hope, warmth, and a sense of togetherness. Hence, our local philanthropy is wrapped in loads of joy and fun. It is an unwritten rule that our local philanthropic events spotlight activists, often from smaller towns, whose stories of turbulent struggles in confined environments call for immediate solidarity. We also welcome academics, frequently women we have supported through our program of stipends, to shed diverse light on feminist knowledge and remind us of the importance of contributing to women’s education.

Finally, what completes our events are artists and musicians, not the well-known names but certainly, those bringing the fresh breeze of feminism and rebellion expressed in striking creative forms and sounds.

One of the symbols of our devotedness to local feminist philanthropy is embodied in Cakana, a recognizable wooden donation box proudly wearing our “R” logo. She lives in our office but is the happiest when she accompanies us to local philanthropic events to fundraise for the movement. With the blow of the pandemic, Cakana was working her magic online, writing people emails and reminding them of the importance of supporting the movement. In her vocabulary, fundraising stands as fundraising.
Not that we neglect the seriousness of philanthropy, money, or how it’s generated and distributed. Quite the opposite, we have a firm grasp of a sense of responsibility not only to practice fair and transparent redistribution of money in our own bubble but also feel responsible to take part in broader public conversations or even start our own conversations around all sorts of money-related subjects. Our educational campaigns and workshops on local philanthropy, aimed at activists, have broad frameworks. From how the public money is spent to money accountability to creative ways of fundraising locally. It all adds up to a tangled network of methods directed at change-making.

So, what futures are there for feminist philanthropy in Serbia? We work and dream toward becoming a hybrid place where we work, cry, and laugh while we do the hard work of change. And a place where “we” is evermore always contested, always thought as vague, polysemantic, and without closure...
SEEING THE WORLD WITH DIFFERENT EYES – THE STORY OF FILIA.DIE FRAUENSTIFTUNG

By Nina Hälker
To date, women* and girls* worldwide face and experience multiple forms of discrimination and violence. To bring about change, to strengthen women’s* and girls’* rights, and to come closer to the vision of a just and equal society, it is central to provide and distribute resources. Feminist philanthropy paves the way to make this vision reality.

As filia.die frauenstiftung celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, we look back on filia’s origins and the steps that led to what filia is and does today.

The roots

In 2001, a group of nine women pooled their financial resources to bring filia.die frauenstiftung to life. At the time, it still was not quite common in Germany that, by law, women were allowed to inherit and own private wealth. The women had thus started to discuss what it might look like to take responsibility for feminist ways of inheriting and owning wealth. Inspired by feminist practices in the US, where several wealthy women had started to give their money to foundations to support women and girls, filia’s founders, too, wanted to make sure that the resources that they, as women, provided should directly support activities by and for women* and girls* facing multiple discrimination to empower them and end female marginalization.

8. The basis of this contribution has been an interview with Sonja Schelper and Katrin Wolf, filia’s long-term Executive and Deputy Directors who are leaving the foundation in summer 2021 for retirement. We took this opportunity to speak about the challenges, barriers, and successes that filia has faced, overcome, and achieved.
In filia’s statutes’ preamble, it therefore says:

“We, the founders of filia, have the vision of a just, humane, and diverse world to which women* have a decisive contribution. It is our interest that women* and girls* all over the world get better opportunities. […] Women* are different. They come from different cultures and circumstances, belong to different generations, and see the world with different eyes. We are convinced that the creative potential for change precisely lies in the diversity of experiences and competencies.”

The nine founding women imagined filia as a collective foundation that is not linked to their names. Their idea of mobilizing resources for women’s rights was to invite other women to contribute with their resources to a redistribution of wealth and, by this, to promote social change from a feminist perspective. One of the founders, Ise Bosch, once said that money – if people have much of it – usually lies “dead” in the cellar. But as soon as you hand it over to feminist activists, it transforms into activities of women and girls.

The foundation’s name, filia, meaning “daughter,” is closely linked to this vision: it stands for the women’s foundation being a daughter of the feminist movement – and thus acknowledges, as well as emphasizes, that the foundation builds on feminist history, feminist claims, and successes. During the first decade, filia provided grants to many small groups and initiatives, all of them self-organized and empowering women* and girls* in Central and Eastern Europe, the Global South, and Germany. These partnerships
grew into strong, trustful relationships and a stable, still growing network in which the women’s funds and Prospera play an important role. Short-term cooperations developed – by the financial support of public resources – into long-term partnerships, for example, some regranting projects in which filia collaborates with the Women’s Fund in Georgia, Ukrainian Women’s Fund, Women’s Fund Armenia, and recently, the FemFund in Poland.

**Participatory decision-making**

Filia’s early years, during which the foundation was run based on volunteering, were accompanied by critical voices
who assumed that many foundations lacked democratic legitimacy. Besides the fact that filia, as a private, albeit collective foundation, is not obliged to provide democratic structures, the founders, strongly assigned to the idea of collective female power, had included democratic principles for filia’s work from the beginning. Content issues were and are exclusively decided from within the different committees that are part of the foundation.

Indeed, the founders provided a structure to enable shared decision-making. This is exemplified, in the (still growing) founders’ assembly, the advisory board, and the executive board – all of them responsible for filia’s strategic development. This structure is not unique, but very different from the vast majority of foundations in which one or very few people make the decisions. Over time, filia’s founders who, in the beginning, also held some seats in the advisory board, more and more frequently handed over their positions and votes to experts – as a step to not only redistribute wealth but also to share the power of decision-making.

Another committee that includes experts in decision-making structures is the body of filia’s girls’ empowerment program, which, by now, has been running for almost ten years. Girls* and young women* form the girls’ advisory board, which has the task to select girls*-led projects in Germany for funding. They define and develop the selection criteria, review and discuss project applications, and recommend the projects that should receive funding to the advisory board.
This distribution, not only of money but also of knowledge and opportunities, has proven to be particularly meaningful and promising for the future. Following a similar model, filia launched the empowerment program for refugee women* two years ago. Both programs are approaches to further ways regarding the redistribution of power.

As Katrin Wolf, filia’s Deputy Director puts it:

“For me, feminist philanthropy is how we communicate with our partner organizations. Recognizing that trustful communication on eye level is as important as the amount of money that we grant is invaluable and important to reflect. Both aspects are closely connected to power. To reflect and understand this, transparency is crucial.”

The consequences of the economic crisis

By law, charitable foundations in Germany have to keep their capital resources. Foundations’ grant-making and further activities are realized by investing the dividends – while the stock mustn’t be touched. This worked well for filia’s first decade and brought the freedom and possibility to grant nearly unrestricted funds, based on a climate of trust between filia and its partner organizations.

The economic crisis of 2008 and its consequences gave rise to a new situation and the urgent need of mobilizing further resources – as dividends broke down massively. Until 2008,
filia’s annual budget was roundabout 4-5% of the capital stock (which has grown from 250,000 Euros to 15 million Euro) while, since the crisis, it is less than 2%. This meant filia needed to either shrink in terms of activities or find new ways of mobilizing resources for women’s rights.

Filia decided to diversify her fundraising strategy and is, since then, approaching and cooperating with companies and other foundations as well as applying for public money – e.g. from the Federal Foreign Office in Germany. This new direction has so far been successful; nevertheless, it does cost freedom – and has consequences for the basic idea of feminist philanthropy: giving with trust⁹. While feminist funds see women* and girls* as experts of their life, and at least try to make their grantmaking inclusive, participatory, low-threshold, and with low restrictions, many donors have complex requirements regarding applications, project descriptions, and reporting. Cooperating with donors means that filia has to ask projects to keep their receipts and more for up to 10 years. This means a huge change in the way filia conducts partnerships with projects and organizations.

**Continuing to learn**

The concept of feminist philanthropy still relies on ideas that women’s funds have to continuously spread and share with others. As we, as a women’s foundation, reflect our

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own practices in an ongoing process, it is our task to share these reflections with others – striving to mobilize money for women’s rights – towards transformations to a just society. Up to today, the concept of feminist philanthropy isn’t well known in Germany. Even the concept of philanthropy itself isn’t familiar for many – and still tends to be mixed up with philately. Here, as in other areas, lies one of filia’s ongoing and future tasks: introducing the concept of feminist philanthropy to people and organizations to mobilize resources for women’s* and girls* rights.

Filia sees herself as an ally as well as a facilitator between partner organizations and donors. An example of this and the concept of feminist philanthropy is filia’s “donor trips” that have been taking place once a year for several years now. Sonja Schelper, filia’s Executive Director, describes the format as follows:

“A group of women that are connected to filia’s mission and vision, travel to a partner country for a week, meet project partners, discuss their important issues, and donate a certain amount of money. Together, all women share their perspectives and their understanding of and for feminist approaches and futures.”

Looking ahead to the next steps of filia’s practice of feminist philanthropy is that filia currently – with the beginning of her third decade – is starting an organizational development process that, as part of the reflection of power structures
within filia and filia’s work, shall include decolonial feminist approaches. We stay curious and are aware that new paths – although they will be accompanied by uncertainty – need trust.

Putting it in Laurie Anderson’s words:

“You’re walking.
And you don’t always realize it,
But you’re always falling.
With each step you fall forward slightly.
And then catch yourself from falling.
Over and over, you’re falling.
And then catching yourself from falling.
And this is how you can be walking and falling
At the same time.”
TOWARDS A FEMINIST AND ANTI-RACIST PHILANTHROPY: WORKING WITH THE MIGRANT COMMUNITY, RETHINKING OUR MODEL

By Fiona Montagud O’Curry, Director of Programs, Calala Women’s Fund
Calala has been committed to strengthening the migrant and racialized women’s movement since 2012. ‘Migrant Power,’ our main program in Spain, gives support to 24 migrant women-led organizations working on different issues. In this period, we learned a lot about how to involve this community and their perspectives in our practices, both at the internal and external levels. Through this article, I want to share the mechanisms we put in place to do so, hoping they can be inspiring for others.

In the current context, we believe it is more important than ever that there be a strong migrant and racialized women’s movement in Spain. At a global level — and here as well — the xenophobic, racist, and misogynist discourses of fundamentalist anti-rights groups and extreme right-wing parties occupy even more space, encouraging behaviors driven by hate against women, especially against migrant and racialized women.

While COVID-19 affected the entire population, the consequences of its impact are not the same for all. Migrant and racialized women are among the most severely affected, especially those in an irregular administrative situation, unemployed, precariously employed, or working in the informal sector. Before the pandemic, these women already faced racist and sexist discrimination, gender violence,

10. This article is inspired by “Migrant Power: Lessons learned accompanying the migrant and racialized women’s movement in Spain,” 2020, Calala Women’s Fund, available in: https://calala.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Learnings_Accompanying_Migrant_Movement_FINAL.pdf
impediments to accessing healthcare and decent housing, among others. This health crisis and its social and economic consequences only deepened these inequalities. The social fabric woven by the informal collectives, as well as the organizations and networks in which these women participate, plays a crucial role in providing immediate responses to these inequalities and, especially, in bringing about structural changes that might guarantee a decent life for everyone.

**Protagonists at the Center**

Migrant Power has three main components:

- Grantmaking, providing flexible, long-term general support funding with minimal procedural requirements.
- Capacity building, with training and exchange activities so that activists and their organizations can be more sustainable and have a greater impact.
- Alliance building, devoting resources to support spaces for making connections, increase mutual knowledge and build common agendas.

**Better Late than Never: The Creation of an Advisory Board**

In 2019, we conducted an assessment to better understand the situation of the migrant and racialized women’s movement in Spain. For this purpose, we decided to use the Movement Capacity Assessment Tool (MCAT), developed by the Global
Fund for Women. We selected a migrant and antiracist female activist researcher as a consultant.

The results of the report helped us — even now — to orient our work better. We also learned very valuable lessons about the analysis process. Mainly, that we should have prior consultation with migrant women’s organizations to gauge interest in conducting a study of the movement’s capacities. The initiative to analyze the movement did not arise from the migrant organizations themselves. Likewise, involving organizations from the movement to design the tool would have been helpful.

These recommendations were made by some of the organizations during the sessions held to discuss the early results of the study. To make up for the lack of participation in earlier phases of the study — and with the fieldwork already completed — an Advisory Group was created, composed of 15 women linked to 17 different migrant women’s organizations. We now understand that this Advisory Group should have been established at the beginning of the process. The Advisory Group had a relevant role in the following stages of the Migrant Power Program and the approval of the final version of the study.

We recently reduced the size of the Group because many were not actively participating. Also, because a group that big can be difficult to manage. The Advisory Group currently has 9 participants from organizations of different sizes, working on a diverse set of issues and based in different regions of the
country. They are now supporting us in the development of a genealogy of the migrant and racialized movement in Spain. This time, they have been involved since the very beginning, participating in the process of elaborating the Terms of Reference to select the consultant and in defining the scope and methodology.

**Migrant Women Leading the Capacity and Alliance Building Activities**

‘We love that the experience and knowledge we have as migrant women are valued. The fact that I am a domestic worker does not mean that I do not have other knowledge that I bring from home. Also, trusting in our capacities gives us confidence and security in ourselves.’

(A participant in the workshops)

Within the framework of our Migrant Power Program, we executed a process of training and exchange between our grantees. Migrant women from 19 different organizations participated. The workshops addressed three themes: Self-Care and Collective Care; Synergetic, Inclusive, and Diverse Leadership; and Fundraising and Resource Management.

The process was designed and carried out in a participatory manner in which migrant and racialized women were the protagonists. Here we share some of the most valuable elements of this process:
Evidence-based priorities. We had previously carried out a study to better understand the needs of the movement through the MCAT tool. Based on the results, we identified five fields in which movement participants were interested in building skills.

Consultation with movement organizations. We conducted a consultation in which 20 collectives participated. They were asked about their degree of interest in the themes of the Fund.

Direct participation in decision-making. The Advisory Group (previously established through the MCAT process) was called to meet. The results of the consultation were shared with the Advisory Group, as well as information about available resources. The Advisory Group decided which themes would be addressed in the workshops and what resources would be allocated to each theme.

Definition of content and methodology by protagonists. Three working subgroups, one for each theme, were created with the members from our grantees that had shown interest. Each subgroup had a budget and could make its own decisions about how to distribute the resources. They discussed and defined the contents and the methodology for the different workshops.

Facilitators from the movement. The training and exchange sessions were moderated by women from the movement with experience and training in the relevant themes. They were paid for this work.

The alliance-building component of the project was designed using a similar methodology. Regional online encounters
were held in four of the most populated regions in Spain, each of them having its own context and dynamics. These meetings had 87 participants from Andalusia, Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Madrid. There was also a nationwide gathering with 65 women representing 61 organizations. The whole process was self-managed. In each territory, there were one or two organizations of migrant and racialized women responsible for organizing the encounters: setting dates, defining contents and methodologies within a shared framework decided upon by all with the help of a liaison facilitator. They were all paid for their work.

The most significant challenge around the direct involvement of our grantees in designing and implementing the training and alliance-building activities is their lack of time. The groups highly valued working collectively and participating in decision-making. But participants must find a balance
between their paid work, their care work, and their activism in their own collectives. Most of our grantees do not have staff and work voluntarily. Many of their members have precarious jobs, working long hours, for example, in the Domestic and Care Work Sector. Participating often means taking away from their time for rest.

Therefore, it is important that when we facilitate spaces for participation, we clearly define the role of the members and their decision-making capacities, and together with participants, determine the required time, commitment, and mechanisms of participation.

Our First Experience with Participatory Grantmaking

‘The experience was very good. The process should remain simple both to apply and to vote so that it remains participatory, deliberative, and inspiring for us as applicant organizations.’

(A participant in the participatory grantmaking pilot)

In 2021, we carried out a pilot through an additional call for the Migrant Power Program. The 24 grantees had their grants renewed and, through the pilot, five groups were selected to receive an extra grant.

We decided to explore participatory grantmaking for two reasons:

- The first one is our commitment to redistributing power. Philanthropy is a space mainly led by white people and organizations based in the Global North. We feel we
have a responsibility to make the philanthropy sector more diverse and accessible and this change must start inside our own fund.

- The second is that we believe the organizations that are part of the movement to be those that are better positioned to understand the needs of each moment. We believe that we will make better decisions through participatory grantmaking.

After the pilot, we carried out an evaluation, and this is what we learned:

- These kinds of processes take a longer time than making decisions internally, and we must take this into account when planning the grantmaking cycle. In the pilot, participating groups recommended extending the deadlines.

- Keep it short and simple. There was a high level of involvement of the organizations in the pilot. 58% of the organizations submitted proposals and 79% evaluated and voted in the selection process. This was possible because the proposal format only had two questions on a half-page.

- Grantees like this model. Organizations perceived the process as transparent and participatory and considered that we respected their decision. 8 out of 9 organizations valued positively being able to select the proposals to be financed. They consider it important to set some criteria in the call to balance the opportunities of those with more barriers.
We need to find a balance between transparency and avoiding conflicts. We had anonymized the proposals and shared the results with the score each group gave and received. After the evaluation, we decided that we will send the proposals for voting with the name of the applicant group, while the voting results will be anonymized.

After this pilot, we decided to incorporate a participatory grantmaking approach to Migrant Power permanently. We are also expanding the experience to our Program supporting young and indigenous women in Central America.

Calala Team, 2020,
photo provided by Calala Fund
Rethinking Calala

We are the only women’s fund in Spain. We were founded in 2009 by a group of Latin American and Spanish women living in Central America at that time. The aim was to strengthen the feminist and women’s movements in Latin America. We maintain a diverse board representing the communities we support. 50% of our current board is composed of migrant women living in Spain. Our current President is a Nicaraguan indigenous woman who is employed in the Domestic and Care Sector. Other communities, such as women human rights defenders and women from the LGBTQ+ community, are also part of our board. We are currently in a board transition, and this diversity has been considered in the criteria to invite new board members.
More than half of our staff are also Latin American women living in Spain, which is a priority in our selection processes. In a recent evaluation, we learned that our grantees value the fact that within our staff there are Latin American migrant women who participate in the migrant antiracist movement. They consider this a reflection of our coherence that brings us closer to their reality. Moreover, our experience showed us that the presence of this diversity within our team generates greater openness among our grantees and a greater probability of implementing appropriate methodologies.

The Migrant Power Program has been a process of much reflection and learning, in which we are still immersed. All the lessons and challenges we encountered have made us think. Thinking about what our role as a women’s fund should be; about how to address the power dynamics in our relationships with the groups we support; about how to make the decisions about the resources we manage more participatory; about our own identities, and those of our members; about how to deconstruct ourselves without plundering knowledge generated by anti-racist and decolonial feminisms; about what role we should play as a mixed entity with origins and alliances in white feminism, that at the same time is committed to the movement of migrant and racialized women.

In Calala, we decided antiracism must not be a matter of individual choice for our staff. So, we initiated a process to integrate a decolonial perspective into how we work. We still have a long way to go. As we stated in our manifesto Towards a
feminist and antiracist philanthropy\textsuperscript{11}: “We know that by virtue of being in the global North and funding groups in Latin America there are logics of power that we reproduce, and from which we are not exempt. We still have a long way to go. Aware of our European, whiteness and class privileges, and everything that we still have to work on within our foundation, we are convinced that we must eradicate racism from our ways of being.” In 2020 we began to take some steps. The whole team participated in training sessions on decolonial perspectives and antiracist feminisms. We recently finalized a diagnosis to analyze five institutional areas within Calala from a decolonial perspective: Political Will, Organizational Composition and Structure, Technical Competencies, Organizational Culture, and Monitoring. Considering the results, we are currently developing a Work Plan to define the next steps of integrating this perspective in our organization and the different areas of our work.

We are just beginning. We hope to be able to shift our structures enough to move towards a greater coherence with our principles. But we also hope to share our own experience with other organizations and foundations willing to undertake this work and build philanthropy that is truly feminist and antiracist. In the meantime, we are committed to continuing efforts to channel even more resources to organized persons and organizations who are building non-racist realities every day.

\textsuperscript{11} This article is inspired by “Migrant Power: Lessons learned accompanying the migrant and racialized women’s movement in Spain,” 2020, Calala Women’s Fund, available in: https://calala.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Learnings_Accompanying_Migrant_Movement_FINAL.pdf
CRAFTING CANOES OF CHANGE IN FIJI

By Devina Devi, Kuini Rabo, Menka Goundan, Fiji Women’s Fund
Since Fiji’s independence from Britain in 1970, the political landscape of Fiji has evolved. The 1960s and 1970s was an exciting time in the Pacific. The heavily colonized region was embarking on independence which brought ideologies of human rights, emancipation, and suffrage to the Pacific Ocean. With the changing tides, women had stepped into the socio-political light with many women pioneering in many sectors like medicine, ecology, law, and education. These pioneering women soon started to co-conspire and form collectives.

The 1980s to the 1990s was a time of vibrant activism. Women took to the streets of Suva (Fiji’s capital) in response to increasing domestic violence and rape, nuclear proliferation in the Pacific, and the rule of law. These early marches were symbolic because they spurred systemic and legislative reforms not just in Fiji but also across the Pacific. These events are today recognized and celebrated as the cornerstone of women’s human rights in Fiji and also mark the beginnings of the Young Women’s Christian Association in Fiji, Fiji Women’s Crisis Center, and Fiji Women’s Rights Movement. These organizations represent the deep journey and the studious navigation of many turbulent events in Fiji’s history.

Our feminist journey in Fiji is rooted in the foundations of these organizations. It is the map that our feminist godmothers and sisters had charted that we now use as a guide to inform our collective path beyond horizons.
In reaching beyond, the Fijian feminists visioned a women’s fund in the region. In 2017, through the support of the Australian Government, the Fiji Women’s Fund, Pacific’s first national women’s fund was incepted. The Fund came at a time when many groups and organizations in Fiji, led by and for women, were facing a great resource calamity. The Fund soon became the connector, the conduit, and an accomplice to many national organizations, rural remote women’s groups, and diverse women’s collectives. Fijian feminists were now dreaming bigger, our horizons stretching far and wide.

The horizons we dreamt of during the Pacific Feminist Forums in 2016 and 2019 have continued to guide the work of feminists in the Pacific. In our dreaming, we identified challenges and our feminist realities of climate change, violence, patriarchy, and deep-rooted injustice. We had never dreamt of COVID-19 - the global pandemic, which is here, and which is now. Our other challenges have not vanished. COVID-19 is another great difficulty coupled with others that have now been exacerbated.

The second wave of COVID-19 in Fiji, which began in April 2021, has brought the most demanding health catastrophe in Fiji’s history. Women are at the forefront of this. From the leadership of the Fiji Centre for Disease Control, the Fiji COVID Vaccination team to the Fiji CSO Alliance on COVID-19; women have led the way in crafting the canoe and sailing the rough terrain that COVID-19 has brought to Fiji.

The Fiji Women’s Fund remained an integral conduit and connector in this context by providing flexible and adaptable
Refugee, Exiled and Migrant Women, Fiji
photo provided by Fiji Women’s Fund

grants. The Fund’s grantees have worked tirelessly since April, responding to a myriad of resilience and recovery work. In a pandemic, women have continued to lead. Some of these women are not health professionals, some of these women are farmers, some are women artisans, and some even sex workers. But they have contributed their heart and soul to their communities.

The following excerpts capture the frontline work of some of our grantees in the face of COVID-19 in Fiji.

**Building Innate Resilience Through Hearts Fiji – BIRTH Fiji**

BIRTH Fiji is a registered non-governmental organization based in the Western Division. It was established in 2019 to provide free counseling services to individuals and families. The skilled and empathetic female counselors have been working on a volunteer basis for the last two years whilst assisting the needy in Western Division.

In adherence to the government’s COVID-19 guidelines and with very limited available resources, BIRTH Fiji counselors continue to provide counseling services using innovative ways, such as providing counseling and referrals via phone to keep clients and themselves safe. In these challenging times, BIRTH Fiji counselors are mobilizing resources from family and friends locally and overseas to meet the increasing number of requests from women and children for all sorts of services and items. According to the BIRTH Fiji director, sometimes counselors have no other choice but to make personal sacrifices to help members of their community, for example, feeding families, pregnant mothers, and children who have not eaten for days.

Medical Services Pacific (MSP)

The Medical Services Pacific (MSP) is also a registered non-governmental organization that is working to address gender-based violence through the provision of services such as counseling and mobile clinical services for women and girls. MSP is one of our grantee partners providing services to everyone. It is at the forefront of responding and supporting the Ministry of Health and other stakeholders during this pandemic. The MSP team is led by and consists of fierce women who believe in equality and equity in terms of services and rights for women and children in Fiji. During this pandemic, MSP is also executing a variety of activities from mental health, counseling, SRH services, clinical services, managing a 24/7 children’s helpline, referrals, and currently deploying volunteers at vaccination centers. MSP makes an
effort to help everyone that comes to them, for example, in the last few months, they have been distributing food rations, medicines, and other necessities, addressing the urgent needs of women and children. As frontline workers, the lives of MSP staff are always at risk, but this does not, in any way, hinder their commitment and dedication to serving the women and children of Fiji.

The Naitasiri Women in Dairy Group (NWDG) reached out to the Fund for an amendment to their current Grant to include their COVID support relief packages for their members who were facing the impacts from the containment zones and detection of COVID-positive cases in their community. Given the rising number of infections in their community, the women wanted to facilitate access to the second dose of vaccine for their members and families in early July via arranged transportation. This will also prepare all NWDG members to meet the new COVID-19 requirements and continue to work together as a collective when COVID restrictions are lifted. Talanoa Treks and a few private individuals have also reached out to NWDG and provided them with personal protective equipment, hygiene kits for women and facilitated access to markets for their mushrooms at the Sawani border. The NWDG members have also ventured into mushroom cultivation as part of their business diversification plan in 2020.

The Women Entrepreneurs Business Council (WEBC) is working tirelessly to help women small business owners to stay afloat during these challenging times. Especially given the announcement of COVID-19 safe business measures by
the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism, and Transport. As a women’s fund, we must support these women to ensure that they operate business as usual and adhere to the COVID-19 safe business measures. We provided a grant to WEBC to establish COVID-19 safe business measures, including the safe transportation measures of produce to markets to these women.

Rise Beyond the Reef - The Basa Exchange concept focuses on promoting circular economies, inclusiveness of rural-remote women, communities. “Amid this pandemic, we have to fight with what we have and that involves everybody in the community. Using the traditional concept of ‘Solesolevaki’ - working together for the greater good, supporting each other during this difficult time,” RBTR Co-Founder. With the Fund’s grant support, we provide financial support, enabling our grantee partner to travel to rural, remote communities to purchase crops/fresh produce at village-gate. These rural communities have lost opportunities at the markets where they often sold their produce. To date (12 July 2021), the Basa exchange has benefited 1,313 rural, remote households, earning a total of FJ$119,317, much-needed cash at village gates. These Rural Remote communities (women) have supplied 119 tons of fresh root crops, vegetables, and fruits, providing a nutritional boost for families in containment / lockdown zones and frontline workers in quarantine. A total of 1,813 households plus 549 individuals received fresh food packs through this initiative, covering areas from Nadi to Ba, Nausori, and Suva. RBTR works in partnership with the local government to get food to those in need.
Trusting our grantee partner with this initiative and providing the key support to the 1st Basa Exchange, we have witnessed the buy-in of Private sectors such as the ANZ Foundation and the Fiji Water Foundation, to support the Basa Exchange concept.

Inspired by the Basa Exchange model, one of our grantee partners, Pacific Rainbow Advocacy Network (PRAN), in their COVID support for its members, adopted a holistic approach of partnering with RBTR for its rural members to be a part of the Basa Exchange, at the same time providing basic food necessities packages and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for its members. The Basa Exchange Partnership benefited PRAN members who were assisted with food ration including fresh crops and vegetables from youth and female farmers of Vaturu. This includes PRAN’s marginalized community, which was provided with a healthy diet and earned income for Youths of Natawa village, and the women of Vaturu, who are underprivileged and live in remote communities that have limited access to assistance during this pandemic.

Talanoa Treks is building on a similar concept, in partnership with NGO Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprise and Development and Fiji (FRIEND Fiji), to support women-led farms in the Ra Province and supply fresh produce to be included in the food security packs that are being distributed by FRIEND Fiji in the Western Division.
Pacific Centre for Peace Building (PCP) provides COVID relief support for frontline workers and community leaders in informal settlements. Building on their existing partnership with the Police Department, PCP is handing out surveys to gauge what they are currently feeling, given that they have been away from their families for a prolonged period. The surveys also seek to help understand the experiences from the communities, what type of psycho-social support is needed by frontline workers and community women leaders post COVID-19. The data collected from this survey will assist PCP in creating referrals to relevant Service Providers.

Fiji Women’s Rights Movement (FWRM), one of Grantee Partners who is also an active member of the CSO Alliance, provides support for women and children in diverse communities who are struggling to meet the basic needs of their families. FMRW works in partnership with Rainbow Pride Foundation, femLINK Pacific, Western Council of Special & Inclusive Network, and FRIEND Fiji to distribute food and personal protective equipment (PPEs) to women and children on Viti Levu.

The role of the Fiji Women’s Fund as resource mobilizers, conduits, and connectors has enabled many canoes that the women of Fiji had crafted to sail. In sailing, these women have collaborated as in the example of the Rise Beyond the Reef and Pacific Rainbow and Advocacy Network. They have been co-conspirators, much like the Medical Services Pacific and BIRTH Fiji, or have been conduits themselves, like the Fiji Women’s Rights Movement within the CSO Alliance. Our Fijian feminist journey has come far from our birthing. We
continue to nurture and support and learn from our feminist sisters around the world.

About Fiji Women’s Fund

The Fiji Women’s Fund is a feminist women’s fund that is based in Fiji. Established in 2017, our vision is as an agent of change, we are influencing the flow of resources to diverse women, girls, and gender non-conforming people in Fiji. Link: www.fijiwomensfund.org

Mission

We are an empathetic and adaptive feminist fund that influences and mobilizes financial and non-financial resources for feminist and women’s rights organizations and movements and our grantee partners to progress the human rights of diverse women, girls, and gender non-conforming people in Fiji.

Values

- **Feminist**: We are feminists. We promote transformative agency, autonomy, leadership, and decision-making. We are committed to supporting approaches that advance the rights of diverse women, girls, and gender non-conforming people. We practice rights-based approaches, substantive equality, non-discrimination, intersectional, and transformative approaches.

- **Flexible & Adaptable**: We are responsive to shifting contexts and circumstances. We are willing to examine
the value of strategic opportunities to meet the needs of our partners.

- **Accountable**: We are accountable to ourselves and to the community of people we work with, including our grantee partners, funders, and the women’s and human rights movements. We are committed to being accountable by appraising and communicating the outcomes of our grantmaking and sharing our learnings.

- **Transparent**: We strive to be transparent in the way we conduct our grantmaking, resource mobilization, communications, administrative, and governance processes, without compromising on the confidentiality and safety of our grantee partners.

- **Inclusive**: We empathetically embrace diversity and are inclusive. We are committed to actively promoting, respecting, and supporting the rights of the most marginalized and oppressed communities of diverse women, girls, and gender non-conforming people in Fiji.

- **Collaborative**: We believe in the power of social movements. We are committed to forging collaborative partnerships with the community of people we work with, including our grantee partners, funders, and allies to achieve shared goals.
‘SPIRALING BACK’: SHARING POWER, SOLIDARITY GIVING, AND MAMA CASH’S EVOLUTION TOWARDS PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING

By Zohra Moosa and Coco Jervis

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Introduction

“To Mama Cash, feminism is a radical strategy for change. Therefore, it follows that she focuses more on change than on maintaining the status quo.”\textsuperscript{14}

Mama Cash is the first international women’s fund in the world. It was founded in 1983 by a group of lesbian, feminist activists in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. From its inception, Mama Cash aimed to channel funds to feminist activists and movements around the world in ways that facilitated their autonomy and agency, and in the spirit of trustful partnership. As our history website explains, “There had already been numerous examples of rich women who used their resources to set up funds for women. While most had emphasized charity, Mama Cash focused on activism and change. The founders wanted to change the world by establishing an independent financial source for women.”\textsuperscript{15}

Today, Mama Cash continues to mobilize resources from individuals and institutions for autonomous feminist activism. We make long-term, core support grants for self-led groups\textsuperscript{16} and initiatives, and we help to build partnerships and networks needed to successfully defend and advance women’s, girls’, and trans and intersex people’s human rights globally.

\textsuperscript{13} This article is written by the authors on behalf of Mama Cash
\textsuperscript{14} From Mama Cash’s first annual report
\textsuperscript{15} http://history.mamacash.org/
\textsuperscript{16} Report: Our Voices Are Strong, Mama Cash, December 2017
As feminist philanthropist activists, our organizational ethos is grounded in the practices of continuous learning, responding to the priorities of feminist movements, transforming power relations and evolution, and 2021 has been no different. It marks both a radical shift as well as a kind of return to our roots: we are (becoming) a fully participatory grantmaker. As was the case at various times in our organizational history, once again we have sought to share power by shifting the decision-making about our grants – both who receives them and how much they receive – from our staff to the activists and members of the communities we seek to support.\(^\text{17}\)

**The journey to the here and now**

Our shift to becoming a participatory grantmaker is what our Board Co-chair Nancy Jouwe names as ‘spiraling back,’ in her work on intersectionality. As she explained to us in an interview we conducted with her as part of our launch in January 2021, “the notion of spiraling back is not entirely about going back to our roots because we have evolved as activists. The world is different and the vision may be slightly different, but it is a reaffirmation of our principles.”

Participation of movements and activists in our philanthropy has been at the core of our work since the beginning, yet how that has manifested in our approach has changed over time.

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Our organization was born from feminist movements and run by activists. In our early years as a funder, decisions about Mama Cash’s grants were grounded in movements. We had no paid staff, and activists themselves were making decisions about our grants. As we professionalized and grew as an organization, we were able to scale our impact globally. While staff that joined us often came from movements, the decisions about grants were made internally. Even then, though, and throughout our existence, we have relied on guidance and endorsements from advisors active in various feminist movements. These advisors brought significant networks and expertise to guide our work and keep us grounded in the needs of the communities and movements we seek to partner with.

Our latest shift has been a process of evolution over the last few years. Three years ago, in 2017, we began the Spark Fund, a participatory fund focused on the Netherlands, where local activists have both designed the fund and made the decisions on its grants on a rotating basis. In 2019, we decided to develop the Solidarity Fund for Women’s Funds. Our approach to this Fund is rooted in our commitment to sharing power and our desire to work in partnership with other women’s funds around the world. We used a participatory method to design the Fund; we developed it collaboratively with representatives from 10 other Women’s Funds, with all eligible and interested Women’s Funds being invited to join in on the decision-making.

As we were learning about what works and what doesn’t with these funds, we began a two-year process of exploring how to transition all of our remaining funds into participatory decision-making grantmaking models. This process included researching, information gathering, consulting with technical experts, and facilitating dialogue and decision-making about our transition with many stakeholders. We conducted a study of 11 other participatory funders, speaking with them about their experiences and lessons learned and seeking their input and advice for us.21 We conducted dialogs with external stakeholders including long-term grantee-partners, external (activist) advisors, board members, and allies about their ideas, visions, hopes, and doubts. We spent a lot of time having internal discussions and deliberations to socialize the values of power-sharing and transparency across the organization so that the move to become participatory was collectively held. We also weighed out and thought through how to address the varying tension points of making the shift related to (perceived) risks, auditor requirements, restricted funding, donor reporting requirements, due diligence matters, and staffing, among others.

Our participatory grantmaking model

As far as we know, Mama Cash is the only funder of its size,

21. The peer funder participatory grantmakers that we interviewed and learned from included the Disability Rights Fund, EDGE Fund, Fem Fund, Filia fund, FRIDA Fund, Fund Action, Global Green Grants, Robert Carr Network Fund, Red Umbrella Fund, Third Wave Fund, and UHAI; we also conducted desk research of Semillas, the International Trans Fund, RSF Social Finance, and Wikimedia, among others.
with its depth of thematic areas (issues and population constituencies) and breadth of geographic diversity that has fully transitioned its grantmaking into a participatory approach. This means that there was no existing model or template for us to follow, leaving us to be creative and innovative according to our possibilities and boldest dreams, while at the same time recognizing that there was (and is) so much for us to learn.

Each participatory Fund model that we’ve developed (or are in the process of developing according to our new strategic guide\(^2\)) is unique and fits for purpose – involving different types of participatory processes, serving different types of movement actors, or providing different kinds of grants. Yet the unifying thread is that each is designed with or by those who would benefit from the fund.

Our largest fund, the Resilience Fund, has been designed as a two-step process so that decision-making is carried out in various formats and many activists are engaged in the decision-making process. This model facilitates a wide range of activists, setting our grantmaking priorities every year to stay alert and responsive to changing contexts and needs of various types of feminist actors and movements. And it also ensures that the ultimate decisions on grants are made in a collective and more transparent process by a set group of activists reflecting the depth and breadth of the constituencies, themes, and contexts that Mama Cash reaches and that they are compensated for their time and expertise.

\(^2\) https://strategicguide.mamacash.org/
In the first step, applicants to the Resilience Fund provide input and guidance on which issues to prioritize as part of their application process. Then, a committee reflecting the communities we aim to serve – the COM COM23 (community committee) – makes the final decisions on who the new grantee-partners will be. The inaugural COM COM is composed of 11 individuals that are former Mama Cash grantee-partners or advisory members from diverse backgrounds, geographies, thematic expertise, languages, gender identities, and sexual orientations, and were also selected in a participatory way with activists. Mama Cash continues to set the overall criteria for eligibility in line with our organizational vision and mission, and staff pre-screen applications to ensure the COM COM only reviews eligible groups.

Lessons we are gathering along the way

The process of transitioning into participatory grantmaking has been inspiring and humbling. Along this journey, there have been, and continue to be, many challenges and lessons learned that we are eager to share openly and transparently. Some of the lessons we have already reflected on include:

We are not alone: There is a diverse and growing community of practice of participatory grantmakers that we have and can continue to learn from. We have been inspired by the Red Umbrella Fund, the International Trans Fund, UHAI, the Disability Rights Fund, FRIDA, and many others. And we know that working together collectively enhances all of our work and also helps us achieve more, together.

23. https://www.mamacash.org/en/the-community-committee?fbclid=IwAR1sS3JiLgg_B7dg6-4I-f6F7f0hNYAPbXRhRXXJctpL0zZYlrEt53Xji8
Start small and build up: We have really appreciated the value of starting small(er) and building up. Successfully carrying out the participatory grantmaking pilots with the Spark and Solidarity Funds, and intentionally reflecting on the experiences and carrying forward lessons, gave us the confidence to transition the remainder of our grantmaking portfolio in quick succession.

Be willing to take risks: To become a participatory grantmaker, an organization needs to increase its risk appetite, as we are handing over decision-making about funding to the community, which is seen as counter-intuitive and risky in the philanthropic sector. For Mama Cash, getting to
this point was not a linear process, nor was it easy. It has required time, resources, strong leadership, and internal excavation. It has also demanded an increase in our risk appetite. Not just institutionally, as we need to constantly address the associated challenges of restricted funding, due diligence, donor reporting, etc., but also individually because transitioning to participatory grantmaking has necessitated changing some staff roles. In addition, it has required us all to be willing to “grow” by learning on the go, making mistakes, and course-correcting each step of the way.

**Conclusion**

The question for Mama Cash in the past years has been not why to become participatory but how – because we see it as an evolution of our purpose and trajectory, and a concrete tool that advances decolonization and justice. Yet we recognize that being a participatory grantmaker, in and of itself, is not enough; it is not a magic pill that ends entrenched power dynamics. What it is for us at Mama Cash, then, is one step further in a direction that helps us shift and share power and create more transparency and accountability towards the movements and communities that we aim to support. An evolution that we hope advances the revolution.
GEORGIAN HISTORY OF FEMINIST PHILANTHROPY

By Women’s Fund in Georgia
The context

Philanthropy, being a largely Western concept, takes a very specific shape and form in the Global Eastern and Southern parts of the world. If we focus specifically on Georgia, which is a post-soviet space and has a history of just 30 years of independence, it comes as no surprise that philanthropy does not thrive here but rather takes on a specific meaning.

Firstly, to briefly mention the 70 years of Soviet occupation, this was the period of pseudo communism, where people were supposed to have equal income, equal rights, and access to social guarantees, while, in reality, people were divided into two groups of increasingly different economic capacities.

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the economic crisis and the establishment of NGOs in the early ’90s. These organizations were not ideological, did not serve the social causes, but rather were the sources of income for families in crisis. These NGOs were vastly headed by women, who turned out to be more flexible and open to the new economic system that the independent state of Georgia was stepping into.

Over the years, these NGOs have evolved and grown into an ideological, political, and deeply feminist movement, with its own set of values, strong networks, and wide range of knowledge.

In the early 2000s, two WFs were established - the Women’s Fund in Georgia and the Taso Foundation.
The **Taso Foundation**, as both part of the women’s movement of Georgia and as its supporter, is involved in the work aimed at the creation of a peaceful and just environment. An environment where each woman will be entitled to free choice and self-realization and will be able to exercise her rights and freedoms without hindrance.

The **Women’s Fund in Georgia** is a local grant-making organization supporting women’s rights groups/organizations and individual activists for social changes with financial resources, capacity building, and promoting the culture of feminist philanthropy. For more than 16 years, WFG has awarded over 750 grants nationwide and organized over 100 local and international fundraising events. WFG is an activist fund and not only supports the women’s movement but is also a part of it. WFG contributes to the movement-building by supporting WHRDs, whose work and commitment are not acknowledged and valued in Georgia.

**We want women, girls, and transgender people to live in a safe, equal, and free environment.**

In order to realize this vision, the mission of the Women’s Fund in Georgia is to make girls and women more active and strengthen the women’s movement. For this, WFG is supporting the spread of feminist ideas, the creation of spaces that are free and based on solidarity, awards grants, and builds the capacity of the parties involved in the process.
Experiences

Feminist philanthropy is a political act. It is an act that seeks to challenge and transform notions of power, privilege, and resources.

Having two feminist funds is a luxury in a small country like Georgia, and both of them are working in complementary directions to support local feminist philanthropy. For example, in 2013 Zviad Kvachantiradze and Guguli Maghradze, members of the parliamentary majority, submitted a legislative initiative to the Parliament on the draft law “On Philanthropy, Charity and Public Partnership,” “On Amendments to the Law on Grants,” and “Amendments to the Tax Code of Georgia.”

Taso Foundation, in cooperation with different CSO representatives (including WFG, OSGF, Radaram, Association of Young Economists, etc.) had initiated a package of amendments.

According to the draft law, philanthropy and charity could be carried out by individuals, foundations, and other civil society organizations as well as business organizations and state and local governments, if they provided financial and other resources for philanthropic and charitable activities and/or participated in public partnerships.

The draft law “On Making Amendments and Addenda to the Tax Code of Georgia” envisaged an exemption from profit, income, and value-added tax of certain philanthropic and charitable activities. Also, it included the authority of the

income taxpayer to pay 1% of the income tax rate to the entity carrying out activities according to the Law of Georgia on Philanthropy, Charity, and Public Partnership. The draft law failed to be adopted. There were several attempts to reinitiate it.

While supporting the above-mentioned top-down approach and legislative process, WFG adopts a contrasting strategy, nurturing a more bottom-up policy, empowering grassroots women to engage in philanthropic activities. The organization provides thematic grants programs for marginalized groups of women and queer persons on the following topics:

- Supporting Feminist Movement-Building in Georgia
- Overcoming Hidden Forms of Violence in the Regions of Georgia
- Women’s Rights and Environmental Justice
- Protection of Women’s Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)
- Combating Anti-gender movements in Georgia
- Labor and Women’s Rights

Furthermore, the organization provides open door grant opportunities that allow the applicant to define the topic and methodology by themselves. The program is open throughout the year. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, WFG has also issued 32 urgent response and women’s solidarity grants, the aim of which was to support women and trans persons to respond to the urgent needs they faced because of the pandemic.
Based on the lessons learned from the achievements and challenges, WFG remains more social change-oriented in its grants programs. The major programs are explicitly oriented towards the protection and realization of women’s human rights, advocacy, and feminist activism. WFG is supporting initiatives of marginalized groups of women with the aim to contribute to building a diverse, inclusive, and truly feminist movement. WFG hopes to be more effective in this work by mobilizing more resources to better respond to activists’ needs and to increase their capacities in various fields, enabling them to have a larger impact.

The Fund views all its grantees as partners and collaborates with them on various occasions. At the local level, WFG collaborates with women’s organizations and activists that are WFG’s past or current grantee/partners and other women-led initiatives. The circle of stakeholders encompasses various networks, non-governmental organizations, initiative groups, feminist activists, and scholars who focus their efforts on women’s rights advancement in Georgia. WFG is a member of several networks including, Ariadne, Prospera, EDGE Funders Alliance, Human Rights Funders Network (HRFN), and AWID. On a local level, the Fund actively participates in the UN Women’s Gender Theme Group and Women’s Economic Empowerment Group meetings.

**Future of feminist philanthropy and solidarity**

Philanthropy, by its nature, is the result of the capitalist economic system we live in globally. This is the undeniable
result of disparities between different social groups, the majority being poor and very few owning the majority of the wealth. Capitalism and poverty are also heavily gendered, leaving women and non-binary persons beyond the possibility to gain wealth or even overcome poverty and own lands. To address this challenge, philanthropy as a concept became needed, where the wealthiest would share very little to make sure that the poorest survived.

**Feminist philanthropy is more careful than any other kind of philanthropy not to replicate exploitative dynamics of power.**

In feminist philanthropy, the actors usually also come from disadvantaged backgrounds and play the role of mediators (such as Women’s Funds), sharing resources with those whose voices are the least heard. At the same time, they make sure that this is not an act of charity or humanitarian aid, but rather an act of empowerment and solidarity.

Its approach to supporting activists and communities recognizes that those communities have the intelligence, power, and resources to contribute to transformations and that money plays a complementary role (Alliance Magazine, 2019).

Feminist philanthropy is the only answer to the power relations we face in different forms. This is one of the effective ways to

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analyze power, criticize it, bring up the “power within” model, share it with sisters, and destroy the systems that oppress and marginalize women, queer persons, and different vulnerable communities. Feminist philanthropy is a manifestation. It is a fight against injustice and inequality.

Despite the urgency of the matters feminist movements are facing, feminist philanthropy is a slow, stable way to build an environment that would be inclusive of all, intersectional, safe, and thus, political. This is a long-term strategy to practice solidarity, to share the resources, to build a community, and transform the environment we live in.
SIBIL (ZABEL ASADOUR) AS A FEMINIST PHILANTHROPIST AND HER “PATRIOTIC ARMENIAN WOMEN’S ASSOCIATION”

By Arpy Atabekyan
Feminist philanthropy has a long history, but this term in its broader meanings has recently become an important topic within Armenian feminist research. When reading about philanthropy, within the framework of the term, we see that Armenian women, women's unions, or associations have been active in a variety of ways, both in Eastern Armenia at different times and in Western Armenia and Constantinople.

This term seems new to our culture, yet we have been familiar with it from as far back as the early 20th century, thanks to several Armenian women. Even though many did not declare themselves as such in Western and Eastern Armenian dialects, terms existed and were used to describe women who have been doing philanthropist work. These include, “vorpakhnam” women («որբախնամ» is someone who takes care of orphans), or women who carried out «խնամատարության գործ» which aimed to describe caretaking work initiated by women as a whole. Some of these activities had a participatory or care-related nature, however, some aimed to erase the gaps between the classes of society and battle social inequalities through education. Firstly, through the education of young women.

Hereby, I would claim that we have inherited a very rich practice and history of philanthropic activities by women at the beginning of the 20th century, both in the Republic of Armenia and in Western Armenia. I have decided to dedicate modest research to Sibil (also known as Zabel Asadour or Zabel Khanjian) and the “Patriotic Armenian Women’s Association” («Ազգանվեր հայուհյաց ընկերություն»). Sibil was one of the most prominent female writers, at the same time, a great
public figure, who successfully established benevolent and educational campaigns.

The “Patriotic Armenian Women's Association” was established by Sibil in 1879 in Constantinople during very challenging times. The association would nowadays be considered as a philanthropist mission to educate young women and girls from the periphery, help underprivileged and socially challenged groups of girls be educated, and advocate for their generations. At the same time, I aim to show here that philanthropy is not only a sheer act of funding women’s studies or education but an act to empower women and invest in their future, to battle the local and global inequalities, to convey the tradition of study and education to the next generations of girls. Upon looking at the history of Armenian feminist public figures, it is very surprising to see how back then, i.e. a century ago, philanthropist ideology placed a heavy emphasis on the bodily politics of women, by advocating for autonomy and the right to their bodies, therefore also to their future, making body politics one of the most central topics of their philanthropic activity.

My aim in the extended research of this topic is to shed light on the philanthropist movement of “Patriotic Armenian Women’s Association,” especially having in the center and as a driving force Sibil, her writings, her rhetorical publications, and philanthropist campaigns. In the forthcoming pages of the research, I will make a short reflection on the journal “Hay kin” (“Armenian woman” (1919-1933)) the editor of which was Haykanush Mark, Sibil’s student and another prominent feminist Armenian name to be remembered. The magazine
aimed to increase the role of the Armenian woman in national life, to develop the life of the Armenian woman through literary, pedagogical, and scientific articles, and establish a connection between women across the world. The magazine has repeatedly referred to the educational problems of women and children living in the provinces of Western Armenia and to women who have dedicated their lives and activities to solving those problems. Therefore, I will claim the existence of the “Haykin” journal as an organic continuation of the philanthropic and educational work that Sibil has launched.

As mentioned above, the name of this association is known to us from history from the biography of Armenian writer, pedagogue, publicist Zabel Asadour (Sibil). Sibil, known as Zabel Khanjian, was born on the 23rd of July 1863 in the Scutari district in Constantinople and was a poet, writer, publisher, teacher, and philanthropist. She graduated from Scutari Seminary (Սկյուտարի ճեմարան) in 1879. That year also marked the foundation of the “Patriotic Armenian Women’s Association.” The association aimed to educate and enlighten Armenian women and girls in the provinces of Western Armenia, to help the Armenian provincial woman to be educated, to educate her children, to ensure their future.

After losing her first husband, Karapet Tonelyan, in 1905, she married a famous Armenian linguist and critic, Hrant Asadour. This union sparked a new era of writing and social activities in Sibil’s life.

Especially to Eastern Armenian readers, Sibil is very well known for her lyrical and patriotic poems, her stories about women,
inequalities, and social problems in the Western Armenian context. Among her most well-known works are The Heart of a Girl, 1891 (Աղջկան մը սիրտը) and a collection of poems, Reflections (Ցոլքեր), 1902.

Apart from her philanthropist activities, Sibil is also very well known as the author of “Practical Grammar for Contemporary Modern Armenian” (Գործնական քերականութիւն արդի աշխարհաբարի), a classical grammar book, which was revised and republished with the help of her second husband, Hrant Asadour. Sibil and Hrant Asadour worked closely with famous Armenian writer and political figure Krikor Zohrab. The most famous and prominent result of their collective work was the “Masis” journal (1852-1908), where Sibil used to write portraits of famous Western Armenian figures. Those articles were collected and published in a compilation book in 1921 and entitled by Hrant Asadour as “Profiles” (Դիմաստվերներ).

There is a famous story reflected in Sibil’s letters to Arshakuhi Teodik, where she writes about how she came up with the idea of the “Patriotic Armenian Women’s Association” establishment. This memoir/letter shows in all its details how deep and rooted the inequalities between the center and the periphery were in the Ottoman empire, as well as how real and prevailing the inequalities towards minorities were at the end of the 19th – beginning of the 20th century.

Sibil lived in Constantinople in quite a secure life, which we understand from the same correspondences and memoirs. In the letter, Sibil talks about the Armenian servant of their house
Hakob aghbar (brother Hakob), who goes to his hometown Kgi (Քղի, a small town in the Erzurum province) and returns to Constantinople in a heartbreaking condition, tired and very poor. When Sibil asks him what happened, Hakob replies that the country (meaning the Western Armenian provinces) is too poor and they can hardly find food to eat, that males have no jobs, and that women have no idea about basic rules of health, they don’t know how to read and write, count, or sew clothes, that there are no doctors, and sick people die without getting medical aid, that there are no schools and kids wander on the streets. (Թեոդիկ, «Ամենույն տարեցույցը», Կ.Պոլիս, 1911, p. 242-243).

According to her life story, this was the turning point of Sibil’s life, when she understood that she had been singing and longing for the country in her works, “however the periphery needs work, not words and poems” (Թեոդիկ, 1911, p. 242-243).
After this incident, Sibil invited 8 of her female classmates to her house, and with the sponsorship and support of her mother and aunt, on 1879 11th of April established the “Patriotic Armenian women’s association.”

In the extended article, I will also reflect on the socio-political circumstances of the time, i.e. from the end of the 19th century until the Armenian Genocide in 1915 and the post-genocide era. It goes without saying that in the circumstances of Hamidian repressions followed by pogroms in Adana and finally the Genocide, it was almost impossible to establish, run or finance a charity organization to educate minorities of the Ottoman Empire. One more interesting aspect of that time is the Revolution of Young Turks that happened in 1908 and marked the beginning of the second constitutional era (İkinci Meşrûtiyyet Devri) in the Ottoman Empire. In this context, this constitutional change is very crucial, as it signified a seemingly more democratic atmosphere and circumstances for minorities. It is especially worth mentioning that the 1908 constitution, on paper, gave many rights to the minorities and that Armenians had representation in the parliament (12 seats).

In her memories and works, Haykanush Mark also reflected on the socio-political conditions and the philanthropists, feminists, female writers, journalists, and intellectuals who did not stop their activities throughout the beginning of the 20th century. Approximately in the same period, such notorious women associations and unions had been established by minorities, for example, Դպրոցասեր տիկնանց ընկերություն (School-loving Ladies’s Association), Հայ կանանց միություն
(Armenian women’s association), Ղալաթիո աղքատասեր կանանց կոմիտեն (Poor-loving women’s committee in Galata), Որբախնամ կոմիտեն (Orphan-caring committee) and many more (Ekmekçioğlu, Lerna. Bir Adalet Feryadı / Osmanlı’dan Türkiye’ye Beş Ermeni Feminist Yazar, p. 298-300). Each of them had its own lifespan throughout these years, however, board member women had very strong connections and closely cooperated.

Nevertheless, there were many different levels of silencing the existence and activities of minorities (Ekmekçioğlu, p. 333) and particularly women’s organizations on a governmental level. These actions and operations have been carried out throughout the years and aimed to weaken the alternative voices of women: however, a woman from a minority community was subjected to silencing even more than a Turkish citizen had been. Repressions against women organizations, newspapers, journals, and individuals did not stop after the Armenian genocide either, rather gained different forms.

This article is a tribute to Sibil and the women who had surrounded her to carry out tremendous work in philanthropy and education. This is the least we can do, and it is a very small attempt to look from upon the complicated sociopolitical phase of history and to see what kind of mission Sibil had taken on to accomplish the operation of “saving the nation.” The latter process was not only carried out by establishing schools across the Western Armenian provinces but also by developing the Armenian language and grammar and contributing to Armenian Western literature in prose and poems. In other
words, by enriching Armenian culture, by seeing the salvation of people in those actions. She was a foremother for many feminist women writers (including Haykanush Mark), who later carried out tremendous work as feminists, educators, writers, philanthropists. Sibil was a restless fighter for women’s rights. Her vision (like that of many other contemporary Armenian feminists) pointed to the Socialist Armenian Republic as a final abode for the Armenian future.

This little contribution is an attempt to learn about feminist philanthropist women who lived and worked within Armenian culture, but also, and perhaps more importantly, aims to understand what we can learn from their legacy for the future of our education and development.

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17. http://www.istanbulkadinmuzesi.org/en
MARIAM KHATISYAN’S PUBLIC AND PHILANTHROPIC WORK AND THE “WOMAN QUESTION”

By Arpy Manusyan
Mariam Khatisyan (1845-1914), an almost forgotten Eastern Armenian woman writer and public figure, wrote and published four novels: “Heghineh” (1891 (part 1), 1892 (part 2)), “Bridegroom Hunters” (1894), “On the New Road “(1894), and “The Unhappy Woman” (1899).26

Mariam Khatisyan’s novels address the legal, marital, educational, and social issues of middle-class Armenian women in Tbilisi, opening a new, more complex perspective to the “woman question” in 19th-century Eastern Armenian literature.

The first mention of Mariam Khatisyan can be found in Leo’s27 “The Literature of Russian-Armenians,” where the author pays special attention to Khatisyan’s contribution to Eastern Armenian literature. “Whereas among Russian-Armenians, there is almost one woman who is an independent novelist, and that is Mrs. Mariam Khatisyan.” (Leo, 1928: 276).

Through Khatisyan’s novels, we uncover middle-and-upper-class Armenian women living in Tbilisi, who constantly face the legal, marital, educational, and social issues of their time and, in a broader sense, the male-centered, patriarchal society. We reveal the woman, who was subordinated and remained in the margins of public life. It is through these women that,

27. Arakel Grigori Babakhanian, commonly known as Leo was an Armenian historian, publicist, writer, critic, and professor of Yerevan State University.
perhaps, for the first time in the Eastern Armenian fiction of this period, female characters try to question the masculine and patriarchal order.

However, when we carefully analyze the artistic and public activity of Mariam Khatisyan, we confront the deep roots and influences of the male literary tradition. Communicating with the formulation of the “woman question” by a woman (Khatisyan), we notice the scope of reproduction of male ideas about women in the latter’s works, at the same time, we reveal unexamined, scattered insights on the woman’s poor condition and timid attempts to get out of that situation.  

This influence is especially evident in Khatisyan’s great desire to dedicate women to the cause of national awakening by regarding them (and also herself) as mothers, educators, and guardians of the younger generation. Thus, in the 19th century, women’s participation in public life and social reforms took place mainly through involvement in the upbringing and education of children. Women acted as teachers, textbook authors, founders, and members of charities, and in practice, promoted women’s public participation in education.

In Eastern Armenia, the establishment of philanthropic, social-educational, and literary salons by women launched in 1880, with the establishment of the “Froebel” and the “Armenian Women’s Benevolent Company of Tbilisi” organizations. The latter started its activities in March 1882.

In addition to promoting general education, many charities directly encouraged women’s literary endeavors by publishing their fiction and school textbooks. One of the vivid examples of this is Mariam Khatisyan’s novel “The Unhappy Woman” (1899), which was published with the direct support of the “Armenian Publishing Company of Tbilisi.”

Mariam Khatisyan, Daria Hovhannisyan, Taguhi Melik-Azaryan, Sofia Babayan, Srbuhi Yeritsyan, and other women, who were educated in Eastern Armenia, as well as in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and in the cultural centers of European countries, undertook the upbringing of girls in 1879. They initiated a charity meeting of Armenian women and girls in Tbilisi to establish a philanthropic center that would help needy girls with education, skills, and jobs. The 1881
meeting approved the charter of the “The Armenian Women’s Benevolent Company of Tbilisi.” In 1882 March 7, the Company organized its first founding meeting in S. Gayanyan Girls’ School (Shatvoryan, 2000).

All the women and girls who were present at the meeting became members of the Company - a total of 144 people (Shatvoryan, 2000). Later, in 1912, the company was renamed the “Armenian Benevolent Society of Caucasus,” gaining the right to have branches in the Armenian-populated provinces of the Caucasus.

According to the charter of the “Armenian Women’s Benevolent Company of Tbilisi,” only females could be members and men could only be honorary members (Charter of the “Armenian Women’s Benevolent Company of Tbilisi,” 1882). The board of the “Armenian Women’s Benevolent Company of Tbilisi” took an active role in the public, social, and cultural life of the city.

On April 28, 1907, Armenian literary and public figures solemnly celebrated the 25-anniversary of the “Armenian Women’s Benevolent Company of Tbilisi.”

The congratulatory letter of the Armenian women of Mozdok⁹ is especially noteworthy. “Your 25th anniversary proves that

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⁹ Mozdok is a city in the Republic of North Ossetia - Alania. The first quarter of the 19th century was the heyday of Mozdok. Due to its advantageous geographical position, it became one of the main economic and political centers of the North Caucasus.
the Armenian woman, the Armenian girl, can act in the public sphere, to alleviate the bitter condition of many of her sisters through its activities.”

During the First World War, the organization of refugee aid became a priority for the “Armenian Women’s Benevolent Company of Tbilisi.”

Despite the difficulties caused by the war, the Company continued its activities until 1921. After the war, the Company lost the support of both the Church and the benefactors. According to the act of 1921 July 26, the Company donated all its property to the newly created Republic of Armenia. After about 40 years of operation, the company ceased to exist. Mariam Khatisyan headed the “Armenian Women’s Benevolent Company of Tbilisi” in the years 1882, 1884, and 1907. On 1914 February 27, Hovhannes Tumanyan convened a special session of the “Caucasian Society of Armenian Writers” dedicated to the memory of Mariam Khatisyan.

Opening the evening of remembrance, Tumanyan said, “Mariam Khatisyan is the first Armenian [woman] novelist in the Caucasus to whose memory the literary evening is dedicated. This is the first time that an Armenian woman will speak in memory of the first Armenian [woman] novelist.”

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30. Hovhannes Tumanyan was an Armenian poet, writer, translator, a public and literary figure who was called the “pan-Armenian poet” during his lifetime.
The woman speaker was Sofia Daniel Bek (Sofia Danielbekyan), who spoke on “The Role of the Armenian Woman in Literature.”

In the obituary published in Gorts magazine, we read, “Mariam Khatisyan, the first Caucasian-Armenian novelist, was born into a foreign-speaking family and learned her mother tongue by her own will. In the eighties, the deceased played a rather prominent role among the Armenian women of Tbilisi. She is one of the founders of the “Armenian Women’s Benevolent Company of Tbilisi,” which she has chaired for many years. She was known as an intelligent woman, as a public figure. She is especially famous for her novels - “Heghineh,” “On the New Road,” “Bridegroom Hunters,” “The Unhappy Woman” - in which she raised the issue of the liberation of the Armenian woman, where she presented the life of our intelligentsia.” 31

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