

FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THE THEATRICAL WORK OF SEPHARDIC DRAMATIST LAURA PAPO “BOHORETA”

NELA KOVAČEVIĆ

Abstract. *Sephardic cultural heritage forms a significant part of the multicultural milieu in Bosnia. The Sephardic community in Bosnia was one of the biggest Sephardic communities in Europe until World War II. During almost three centuries under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, Bosnian Sephardic Jews lived quite isolated from the rest of the Bosnian population. That was the principal reason they managed to preserve their cultural heritage brought from their homeland Spain, from which they were expelled in 1492: oral tradition, customs, and the language known as Judeo-Spanish (medieval Spanish that accepted influences from the local languages depending on the territory where they settled down after the expulsion). This community was isolated until the Austro-Hungarian occupation, after which it started changing radically due to the inevitable process of modernization. The Sephardic population finally began adapting to the outside world in all aspects in life: education, culture, way of living, etc. All these changes are reflected in the literary work of Laura Papo (1891–1942), the only female Bosnian Sephardic author who wrote in her mother tongue, Judeo-Spanish. She wrote poems, stories, and essays, but the most important part of her work are her theater plays. Her life and work were marked by two apparently contradictory tendencies: to preserve the tradition and cultural heritage of her people, and to support modern tendencies, especially those related to women, such as emancipation and the need to break away from old patterns of life and habits that were suppressing their progress over the centuries.*

Laura Papo’s plays present two prototypes of women: a modern one, and a traditional one that represents a keeper of folklore and old customs, as well as a source of simple, popular wisdom, described by the author with tenderness and a good sense of humor.

Keywords: Sephardic culture, Sephardic women emancipation, Luna Levi alias Laura Papo, literature, theatre

Laura Papo “Bohoreta”,¹ born as Luna Levi (1891–1942), was the most prominent figure in Bosnian Sephardic literature. She was also one of the few authors who wrote in the Judeo-Spanish language in Bosnia in the period between the two World Wars, and the only female writer among them. Although she had never aspired to be a writer, Papo left behind a prolific body of work. She wrote poems, short stories, and essays, but most importantly, theater plays, which makes her the only Sephardic female playwright in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This remarkable woman left a huge mark on the cultural life of the Bosnian Sephardic community.² Laura Papo was eager to exemplify and support female emancipation, and played an important role in the preservation of Sephardic folklore and the cultural heritage that was slowly disappearing in her time due to historical and cultural circumstances.

As a witness to the historical and cultural changes that occurred in Bosnian society after the Austro-Hungarian occupation in 1878, she wrote about a radical transformation in the Bosnian Sephardic community, marked by the disappearance of old habits and traditions that had been preserved among them ever since they settled down in Bosnia, principally in Sarajevo, about the middle of the sixteenth century.

SEPHARDIC JEWS IN BOSNIA – HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Sephardic Jews resided in separate quarters, living quite isolated from the rest of the population in Bosnia, and they continued preserving the cultural heritage, language, traditions, folklore, and cuisine they brought from Spain.³ Among themselves they

- 1 Bohoreta was her nickname because this is the name traditionally given to the first-born daughter in Sephardic families (the first-born son was given the analogous nickname Bohor/Behor).
- 2 About the life and work of Laura Papo see Muhamed Nezirović, *Jevrejsko-španjolska književnost* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1992); Nela Kovačević, *La mujer sefardí-Cuentos, textos y poemas, Laura Papo “Bohoreta”*, PhD thesis, Universidad de Granada 2018; ídem, “Entre la modernidad y la tradición, el feminismo y la patriarquía: Vida y obra de Laura Papo ‘Bohoreta’, primera dramaturga en lengua judeo-española”, *Neue Romania* 40 (2010): 97–117.
- 3 Sephardi or Sephardic Jews, also known as *Sephardim*, are descendants of the Jews who lived in the Iberian Peninsula (“Sepharad”) since the second century BC until they were expelled, first from Spain, in 1492, and five years later from Portugal. In modern Hebrew “Sepharad” is identified with Spain. Over the centuries, they had very prosperous, well-established and culturally developed communities throughout Spain and Portugal, living in harmony with their Catholic and Muslim neighbors. Their centuries-old presence in “Sepharad” was brought to an end as the result of increasing antagonism against the Jewish population that gradually started from the end of the fourteenth century and culminated in the mass expulsion of all Jews from Spain in 1492. Determined to impose Catholicism as the only confession in the country, the Catholic monarchs King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, in their edict of expulsion issued on March 31, 1492, ordered the Jews either to convert to Catholicism or to leave the country within a period of four months, after which followed a series of conversions, executions, and the massive expulsion of those who refused

kept speaking Spanish⁴ and were therefore mostly unable to communicate with other people in their new environment. The only contact the Bosnian Sephardim had with people of other cultural and religious backgrounds was related to business matters, which required some basic knowledge of the local language or Turkish.⁵ Thanks to this isolation, they managed to preserve their language and habits.

Sephardic life under Ottoman rule was quiet, modest, and guided by religious norms that marked all aspects of social and family life. Sephardic families were large, with many children. As in any other patriarchal society, the men were in charge of sustaining the family, while women were to take care of the children and the household. Nevertheless, despite their isolation, the Sephardim could not avoid being influenced by the environment in which they lived, such as oriental customs related to food, garments, the decoration of houses, and the way of life in general.

The turning-point in the history of Bosnia and of the life of the Sephardic community was the moment when Bosnia and Herzegovina fell under Austro-Hungarian rule in 1878.⁶ Immediately after the occupation, the new rulers stimulated the local economy, opening it to Western influences. Capitalism penetrated rapidly, ending with a guild economy in urban centers. Over the coming years,

to convert. After the expulsion, a great number of them fled to the Ottoman Empire, where they were well accepted and where they could freely practice their religion. See Harriet Freidenreich Pass, *The Jews of Yugoslavia* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979); Moric Levi, *Sefardi u Bosni, prilog istoriji Jevreja na Balkanskom poluostrvu* (Beograd, Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 1969); Krinka Vidaković, *Kultura Španskih Jevreja na Jugoslovenskom tlu* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1986).

- 4 They called their language Spanish, but nowadays the language spoken by Sephardic Jews in the Eastern Mediterranean is called Judeo-Spanish, sometimes called “Ladino”. It is a Romance language derived from old Spanish, incorporating elements from all the old Romance languages of the Iberian Peninsula, but also from Hebrew and Aramaic. After the expulsion from “Sepharad”, it was further influenced by Turkish, Greek, Bulgarian and Serbo-Croatian vocabularies, depending on where the expelled Jews had settled down. See David M. Bunis, *Sephardic Studies: A Research Bibliography. Incorporating Judezmo Language, Literature and Folklore, and Historical Background* (New York-London, Garland Publishing, 1981); Tracy K. Harris, “Reasons for the decline of Judeo-Spanish”, *International Journal of Sociology of Languages* 37 (1982): 71–97.
- 5 The local language was a common language spoken by Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians with some differences, depending on the region. It was known as Serbo-Croatian and was proclaimed the official language of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians (1918–1929), later of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929–1943) and then of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1943–1992) until the dissolution of the country in the 1990s. Having declared independence, each republic proclaimed its own language. As a result, the official language of Serbia is now Serbian, Croatian in Croatia, and Bosnian in Bosnia, together known as BCS.
- 6 Following the Russo-Turkish War in 1878, and after a few decades of frequent uprisings against Ottoman rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina, at the Congress of Berlin these provinces were ceded to Austria-Hungary, but they officially remained under the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire. See Todor Kruševac, *Sarajevo pod austro-ugarskom upravom 1878-1918*, (Sarajevo, Narodna štamparija, 1960).

Austria-Hungary introduced many changes to the region, such as codified laws, new political practices, and modernization.

These circumstances forced the Bosnian Sephardim to come out of their closed circle, to acclimate to the environment and act according to the demands of the time in all aspects of life. Primarily, they had to accept the capitalist mode of production and a new way of doing business. In order to adapt to new trade rules and negotiate successfully, it was necessary to be able to speak fluently the language of the country (Serbo-Croatian), as well as German, the language of the new rulers. The Sephardim started sending their children to public school, where they could obtain general knowledge, taught in Serbo-Croatian and other languages such as German. The process of cultural transformation among the Bosnian Sephardim was initiated by the modern educational system. Until then, the only education was exclusively religious, which was a privilege of men, while women were mainly illiterate.

Only two decades after modern education had been introduced in the country, the first generations of Sephardic intellectuals, the majority of whom studied in the foreign universities of Vienna and Prague, returned to Bosnia with knowledge, experience, and new perspectives. They worked to incorporate them into their community.

During the Ottoman rule the only Judeo-Spanish literature that was cultivated among the Sephardim was the literature preserved in folkloric forms, such as traditional ballads, narrative poems called “romansas”, folk stories, and proverbs, principally transmitted orally by women from one generation to another, while the only form of written literature was religious literature such as translations, adaptations, and reviews of classic sacred Jewish books.

Taking into account all these factors, it is easy to comprehend why among the Bosnian Sephardim there was neither artistic creation nor literature until the beginning of the twentieth century. Eventually, after four centuries of a very conservative and patriarchal life in which there was no space for any kind of individualism, the first attempts at the creation of artistic literature appeared.

Over the years, due to radical changes in lifestyle and an extremely rapid adaptation to a new way of life, Judeo-Spanish became the language of the past, folklore and tradition, and, as such, could not adapt to the needs of contemporary literature. The only way to make it possible was to accept the language of the environment. Sephardic intellectuals realized that there was no way to re-establish the primacy of the language, but many of them continued to use it precisely with the aim to emancipate and educate people from the community who still did not know any other language. Another goal they had was to collect the oral tradition produced in the mother tongue in order to save it from oblivion as material of great historical and scientific value. One of these intellectuals was Laura Papo, whose pseudonym was “Bohoreta”.

LAURA PAPO – LIFE AND LITERARY WORK

Laura Papo was born in Sarajevo in 1891, as the first child of Juda and Estera Levi, and she had four sisters and two brothers. During her childhood, Juda Levi, a poor merchant, decided to move his family to Istanbul to try his luck there. Laura Papo attended the school of the Alliance Israélite Universelle,⁷ where she received modern training and learned several languages. Apart from her mother tongue, Judeo-Spanish, she spoke Serbian, French, German, Italian, English, and some Turkish. At that time in Bosnia when the education of women was not yet common, being a student of the *Alliance* was a great privilege, especially for a girl from a poor family. Besides her education, she developed a great passion for reading and learning that helped her later to become one of the first Sephardic female intellectuals in Bosnia.

When the family returned to Sarajevo after eight years, she began giving private French lessons to help support her family financially. Still, she was not the only working woman in the family. A crucial moment in the life of the Levi family was when Nina, Laura's younger sister, decided to open a ladies' hat shop, the *Chic Parisienne*, changing the trajectory of the family and improving their economic situation. In this way, the then 18-year-old Nina Levi successfully ran the hat shop with her two younger sisters and obtained a loan in 1911.⁸

In 1911 Laura Papo married a Jew, Daniel Levi, with whom she had two sons: Leon and Bar Kohba. Unfortunately, the marriage did not last long due to her husband being institutionalized for mental illness. Subsequently, Laura Papo became the breadwinner for her family, teaching French and Latin and doing translations. She and her four sisters were precursors of the new generation of modern, emancipated Sephardic women. Each one of them broke with tradition in her own way.

In Papo's literary work there is an abundance of examples of oral tradition, such as the traditional ballads or narrative poems called “romansas”, proverbs, and refrains all with elements of folklore. She often sought inspiration in the customs

7 The *Alliance Israélite Universelle* was a political organization established in France by a group of French Jews with the aim of supporting economically poor Jews and organizing a program of the Jewish education in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. Over the years it formed a whole chain of schools that applied western methods of teaching, while the teaching language was French. These schools, which promoted French culture, had a huge impact on the Sephardic population, especially in the regions of Turkey and Greece, and existed until the First World War.

8 More about the family of Laura Papo can be found in the novel *The Scent of Rain in the Balkans* by Gordana Kuić, Laura Papo's niece and one of the well-known Serbian contemporary authors. See Gordana Kuić: *Miris kiše na Balkanu* (Belgrade: Vuk Karadžić, 1986, 1st ed.). This is one of her nine novels that been translated into various languages, among them French (2000), English (2004), and German (2015).

and daily life of the Bosnian Sephardic Jews of her time, and considered the people of her community, especially the Sephardic women. Therefore, her plays and other literary work represent a testimony to Sephardic Bosnian Jewry, as well as a very valuable source of information regarding their life and customs. The timing of her contribution is notable because during the Second World War most of the Bosnian Sephardim and their cultural heritage would be swept away.

Her first literary step into the public came in 1916 when she published her first article entitled “Die Spanolische Frau” (‘The Spanish Woman’) in *Bosnisher post*,⁹ a local newspaper published in German. Very soon she assumed a leading role in the cultural activities of the Sephardic community in Sarajevo with her teaching and literary work. Having a solid education, and aware that in Sephardic society there was still much ignorance and prejudice, Laura Papo educated the people of her community and fought some of the conservative ideas and customs rooted for centuries. Through public appearances, lectures, and literary works, “Bohoreta” contributed greatly to the emancipation of Sephardic women by encouraging education which would lead to financial independence and self-awareness. Papo considered it essential for women to receive a basic education, and with it, employability. She also taught the women of the community to read and write, since many were still illiterate.

In the 1920s she wrote and published short musical plays and stories in the Jewish periodicals in Sarajevo such as *Jevrejski život* (Jewish life) and *Jevrejski glas* (Jewish voice). Her most significant theater plays were written in the 1930s: *Avia de ser* (Once upon a time, 1930), *Esterka* (1930), *Ožos mios* (My eyes, 1931), *Shuegra ni de baro Buena* (Mother-in-law is never good, 1933), *La pasensia vale mucho* (Patience is a virtue, 1934), and *Tiempos pasados* (Old times, 1939). They were successfully performed by the amateur theatre group Matatja for Sephardic audiences in Sarajevo and Belgrade.

Laura Papo died in 1942 in a Catholic hospital in Sarajevo where she was registered under a false name, since at that time Bosnia and Herzegovina was occupied by Croatian fascists. Her sons were assassinated by *ustašas* while on their way to a concentration camp. Her sisters and brothers escaped from the country, except for Nina, who remained in Sarajevo. All of the siblings except Laura survived the war.

Papo’s original manuscripts, mostly dramas and poems, were preserved by her sisters Nina and Blanka. Years later, they were donated to the Historical Archive of Sarajevo. Her stories and articles were published in the aforementioned Jewish periodicals, *Jevrejski život* and *Jevrejski glas*, and are preserved in the library of the Jewish Community in Sarajevo.

9 Laura Papo, “Die Spaniolische Frau”, *Bosnisher Post* 287 (1916): 8.

TRADITIONAL AND MODERN WOMEN IN LAURA PAPO’S PLAYS

All of Papo’s plays are preserved in manuscript in the Archive of the city of Sarajevo, but only the *Esterka* was published.¹⁰ They can be divided into two groups: those featuring predominately folkloric elements and those classified as social dramas.

Her folkloric theatrical pieces *Avia de ser* (1930), *Ožos mios* (1931), and *La pasensia vale mucho* (1934), are short plays about everyday life in a traditional Sephardic family prior to the Austrian occupation. While they include numerous folk songs and ballads, they lack any particular plot or deep story. Basically, the only aim of the author was to revive a flagging nostalgia for old times and traditional Sephardic life, while entertaining audiences with traditional songs and comical situations. Her social dramas such as *Shuegra ni de baro buena* (1933) and *Esterka* (1930) are about modern times and deal with current issues such as bankruptcy, economy crises, and the emancipation of women.

There are two types of female characters in Laura Papos’ dramas, traditional and modern ones. The traditional woman appears in the form of a grandmother, mother, aunt, or older neighbor, representing a type of woman that was slowly disappearing during Laura Papo’s time. The traditional female characters in Papo’s plays are jovial, witty, and always ready to give prudent advice, frequently referencing proverbs or traditional songs, or they simply share their life experiences. Laura Papo had a great affection for the traditional type of woman, such as her own mother, grandmother, and many other elderly women with whom she was in contact during her charitable and educational activities within the community. She wrote of them in her stories, plays, and in a study especially dedicated to the Sephardic woman, *La mužer sefardi en Bosna* (1932),¹¹ in which she described the traditional Sephardic woman, her way of life, and her personality.

The life of a Sephardic woman in Bosnia during the Ottoman Empire was no different from the life of a woman in any other patriarchal society. From her early childhood, Papo was raised with the idea that the only purpose of life was to get married and have a large family. Therefore, she was taught to do all the house chores and prepare her dowry, an important factor for every marriage. Girls from rich families never had a problem securing marriages because their parents could afford a very generous dowry. Poor families, especially those with several daughters, had difficulties arranging marriages because each of the girls had to be provided with a dowry. At very early ages, they would be joined in matrimony arranged by their fathers to someone they did not even know. The life of the traditional woman revolved around her husband, children, home, and housework.

10 Prenz Kopusar and Ana Cecilia (eds.), *Esterka de Laura Papo Bohoreta. Drama en tres actos en judeo-español de la comunidad sefardi de Bosnia* (La Plata: Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 2012).

11 Laura Papo, *La mužer sefardi de Bosna*, trans. Muhamed Nezirović (Sarajevo: Connectum, 2005).

Laura Papo describes her as a woman with enormous patience, coming from a deep faith in God's will and fate, which helped her to endure all difficulties in life, be they marital problems, poverty, bereavement, or other misfortunes. Despite her hard life, the traditional Sephardic woman kept up her spirits and enthusiasm and knew how to cherish the little pleasures and joys in life. She appreciated everything good she received from life while accepting misfortunes as part of her destiny, taking it all as the will of God. Due to this fatalistic attitude, she was able to maintain balance and peace in difficult times. No matter what problem she had in marriage, she had to persevere without complaining to or confronting her husband.

The traditional type of Sephardic woman began to disappear along with the patriarchal way of life, gradually giving way to a new generation of modern and emancipated women.

Political and social changes inevitably penetrated Sephardic society in Bosnia, transforming the way of life, causing the gradual disappearance of customs and traditions, as well as the decline of the patriarchal family model. Within this framework, the life of a Sephardic woman was also changed, adapting to her new lifestyle. Gradually, women abandoned the conservative customs and accepted the new laws of life brought by Western culture.

The two key factors that brought radical changes in the evolution of women were education and work. After World War I, during the economic crisis, Sephardic women increasingly began to learn various trades and worked as secretaries, teachers, hairdressers, dressmakers, and seamstresses, among others. Naturally, this process was not unique to the Sephardic community, but occurred in European society in general. The moment when the Sephardic woman started working is when her role within the family started changing. She was no longer dependent on her father's choice of husband or the dowry. Now she could choose her husband independently, or even choose not to marry. The modern woman is aware of her individuality, her right to make decisions for herself, and her ability to live in accordance with her own ideas. Gradually the old concepts related to marriage, quite often criticized by Papo, began to disappear. Also, illiteracy among Sephardic women began to be a thing of the past, now common only among elder women.

Traditional and modern types of Sephardic women are well presented in Papo's drama *Esterka* by two women from the same family: Tia Rufula (Nona) and Esterka are the best examples of this contrast. As representatives of different generations and completely different upbringings, a grandmother and granddaughter, they embody two distinct ways of life and thinking. In this play, Esterka is a young and emancipated Sephardic woman whose son becomes seriously ill. In order to send him to a hospital abroad, she decides to earn money by weaving carpets. Unlike

Esterka, her husband refuses to work; since their family business failed during the economic crisis, he finds any other work humiliating and cares about what other people would think.

Esterka accomplishes her goal of saving her son thanks to her hard work and a professional and determined attitude, but also through the enormous support of her grandmother. Her Nona, Tia Rufkula, is a traditional type of woman but very understanding of the new ways of thinking and living. Nona completely understands that times have changed, and that in this new epoch it is more important for a woman to have a job and to be independent. In the past, the priority for girls was to get married. Now, as Nona notes, it is more important to have a good job:

You are doing it well, my child. Today, unfortunately, the times are such that we should congratulate girls rather for a job, than for a husband. At your age, when I was young, we were already married and with children.¹²

In just a couple of Nona's sentences Laura Papo refers to the life of a traditional, married woman, who was in charge of many children, busy with housework, and her husband's and mother-in-law's wishes, which she had to endure without complaining:

How many times overburdened with children and house duties, lots of shouting of your grandfather and of my mother-in-law, I had a wish to kill myself! I cried when nobody could see me [...] who would have dared to complain!¹³

On the other hand, we have the example of a modern woman, Esterka, openly confronting her husband Vitali and expressing her opinion in a very determined and straightforward manner.

Vitali: And, what if I don't allow you to work, because I lose my reputation in town?

Esterka: We are not in Arabia. Slavery does not exist anymore, we live in Europe, in a free country. I want to work! And you, as healthy as you are, do what your heart tells you. If you have the courage to watch how your child, a piece of your soul, is getting weaker, congratulations; but me, I am a mother, I must do my duty!¹⁴

12 “Bien azes fižika – oj bavonot vino un tiempo, ke kale agurar a las mučāčikas antes buen fečo ke novio – de vuestros anjos ya estavamos en mis mosedades kazadas i afižadas”. Laura Papo, *Esterka*, Act II, scene 9, 12.

13 “Kuantas vezes, enkargada de kriaturas i fečos, mučo grito de tu nono, de mi shuegra, me vinia montas de skapar kon la vida! Jorava, alas eskondidas [...] ken se ozava akešar!” Ibid, Act I, scene 4, 3.

14 “*Vitali*: I si jo este ečo no alesensio, porke perdo el kredito en el čarši? *Esterka*: No estamos en la Arabija. Esklavas no aj mas, bivimos en Evropa, en una tiera de libertad! Jo kero lavorar! I tu sano

This example shows how the relationship between husband and wife has changed. Modern, emancipated woman is now free to express her opinion and do what she thinks she needs to do, unlike traditional woman, who was not allowed to oppose her husband or raise her voice.

In old times, during the Ottoman rule, women did not go to school or receive any formal education. A girl had to stay home and help her mother take care of household chores. Many were eager to read and write, but this privilege belonged only to males. Despite being illiterate, they possessed a natural wisdom admired by Laura Papo along with patience, faith, and the ability to accept life as is. Through the words of Nona, Laura Papo describes the eagerness of women to learn to read. She is telling her granddaughter Linda how much she longed to learn to read and how she had achieved it:

When I was young, there was a newspaper of Santo Semo in Sarajevo and there were three or four women who could read it. I just got married and I was envious of Aunt Luna de Zeky who already had three or four children. I told her: "Look Luna, if I saw you covered with gold and diamonds, I would not envy you, but the fact that you can read makes me furious. And she said: You can start too; God gave you eyes and a brain. Just get into the spirit and you will know. I listened to her, and I wasn't lazy. Without anybody's knowledge, the rabbi who was teaching my brothers-in-law showed me how to do it, and hop hop hop, I started reading."¹⁵

On the other hand, Esterka represents a new generation of Sephardic woman who went to school and received a regular education. She says that when she was a fourteen-year-old schoolgirl, she wanted to learn to weave, and while on holiday, she decided to go to a factory to learn without the approval of her parents, as if she knew this job would one day help her to support her family.

And not to waste my days, I went to the factory of carpets, and I started to weave! I was very happy while going there. All the girls were singing, and me too. All of them made treasures of their work, and every day I was more interested in that

ke estes, aze luke te parese komo te komanda tu korason! Si tu tienes koraže de ver komo te se esta afinando tu kriatura, tu pedaso de alma, en la buena ora, ama, yo, yo so madre, yo kale ke aga mi dover!" Ibid., Act I, scene 12, 20.

- 15 "Ami tiempo salia una gazeta en Saray de Santo Semo y no avia en Saray tres o kuarto mužeres ke la entendian.- Yo estava rizin kazada tija Luna de Zeky ya tenia kriaturas-tres kuarto, le tenia un selo! Jo le dizia – mira Luna, si te via kuvrida en el oro y el diamante no te envidiava, ma esto, ke saves meldar se me va del ožo. – I me dišo ea. – Ambeza i tu, ožos i mejojo ja te dio el Dio! Date zor al alma i saveras. La eskući no hue haragana. Alas skundidas, el rubi ke ambizava a los kunjadikos, me ećava muestras i čup, čap čup te embezo jo a meldar – tenga bueno mi Luna oj en dia kuando la veo me akordo i dainda keria darle las mersedes!" Ibid., Act I, Scene 4, 4.

craft. And then, if you believe me, it was just as if my heart had told me that one day I would have to earn the bread. Today, my dear, I don't regret that I wasn't lazy, because don't forget, I had to argue with my parents to let me go to weave! At that time, I was only fourteen years old, I could not do what I wanted.¹⁶

And, indeed, years later, her knowledge of weaving helped her to save her son.

Through the female characters such as Nona (Tia Rufula) and Esterka, Laura Papo embodies two generations of Sephardic women, born and raised under different historical and cultural circumstances, and shows how Sephardic women have made great progress, stepping out of the patriarchal model of life which prevented them from developing in many aspects of life. If we compare Esterka and her grandmother, it is noticeable how much the Sephardic woman has changed from a traditional to a modern one, and how her position and role in the family have changed, as well as her attitude toward life.

Nona, as a traditional type of woman, was born during Ottoman rule in Bosnia. Her life revolved only around her home, her husband, and her children. She had to endure with patience and stoicism all the pain and suffering, but nevertheless, she maintained a richness of spirit and an ability to accept things calmly, with faith. She possessed innate wisdom and a capacity to comprehend things even though she didn't go to school; as she says: “Si no tenemos škola, ja mos kvadra” (Even if we do not have an education, we understand things).

Unlike her grandmother, Esterka is a prototype of a new Sephardic woman, born after the Austrian occupation, as the author wanted to be: emancipated, educated, determined, and aware of her abilities – such were she and her sisters. Through the character of Esterka, Laura Papo wanted to transmit a message to a new generation of Sephardic women, to inspire them to study, to learn something that would provide them with money, to work, and to be independent and determined to accomplish their aims.

In spite of huge differences in the ways they were brought up and the circumstances under which these two women lived, Laura Papo never opposes their opinions or attitudes nor insists on a generation gap. On the contrary, there is a perfect interaction between them. The older one has accepted the fact that the times and circumstances have changed, and she understands and supports her granddaughter.

16 “I por no perder los dias debaldes, me hue a la fabrika de los tapetes i ambezi a tešer! Muj kontente estuvi mientras ke ija aji – todas las mučačikas kantavan y yo kon eas – todas kitavan tesoros de lavoros – i a mi kada dia me interesava mas mučo este ofisio! I estonses si me vas a kreer, komo ke me dio al korason ke un dia me va kaler pelear por el pan! I oj no me aripiento mi kerida ke no hue haragana, porke no te ulvides, ke me kalio guerear kon los parientes para ke me den lesensia para jir a tešer! Estonses tuve apenas 14 anjos – no pudi azer loke me demanda el alma”. *Ibid.*, Act II, scene 4, 5.

The younger seeks her grandmother's advice, admires her wisdom, and cherishes the traditional values that had been transmitted among their people for ages.

In representing these two types of women in her plays, Laura Papo wanted to demonstrate the two tendencies that were present throughout her life and work: to convey progressive ideas and encourage Sephardic women to emancipate, and to cherish the memory of the traditional type of women who was disappearing with the new epoch, while at the same time leaving valuable information about Sephardic woman for future generations.