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Fatma Aliye Hanım: Gender Debates in Turkey

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Abstract: This essay explores the late nineteenth and early twentieth Century gender debates in the late Ottoman Empire, and the early Republic of Turkey with a focus on Fatma Aliye's presence in the public space, as the first Ottoman woman philosopher, novelist, and public intellectual. I choose to concentrate on her because of the important stakes of the gender debates of that period, and the ways in which they are echoed in the present can be effectively discussed by reflecting on the ways in which Fatma Aliye is read, presented, and received. In the first part of this paper, I talk about Fatma Aliye's life and experience of her gender as a woman, and point to her key interests as a writer and philosopher. In the second part, I situate her in the political history of feminism during the Rearrangement Period (*Tanzimat*), the Second Constitutional Era (*II. Meşrutiyet*), and the institution of the modern Republic of Turkey. Lastly, in the third part, I discuss the diverse ways in which she is interpreted in contemporary Turkey. I explore the political impact of the reception of Fatma Aliye as an intellectual figure on the current gender debates in Turkey.

Keywords: gender debate, Ottoman feminism, Ottoman empire, early republic of Turkey, feminisim

1 Fatma Aliye's life, literature and philosophy

Fatma Aliye [1862–1936] was the daughter of the historian Ahmet Cevdet Pasha (1822–1895). Although she was raised in an educated and wealthy family, she experienced the social disadvantages of her gender in Ottoman society. When she was a child, it was not customary to include female children in any formal education or tutoring at home. Instead, she started her education by listening to the private lessons given to her older brother Ali Sedat Bey (1857–1900). Having discovered her interest in French, her father permitted her to participate in home schooling. She was then sent to a school for Christian women. As soon as she graduated in 1879, Fatma Aliye was arranged to marry Faik Bey. She was only

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17 years old when she was married. During the first decade of her marriage she suffered from her husband's objection to and suppression of her own intellectual life. She had to hide that she was still reading books and writing. Her husband finally accepted her occupations as a reader and writer.

Fatma Aliye started out as a translator, and then wrote novels and philosophical treatises. In 1889 she translated George Ohnet's *Volonté* (*Meram*). However, given that at the time women were not socially permitted to write and publish, she could not sign her translation by her own name. Nevertheless, she signed it as 'a woman', purposely making her gender manifest to the public. For successive publications, she signed with the indirect description 'The translator of *Meram*'. The famous novelist Ahmet Mithad Efendi (1844–1912) appreciated her efforts in the daily newspaper *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* and even declared her as his literary daughter. Together, they co-authored a novel *Hayal ve Hakikat* (*Dream and Reality*).[1] Fatma Aliye wrote the part entitled 'Vedad', in which the narrator was gendered feminine. The novel was co-signed 'Ahmet Mithad and a Woman'. The first novel she published in her own name was *Muhadarat* (*Stories*) in 1892.[2] Subsequently, Fatma Aliye published four other novels *Ref'et* (1898),[3] *Udi* (1899),[4] *Levayih-i-Hayat* (*Scenes from Life*, 1908),[5] and *Enin* (*Lamentations*, 1910).[6] Turkish literary critics considered her style close to Ahmet Mithat Efendi's, who continued to support her, as is clear from his recognition of her literary identity in his book *Fatma Aliye Hanım or the Birth of a Woman Writer*.[7] They shared a moralistic view of the novel. For both, literature, by means of concrete plots and characters could give response to the question how one ought to live; hence it could be instrumental in the moral education and reformation of the society. Fatma Aliye was a columnist in *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* (*Newspaper for Women*)[8] in which she published several articles that aim to improve women's position in Turkish society.

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1 Ahmet Mithat Efendi/Fatma Aliye (2015).

2 Fatma Aliye (2015b). She is often designated as the first woman novelist of Turkish literature even though literary authorities contest that claim on the grounds that Zafer Hanım had written 'Aşk-ı Vatan' (*Love of Country*) in 1877 (that novel was about the homesickness of a female slave (*cariye*)).

3 Fatma Aliye (2012b).

4 Fatma Aliye (2014 [1898]).

5 Fatma Aliye (2013 [1898]).

6 Fatma Aliye (2015a [1910])

7 Ahmet Mithat (2011).

8 *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* began in 1895 and puplished 612 issues until 1908. It is the women's magazine that survived for the longest period of time. It had both male and female authors. The journal stated its mission as follows: "Our task is quite vast. If we must summarise it in a few words, we would say: to contribute to increasing the breadth of ladies' knowledge in

> It appears that in civilized societies first men advance in knowledge and science and women follow their path. But men, as they enter this treasure house, get jealous of women who follow them and want to deny them the gems of this treasure. When we say this has always been the case, it means how they [men] have done it. However, since Cenab-ı Allah [the Allmighty] who is the possessor of the virtue of knowledge bestowed it to all his subjects, male and female, then is it within the power of men to deny it to women?[9]

It is important to locate Fatma Aliye's intellectual production in the epoch of a thirty year of absolutist rule of the Sultan Abdülhamit II, which immediately follows the attempt at the constitutional monarchy (1876–8). She published in an era in which there was police surveillance over women's movement.[10] *Ahmet Cevdet Paşa ve Zamanı* (1995 [1916])[11] (*Ahmet Cevdet Pasha and His Time*) was devoted to an explanation of her father's political life, an apology for his traditionalist position during the Tanzimat era. Revolutionary modernism rejected her father's views against the transformation of the lifestyle and the modernization of law and thus, forced her to assess her father's position. She could betray him by renouncing to his views, but she chose to try her chances by coming to his defense, which made her loose her own power in the political scene.

From 1916 until 1936, the year of her death, Fatma Aliye confined herself to private life. She remained silent, publishing nothing and choosing not to participate in any literary and philosophical activities.[12] There are several speculations why she made this decision. One interpretation appeals to family reasons to explain her silence. Her daughter İsmet's convertion to Christianity and flight to Africa to become a Catholic nun tremendously upset her, leading her to

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every way; to be the mirror reflecting the opinions of women poets and writers, or in other words, to display the innate abilities of Ottoman women through the publication of their works." *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* no. 1 (1895): 2–3. Cited in Çakır (2007): 69.

9 *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* 1895: 2–3. Cited by Demirdirek (1998): 69.

10 Kandiyoti (1991): 28.

11 Fatma Aliye (1995 [1916]).

12 Senem Timuroğlu documents how forgotten Fatma Aliye was in her old age. "When she died on July 13 1936, Fatma Aliye had been living as a recluse for a long time in her houses in Beyoğlu and Pangaltı. Even back then, her death was publicized as "The Death of the Forgotten Litterateur" in the press. It was known that her illness, which came on after 1885, and her daughter's conversion to Christianity and move to Europe, had worn her down. Her writing had also become sparse and irregular. In the article announcing her death, Turhan Tan emphasised that political reform had driven Fatma Aliye into reclusion and oblivion, the fame that came before the new literary school Edebiyat-ı Cedide was about to burn out in the face of Halide Edip's writing, which he believed should not result in Fatma Aliye's exclusion from literary history." Timuroğlu (2014): 434, footnote 3. Turhan, Tan (1936) "Unutularak Ölen Edip". In: *Cumhuriyet* 4371.

devote the rest of her life to search for her. She spent her father's fortunes paying detective fees to find her daughter, with no success. Another interpretation, which I too support, appeals to the political position she took in favor of the young Ottoman style modernity that lost the historical ground to political strategies in favor of modern nation state building. Because she took the loosing political end, given the absence of democracy, to remain in silence was the only possibility of leading a tranquil life. Indeed, the Islamist interpretation that the new Turkish Republic silenced her because she understood modernization differently, and did not agree with the ways in which Kemalist reforms were done takes its departure from her silence. The new Republic did not promote her as an intellectual because her views contradicted with the official stance on Ottoman history. While feminist interpretations argue that the reason for her being silenced is her feminist position, Islamist interpretations tend to take it to be her unconfessed critique of the Kemalist revolutions.

In literature Fatma Aliye addressed women's issues. Her novels reflect on the gender issues such as women's affective relationships with men, premarital dating for making decisions about prospective spouses, falling in love before marriage, love in marriage, motherhood, slavery, the education of children, chastity, betrayal, divorce, and paid work. Just as Ahmet Mithad did, Fatma Aliye attributed to novels the task to morally educate society. She created female characters, which enabled her to raise ethical questions about the right thing for women to do in situations they were likely to face in their lives. Even though women were expected to act according to social and religious norms, they were not entirely subjected to decisions men made for them. Fatma Aliye gave her female characters a position of subjectivity to make moral decisions about their lives that also related to most women in Turkish society. One core theme was that marriage was not a woman's destiny. Instead, women should have control over the decision to marry and should be strong and courageous enough to get out of a marriage if they are mistreated or betrayed by men.

In her literary work Fatma Aliye depicted the upper or middle class Ottoman family life from women's perspective. Her literary families include wives, daughters, sons, brothers, sisters, cousins, friends, and female slaves, who are often described as occupying a position in between adopted daughters and servants. In *Enin*, the parents would like very much that their son marries their slave, even though the marriage cannot eventuate because he is in love with someone else, and the slave dies of white plague (tuberculosis) because of her despair and disappointment. In her writings the boundary between a slave and a non-slave family member remains fluid. In *Muhadarat*, for example, a non-slave woman who is married to a wealthy man who betrays her, makes the decision to become a slave in order to flee from him.

The protagonists and narrators of these novels often live in kiosks surrounded by high walls; however whether or not they are cut off from the public realm remains dubitable. Instead of an imprisonment into the interiority of the household, the household is open to neighbors and friends thus blurring the traditional distinction between the private and the public. Elif Ekin Akşit in "Fatma Aliye's Stories: Ottoman Marriages Beyond the Harem" argues that the importance of Fatma Aliye's novels lies in her depiction of the new Ottoman family in which women are situated at the intersection of public and private spheres.[13] According to her, Fatma Aliye opposed the polygyny of the harem life and transformed the house into a moral space in which women might develop strong characters in relationships of friendship and neighborhood, empowering themselves through education and work in order to save themselves from destitute subordination to disrespectful and unfaithful husbands in marriage. She conceived the ideal marriage as a spiritual union between husband and wife, in which love is based on respect and friendship between the couple. In this new family dynamic, young girls are given a chance to see and talk to their prospective husbands, and they may reject to marry a man if they realize his tendency to polygyny. Fatma Aliye considers falling in love before marriage as an emotional weakness, which young women and men should avoid. In her first novel *Muhadarat*, she rejected the view that a woman should remain married to an abusive husband. She opposed the prejudice that they cannot forget their first love. Her protagonist Fazıla sells herself to slavery in order to escape from a marriage in which she is betrayed, however she preserves her chastity by accepting to marry her master who falls in love with her, only after the death of her first husband. It is controversial that Fatma Aliye thinks that women's roles as mothers and wifes should satify them, both because her female characters are not limited to that gender role, and because she herself strives to enter into the public realm as a woman. It makes sense to represent Fatma Aliye as appealing to an Islamic frame of reference although her depiction of a new family reveals a modernity that challenges the ways in which sexual difference segregates the old Ottoman society into the segments of private and public spaces. Indeed, in her novels family is reinvented and the question of its organization becomes a public issue.

What is her position on women's employment? She acknowledged that successive wars at the end of the nineteenth Century had reduced the male population, and that industrialization had paved the way for lower class women to work in factories. However, she insisted that women should work without sacrificing their chastity. As an upper class woman, she repeated the traditional

13 Akşin (2010b).

idea that men are the primary breadwinners and that there was no reason for women to work if not for economic necessities. On these grounds Firdevs Canbaz highlights Fatma Aliye's take on these issues to conclude that she cannot be considered as a feminist.[14] However, most of Fatma Aliye's protagonists are strong women, who would be able to change their lives if they had to. Her character Refet in *Dar'ul Muallimat*, a daughter of a poor female slave, attends school (*Dar'ul Muallimat*) to become a teacher.[15] Bedia in *Udi* gives lessons of Ud in order to make a living, after she discovers her husband has betrayed her. She condemns prostitution even though she understands that women that work in other people's houses for cleaning, and washing the linen etc., make very little money, and loose their health.

Let me now turn to her non-literary work. Even though she may not be the first woman novelist, Fatma Aliye was indubitably the first woman philosopher in nineteenth Century Ottoman intellectual life. Her translations also won the appreciation of her father who was an historian and one of the most prominent intellectuals of his time. Her success in publications prompted him to give her private lessons and include her in philosophical discussions at home with his group of friends. The group discussed not only Islamic philosophy, comparing Aristotle and Plato with Al Gazhali and Averroes, but also the fundamental figures of European modern philosophy, such as Descartes and Leibniz. These studies proved influential in giving her the intellectual direction to publish her first book on philosophy. In 1900 she wrote a history of philosophy *Teracüm-i Ahval-i Felasife*[16] (Philosophers' Biographies) with a focus on the lives of philosophers, the first part of which is devoted to ancient philosophy starting from Thales, and the second part to Islamic philosophy. Her second book *Tedkik-i Ecsam*[17] (Examination of Bodies) is a commentary on Leibniz's metaphysics (*Monadology*). She does a relatively good job in explaining the fundamental concepts of Leibniz's monadology even though, I believe, she accounts for the distinction between 'truths of fact' and 'truths of reason' in an odd way. She ties it to the opposition between religious faith and knowledge. In a broader sense, Fatma Aliye tended to read modern Western philosophy through the lenses and problems of Islamic philosophy.

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14 Canbaz (2005): 81–102.

15 Sultan Aldülhamid II, has consistently opened schools for girls, and valued education for women. *Dar'ul Muallimat* is the high school that would form female students as teachers. Meanwhile the State began to employ women as teachers and administrators in schools for girls.

16 Fatma Aliye (2006 [1900]).

17 Fatma Aliye (2009 [1901]).

Let me briefly explain. According to Leibniz all truths from the standpoint of God's absolute knowledge, even the truths of facts subject to possible negations, would be necessary and God would know them *a priori*, even though from the monad's perspectives they can only be known *a posteriori*, as the monad actually perceives them. This issue has given rise to an extensive philosophical discussion about freedom and determinism. However, Leibniz did not use it to indicate the limits of human knowledge vis a vis faith. Fatma Aliye, on the other hand, throughout her commentary on Leibniz, stresses that the major problems of philosophy, when pondered upon, lead us to the limits of human knowledge, to a not-knowing, which she takes as pointing to God's existence as an absolute knower. In short, she uses the contrast between the limitedness of human knowing and the unlimitedness of divine knowing to argue that philosophy points to God, in whom one should have faith. This is to say that, according to Fatma Aliye, even philosophical reflections on the foundations of metaphysical issues make the necessity of faith manifest. From a philosophical point of view, this is clearly circular because she takes the existence of God as an omniscient being for granted. To infer from the limits of human knowledge, the existence of an omniscient being, one must assume that there is an answer to the questions we ask, and that truths exist if they are known and that if human beings do not know them, God knows them. I believe she is influenced by Islamic philosophy in her interpretation of Leibniz, based on the way she implies that faith and knowledge can be reconciled, and the impasses of human knowing point to the necessity of surrendering the mind to faith.

Indeed, it is difficult to make sense of Fatma Aliye's brand of modernity without locating her in the historical context in which she lived and worked. The reason why there is so much controversy and opposing interpretations of Fatma Aliye requires us to think through the historical configurations of the relations between modernity, feminism, religion, and nationalism in that historical age.

2 Modernity, feminism, nationalism

nineteenth and twentieth Century gender debates in the late Ottoman and early Turkish Republic times are part of the cultural experience of the transition of Turkish society to modernity. The women's movement, being a movement of liberation, cannot be considered independently from the modernization of Turkey in general. The Ottoman Imperial Edict of Rearrangement, *Tanzimat*, proclaimed on November 3rd, 1839 as the *Hatt-ı Şerif*, (lit. Noble Decree or Imperial Rescript of Gülhane), was the first major reform under the government

of Sultan Abdulmecid and a decisive event in the movement towards secularization. It aimed at political centralization, military and economic reform, and the creation of a new Ottoman identity that was multi-ethnic and multi-religious. The Edict of 1839 guaranteed the right to life and property to all of the empire's subjects, including non-Muslims. With this reform, Ottoman political life became re-organized and the concept of sovereignty changed. While the Sultan lost his status of being an absolute Monarch, the subjects acquired the status of citizens who bore political and civil rights, such as the right to life and proprety and the freedom of speech and expression. This political re-organization set Turkish society on a path to secularization, which made an impact on education, law, economy, and social life in general.

Given the waves of nationalisms in the nineteenth Century, the project of creating a multi-ethnic and multi-religious identity did not succeed. By the end of the Crimean War, the Ottoman Empire's entire system had warped, and could not battle its ethnic regions, which demanded autonomy. The reforms that aimed at centralization and the creation of a new identity had failed. The military and economic reforms built up a massive debt, which eventually opened the Ottoman Empire up to manipulation by France and Britain.

If we look at the political scene, two years after the declaration of the Empire's new Constitution in 1876 (first one was introduced twenty years earlier) the Sultan II. Abdülhamid dissolved the assembly and reigned as a reclusive absolute monarch for thirty years until 1908. In 1908 under the political influence of Jeune Turcs and the *Committee of Union and Progress*, the Second Constitutaional Era was institutionalized until the declaration of the new Republic in 1923. The history of feminism throughout these political transformations has recently been an important domain of research. With *Tanzimat* women's lives began to change as well, including the possibilities for women to play roles in public life. In the traditional Ottoman Muslim way of life, women were restricted to their roles in the private sphere, and they could only have an indirect influence over public life as the supporters and counsellers of men, being their mothers and wifes. Men were the primary actors and women's destinies were tied to the public success and failure of their male family members who were the primary actors. In other words, women did not possess the means to be active in the public sphere with their own positions, identities, voices, and names.

Elif Ekin Akşit in her essay "Fatma Aliye's Stories: Ottoman Marriages Beyond the Harem," examines the different relations of the Young Ottomans and Young Turks to feminism, and situates Fatma Aliye as closer to the Young Ottomans than to the Young Turks.[18] The Young Ottomans were the intellectuals

18 Akşin (2010b).

of the Rearrangement Era connected with the ruling Ottoman bureaucracy, including Fatma Aliye's father, Ahmet Cevdet Pasha, although they were also critical of the administrators. They were a modernist, reformist group located in the press, seeking social transformation through Islamic politics (by a reinterpretation of traditional Islamic principles). Şerif Mardin was the first thinker to identify how the Young Ottomans' strategies of modernization constrasted with the secularist and nationalist politics of the Young Turks, who had a military background, and for whom religion meant the traditional, oriental way of life that must be overcomed.[19]

The Young Ottomans defended the need for girls' education, however, they wanted to ground that need in traditional gender roles for women. Ayşe Durakbaşa[20] argues that during the *Tanzimat* reform, women's education became the symbol of modernization. The goal of educating women was based on improving the gender roles women had assumed, or rather, were forced to assume in traditional Ottoman society. She shows that men defended two opposite positions on that; some were the proponents of westernization and others took a more culturally conservationist approach. However, both approaches were in agreement on the values of motherhood and wifehood, which all women had to adopt and embrace. Their sole divergence concerned the cultural style and norms through which these values had to be realized. Durakbaşa wrote, "The reason why male reformists thought that the education of women was important, was first of all, the raising of children. Secondly, women's education might ground a love relationship between husband and wife, and thus pave the way for a peaceful family life. Thirdly, it will contribute to the progress and well-being of the society".[21] Since the *Tanzimat* reforms, newspapers began to insist that women ought to be "good mothers, good wives". Even the "enlightened" men strategically grounded the need for women's education on these virtues because the traditional social values were still too strong to disregard. Fatma Aliye too argued for women's education along the conservatist reformist lines; she demanded that women should be educated to be good mothers and wives, while also insisting that education empowers women in marriage. The position of an educated woman in marriage would be different to the position of an uneducated woman: "An ignorant and oblivious wife will be always debased and not be recognized by her husband! God declared that knowers are not equal to those who do not know. Our ladies

19 Mardin (2000).
20 Durakbaşa (2002).
21 Durakbaşa (2002): 97.

women should ornament themselves with sciences and wisdom".[22] Male intellectuals took up and repeated the idea that women, if educated, would be respected more in marriage, and attain the moral status that she deserved. Men who had been educated in Europe complained that an uneducated Ottoman wife would not understand them. Thus women should be educated in order for men and the family to be happy; and if the members of the family respected and loved each other, general society, which rested on the institution of family, would also be happier.

How different was the alliance of feminism with the Young Ottomans than with the Young Turks? Akşin points out how feminism allied itself with the Young Turks' nationalism movement because it facilitated the achievement of feminist aims. Although feminists attempted to assume agency during the revolution, their initiatives were eliminated by the masculinist strategies of the male elites who were the followers of the *Committee of Union and Progress*. Fatma Aliye is considered by feminist literature as making part of the Ottoman Women's Movement, mainly because her feminism is associated with the politics of Young Ottomans. She was maintaining her religious identity while she demanded the recognition of women as equal partners to men in marriage. In contrast, her sister Emine Seniye who is considered to be the pioneer of Ottoman feminist literature, was a member the Committee of Union and Progress, and associated herself with the Young Turks.

Emine Seniye, left Istanbul to live four years in Paris and two years in Switzerland. She could read in Arabic, Persian and was well versed in Sufism. She wrote on sociology and psychology in addition to literature. In contrast to her sister Fatma Aliye, she is not recognized for her literary works,[23] but for her essays on politics and women's issues. The two sisters corresponded for a long period of time, although we only possess one letter Fatma Aliye wrote to her sister. Fatma Aliye adopted a different tone compared to her sister in regard to women's liberation. Her discourse focuses on women both in the family and society (social life), even though she did not see marriage and motherhood as obligations for women. Women should seek a spiritual marriage based on mutual confidence, respect, and love. If they cannot find such a marital relationship, they should strive to built emotionally and financially self-sufficient lives,

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22 Fatma Aliye Unpublished Manuscript 9/11.

23 She signed her first story *Bir Mütehassisenin Tefekkürati* (The Reflections of a Woman Expert) as Emine Vahide. She signed by her own name *Hiss-i Rekabet* (*Competition of Sentiments*) and *Bikes* (Desolate) and her novel *Muallime* (Woman Teacher) is printed in the journal. She has also published *Hülasa-i İlm-i Hesab* (Summary of Arithmetics) with the ministry of education. She is known with her novel *Sefalet* (Poverty).

and receive support from other women (friends, neighbors, sisters). On the other hand, Emine Seniye problematized moral and political inequality between men and women. Although She was closer to nationalist feminism than her sister, her work was not more acknowledged by the new regime. This should be seen as a sufficient reason for inquiring into the political history in which the repression of feminism in the 1930s became an all-inclusive phenomenon.

In the twentieth Century modern Turkey, the dominant ideology stated that women have been granted their political civil rights by the founder of moden Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and that there have not been previous demands for rights by women themselves before his revolutionary intervention. This official view had thrown all the feminist struggles of the past into total oblivion. Serpil Çakır in her book, *Ottoman Women's Movement*,[24] showed in the early 1990s that this view is mistaken. Her research rests on the feminist thesis that because women's histories were not recorded, women remain invisible in Turkish history. Çakır's research was based on the study of fourty journals women published before 1923 and the establishment of the modern republic of Turkey. These journals addressed the important matters in the women's lives, such as house management, relations between spouses in marriage, the education of children, and health issues. The justification to publish women's journals was that informed women would raise better children, who would in turn contribute more to the historical progress people was expected to make. Even though men authored most of the journals, some letters written by women were published, in which they spoke of their own issues and problems. These letters show that women were not happy about how they were situated in society and complained about male practice of polygamy. They also protested against the difficulties of getting published as women writers, and asked for more opportunities for education and learning foreign languages. Zafer Toprak, following Serpil Çakır and other feminists, supports the view that it is possible to speak of *Ottoman feminism* after 1908, precisely because the equality between men and women is implied by the principles of the liberty, fraternity, equality, and justice.[25] Fatmagül Berktay reminds in *Tarihin Cinsiyeti* (*The Sex of History*) that Ottoman feminism was not created only by Muslim women, it was a movement that included associations founded by women coming from other ethnic groups such as Greek, Armenian, Jewish, Syrian, Caucasian, and Kurdish. Nevertheless, she hints at the existence of an empirical and theoretical connection between Turkish feminism and Turkish nationalism.[26]

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24 Çakır (1993a) and Çakır (1993b).

25 Toprak (2014): 1 and Toprak (2017): 48.

26 Berktay (2003): 97.

It is arguable that the main reason for the lack of records about women is attributable to the reluctance of men to acknowledge women as historical actors. Not only the Ottoman women's movement but also the efforts of Turkish feminists to shape the social and political revolutions in the 1920s and 1930s were not acknowledged until the 1990s. While Serpil Çakır's work examines the Ottoman women's movement, Yaprak Zihnioğlu's *Women Without Revolution* sheds light on the feminist struggle after the 1920s.[27] Zihnioğlu writes on the experiences of the women's movement under the new government in the Republic of Turkey, and focuses specifically, on the history of the *Turkish Women's Union* (Türk Kadınlar Birliği) until the date it abolished itself in 1935. She shows that these women, who were presided over by Nezihe Muhiddin, a feminist activist, demanded to be political actors during the transition to the nation state and the Cultural Revolution that accompanied it. They wanted to be political subjects, who had the right to speak and act in order to shape the future of women in Turkey.

The Republic revolution had banned the hicab and encouraged women to dress themselves in Western style. Secularism, being a social imperative, has also banned sexual segregation in public areas. Families were encouraged to send their daughters to school, and women could in principle work in all sectors. This modernization was an essential part of nation-state building process. Women were represented as symbols for national integrity, bearers of cultural essence and held responsible for the moral unity of the Turkish society. According to Ayşe Durakbaşa, this new gendering of women by the nation-state is an essential feature of national identity.[28] The Republican reforms enabled women to play public roles; gave them access to education and granted them political citizenship rights first in the municipal elections in 1930 and in national parliamentary elections in 1934. Although, as beneficiaries of these reforms they felt empowered by the leader Kemal Atatürk, this was in fact another negociation of freedom with patriarchy because the male actors of the regime continued to gender them as mothers. Women were still seen as primarily responsible for their homes and their main task was still considered as raising children who would prove to be good citizens. They could work in charity organizations in their spare time. Men were seen as the breadwinners and the heads of the family. Teaching was the approved profession for women, who were expected to support the revolution rather than criticize it from a position of subjectivity. Male privileges were socially institutionalized such that women, even if they worked, had to carry out their traditional responsibilities at home. Turkish Women's Union challenged this gender role and eventually came into harsh

27 Zihnioğlu (2003).

28 Durakbaşa (1998): 139–155.

conflict with the official gender policies. Union's activists were publically advocating the political rights for women, which disturbed the major male actors of the revolution. In 1927 the police interfered with the activities of Turkish Women's Union to internally split the Union. Soon after, a law case was brought against Nezihe Muhiddin arguing that she misused Union's money for her personal purposes. Even though no money was ever recorded as missing from the Union's funds, she has lost the case, which led to her unfair dismissal from her position as the president of the Union. She was publically accused for dishonesty and socially disreputed. After the 1930s she was not given the opportunity to publish any articles. In the next few years, Turkish Women's Union, deprived of its political power, was transformed into a charity organization. Şirin Tekeli shows that in 1934, during a period in which fascism rose in Germany and Italy before the Second World War, the Turkish government started to make institutional reforms for women's political rights in the authoritarian style of fascism. These new legal rights for Turkish women and the Turkish Civil Code were portrayed as evidence of the extent to which Turkish people were civilized (modernized, secular, democratic).[29] By comparison, in most European countries women did not have political rights yet in 1934. While Turkish nationalists crushed the feminist movement, they publically announced that there were no longer women's problems, which women should unite to solve. Both the granting of women's rights and the adoption of the new Civil Code were offered as evidence that Turkey had achieved a clear break with Islam, traditionally conceived. In short, women's rights were not granted because women's demands were being recognized. They were part of the nationalistic agenda, which sought recognition of the new Turkish Republic from other nations.

This brief history reveals the authoritarian, male dominant political context in which feminism was forgotten after 1935 until the reappearance of a second wave in the 1980s. The gender politics of the secular Turkish republic did neither sympathize with Fatma Aliye nor with Emine Seniye. Nezihe Muhiddin's experience is exemplary and is the mark of the repression of feminism in the 1930s. She was only revived by the second wave of the Turkish feminist movement in the 1980s, as a pioneer.

In the last few decades, the Turkish feminist movement has greatly influenced the political opposition against conservatism. It has rejected the state's gendering of the female bodies as mothers, and the restitution of patriarchy in its Islamic allure. Against this feminist strategy, Islamists have invoked Fatma Aliye, as a female figure who struggles for empowering women without falling in

29 Tekeli (1982).

the trap of culturally alienating feminist politics. The sovereign Islamist discourse in Turkey has become more and more authoritarian, and adopted policies to promote traditional gender roles for men and women. In the last section of this paper, I argue that Fatma Aliye is not a figure that can be easily used to restitute these traditional patriarchal gender roles.

3 The controversy around the reception of Fatma Aliye

Let me now turn to the reception of Fatma Aliye in Turkey since the 1990s. Research in women's history acknowledges her as one of the pioneers in the early period of women's movement (1868–1908). Yaprak Zihnioğlu, in *Revolution Without Women*, makes the following remark about her, "If we could speak of the presence of an Ottoman feminism in the form of intellectual activity and activism, Fatma Aliye was the most important thinker of this movement. She is the first and most important personality for the publication of our history as women".[30] From the feminist standpoint, her leading public presence in *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, her intellectual activity as a writer and philosopher, and her public defense of 'womanhood' make her a significant figure of feminist studies. Feminist interpreters attend to her calls for women's relations of solidarity, her desire to empower women, and her political awareness that women should organize and act together to have a voice and be heard in the public sphere. In Fatma Aliye they see a reformer who urges women to go beyond the traditional gender roles that the society imposes on them, to become autonomous subjects and moral agents. Fatma Aliye is seen as a predecessor of Halide Edip (1884–1964) who is the second most influential woman public intellectual before and during the war of liberation against the imperialist forces. Serpil Çakır in *Ottoman Women's Movement*[31] does not say a lot about Fatma Aliye, but warns that Fatma Aliye should be interpreted and understood in her own social and political context.[32] In other words, if we evaluate her positions by using contemporary feminist values, she might look like a defender of traditional gender roles in Ottoman society. In contrast, Firdevs Canbaz[33] argues on the

30 Zihnioğlu (2003): 44–45.

31 Çakır (1993a).

32 However, she wrote the entry on Fatma Aliye in *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms*. Çakır (2006): 21–24.

33 Canbaz (2005) and Canbaz (2010).

basis of her interpretations of women's issues in Fatma Aliye's novels such as slavery, work and her debate about polygamy with Mahmut Esad Efendi[34] that she did not take feminist positions on these issues, and that feminist readings of Fatma Aliye are mistaken.

I believe her interpretation of female slavery and her position on male polygamy should be interpreted in the context of her rejection of Western orientalism. In *Nisvan-ı İslam*, which was reprinted as *Women in Ottoman Empire: Slavery, Polygamy, and Fashion*[35] Fatma Aliye aims at correcting the prejudices of Europeans about the lives of women in the Ottoman Empire. She is fighting orientalist ideas about female slavery by showing that it is a different practice than slavery in the West. In her account, slavery is not a race issue, slaves have better life conditions than in their own birth place, and they are not forced to be slaves; they are educated and treated as part of the family, and the boundary between a slave and a non-slave family member remains fluid because marriage with slaves is permitted. In arguing that poor girls desire to be *cariye* because they would have nice dresses, jewelery, and be accepted as part of the Ottoman family they are sold to, she talks about female slavery in idyllic and romantic terms as if this is not often a relation of coercion, servitude, oppression, and sexual exploitation. She explains to her readers that *cariyes* should be freed after nine years of servitude or be sold again to a new family, instead of supporting the abolishment of institutionalized female slavery, which was in fact officially abolished before Fatma Aliye's birth in 1847, although the practice had not ended. She believes that a cariye could consent to or refuse sexual relations with her master, by completely ignoring the power relations that could force her to agree to sexual instrumentalization. Clearly, she is sugarcoating female slavery in defense of Ottoman middle or upper class family culture.

When male polygamy is at stake, she defends it by pointing that Islam does not recommend it. She seems to find a reason for the religious practice of polygamy and argues that poor women support polygamy because the addition of a second or third woman to the household reduces the domestic responsibilities for them, so they labor less at home. And she finds the rich man's practice of polygamy too expensive, overwhelming, and overall, impracticable on the basis that Islam commands equality such that a man who marries more than one woman should treat them equally. Given how expensive it would be for a man to have four women living in four different equally well-furnished appartments, and asking for luxurious dresses and jewelleries etc., we should realize how arduous, if not impossible to put Islamic polygamy in practice. She

34 Fatma Aliye & Mahmut Esad Bin Emin Seydişehri (2007 [1899]).
35 Fatma Aliye (2005).

speaks as if all polygamous men would care for being good Muslims, and that all women who experience polygamy lead luxurious and emotionally satisfactory lives. Her account of polygamy makes the reader feel sorry for the polygamous male rather than the women reduced to his sexual property. In defense of Islam, she would not opt for the banning of polygamous marriage. Although she dislikes polygyny, and supports monogamous marriage, she does not prefer a secularist feminist strategy to make the case for the injustice of this traditional institution. She makes an indirect defense of the monogamous marriage, without criticizing religion that makes polygamy 'an exception'. She chooses to express her dislike solely by concentrating on the conditions that make the practice of polygamy possible. Her view is that in Islam, male polygamy is permissible without ever being a religious obligation. And instead of undertaking a moral and political analysis of the practice in terms of the power relations between the sexes, she views it from an economic standpoint, with the odd, sweeping conclusion that polygamy could be more practical for the lower classes while it becomes a burden for the upper classes.

Fatma Aliye argues that women's rights can be grounded on Islamic foundations and that Muslim women do not need to follow the example of the European feminists to liberate themselves from male domination. The contribution she makes to the struggle for women rights is best discussed in Şahika Karaca's essay 'Fatma Aliye Hanım's Contributions to Women Rights'. Karaca argues that as she focuses on women's issues such as women's education, marriage, polygamy, divorce, public visibility, work, and the place of women in Islam, Fatma Aliye has an Islamic and conservative mind set just like her father Ahmet Cevdet Pasha.[36] Hilal Demir agrees with the claim that, according to Fatma Aliye, women rights have Islamic foundations, though she contests Şahika Karaca and Firdevs Canbaz in re-naming her position as "Islamic feminism".[37]

Demir's interpretation could be supported by referring to Fatma Aliye's work on the renowned women of Islam.[38] There she makes the point that men have interpreted Islam, and reconstructed the history of religion in their own terms, making the important female figures in it almost invisible. In other words, she recognizes that patriarchy is older than Islam and that the divine revelation goes through the male consciousness before it reaches its historical believers. Because a patriarchal interpretation of Islam genders the faithful, they are divided into groups according to interpretation of sexual difference that subordinates women

36 Karaca (2011).

37 Demir (2013): 1061.

38 Fatma Aliye (2011 [1892]).

to men. She excavates the lives of the renowned women of Islam from the traditional interpretation of religion to show that in the golden age of Islam, men did not dominate women as they did in the subsequent periods of history. Firdevs Canbaz is the first to acknowledge that Fatma Aliye buys into the myth of Islam's golden age.[39,40] Indeed, the majority of the reformist Muslim intellectuals in the twentieth and twenty-first Centuries would continue to appeal to this myth in terms of which they made a future projection. The appeal to that fantasy staged a political performative, which has enabled them to judge the present practice (whatever that is) as not truly Islamic. Nonetheless, given that there is no certification for the originality of the original, what is proposed as the old could just be a new construction. The main idea that the truth of Islam should be found at its origin, which needs to be re-awakened and repeated, is used by both Islamic feminists who want to reconcile religion and freedom, and radical Islamists who deny public space to women. Indeed, Fatma Aliye's discouse has overtones that invokes a well-known Islamic feminist position: In comparison with the practices of sexual oppression in the pre-Islamic Arabic pagan world, Islam has historically emerged as bringing with it some progress in women's rights. Nonetheless, as soon as the golden age of Islam has elapsed, patriarchy overshadowed that progress and distorted the right way of live that the revelation had recommended.

Fatma Aliye is not only reclaimed and appropriated by feminists but also Islamists. The latter have argued that her attachment to religion and relations with the ancient political regime resulted in her being disfavoured by the new Republic regime. Because she dissented with the revolutionary procedures of the new regime, she was discredited, blacklisted and forced to undergo a civil death as an intellectual. According to Fatma Barbarosoğlu's interpretation in *Fatma Aliye: Uzak Ülke* (Fatma Aliye: Distant Country),[41] Fatma Aliye confined herself to private life because she was not given the freedom to express her dissent with the Kemalist understanding of modernity. Her country now seemingly distant to her, she was ostracized as a saddened on-looker and not part of the new Republic, because she was forced to give up her identity as an Ottoman woman, in order to assume a Western woman's gender identity. Her resentment could not be overcomed, so she did not seek any opportunities to reconcile herself with the new regime. In Barbarosoğlu's reading, Fatma Aliye is not an

39 Canbaz (2005) and Canbaz (2010).

40 Göle addressed the question of modernity in the emerging new Muslim class in Turkey. See., Göle, Nilüfer (1996): The Forbidden Modern: Civilisation and Veiling. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press and Göle, Nilüfer (2001): Modern Mahrem. Istanbul: Metis Yayınları. She refers the designation 'myth' to Nilüfer Göle (2001).

41 Barbarosoğlu (2010).

Islamic feminist but the female ancestor of the Muslim resentment against Kemalist modernity, which is seen as imposing laicism, in the French style, which did not permit religious representation in the social and political sphere. Even though the State evidently controlled religion, it would be wrong to believe it capable of leaving behind national promotion and the empowering of the Sunnite and Turkish identity, as this is clear from the elimination of non-muslim Greek and Armenian populations and pressure over the Kurdish population.

It is remarkable that now in the twenty-first Century, the Turkish government under the rule of Justice and Development Party has acknowledged Fatma Aliye as a woman intellectual. Her picture is imprinted on the 50 Turkish Lira banknote. This official recognition is possibly due to the perception of her identifying with Ottoman values rather than Western values. This was seen as a controversial choice because all Turkish Lira bills had Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's portrait on their front side. Given that Islamists see him as the proponent of Westernized modernity, it is significant to have Fatma Aliye's image on the reverse side, because she was an Ottoman woman intellectual whom the Islamists recognize as critical of modernity as westernization in Turkey. And, in Barbarosoğlu's fiction, even a silent dissident.

The decision to have her image on the 50 TL bill triggered public debate. The depiction of Fatma Aliye as a suppressed adversary, who disagreed with abolishing the monarchy, the caliphate, the change of alphabet from Arabic letters to Latin letters, and the adoption of western style of dress made her a cultural symbol of Islamic resentment. This resentment shows that the ruling class and the cultural elite have adopted a new identity, and their modernism has not only rejected traditional Islam but also Ottoman modernity. The political representation of this resentment is the mourning of persecution, a cry out for the cultural renounciation to the past, which complains for the loss of the self, of the proper, and along with it, of a future for the proper. Thus Fatma Barbarosoğlu located Fatma Aliye in political Islam's historical resentment of Kemalist modernity. In my view this cultural mourning for *depropriation* is the mark of Turkish political Islamism. The compensation for the loss of cultural and religious identity, due to the revolutionary violence of Turkish modernity, turns into the desire of reviving the Ottoman identity. Indeed, this is the political fantasy of the ruling party in Turkey. However, there is room for the suspicion that this fantasy of 'revival' seeks justification for new political phenomena in its appeal to old cultural signs and symbols.

I think the reception of Fatma Aliye not as a feminist but as an Islamist might have more to do with the history of the Islamic reaction to Kemalism than Fatma Aliye's own experience. Fatma Aliye's feminism was progressive for her own day because she wanted women to be part of the public life, however, as Ferida Acar's essay "Women in the Ideology of Islamic Revivalism in Turkey:

Three Islamic Women's Journals" makes clear the contemporary Islamist ideology supports a view of women as home makers, wives, and mothers. Equality, freedom, and happiness are addressed within the boundaries of the home, "never as aspects of their position or relationships as individuals in society".[42] Ayşe Saktanber argues that Islamic revivalism see women as the ultimate keepers of Islam in their role as the organizers of the inner spaces of life, which should be carefully protected against any dangers from the outside, i. e., non-Islamic world (Western intrusion). This is a decisive feature of "the gender identity of women in Islamic revivalism".[43]

As a public, modern, woman intellectual, Fatma Aliye defended Ottoman culture against its debasement by the orientalism, nationalism, and secularism of her own day. Nonetheless, given that class and education shapes the way religion is experienced by women, her description of the life as lived in Ottoman households could be more about the Ottoman elite's reinvention of modernity with new religious boundaries. Arguably, Fatma Aliye's redemption by the contemporary political regime is not an accident, and has everything to do with her being represented as a critique of secularism. Given the new Ottomanism, modern Islamism, she is put forward as an anti-feminist forerunner of the future Turkish woman, which the ruling Justice and Development Party restitution of Islamic patriarchy would like to impose on women in Turkey today. Conversely, Kemalists have resented her appropriation by the Islamists as a critique of the new secular society created by the modernist reforms. As an intellectual woman who translated and wrote, and had a progressive position on women's rights, how could she fail to appreciate the value of the Kemalist revolutions? They hated the fact that she is used to represent the Islamist political aspirations to challenge and ultimately undermine the modernist secularist revolutions, serving symbolically to the political goal of bringing back the traditional Ottoman monarchy, and the caliphate. Recognition of Fatma Aliye's by the State has set her as an example, made her an ideal of an educated women with Muslim identity. She wore religious tassattur, which the Justice and Development Party does not impose on all women, yet celebrates and promotes. That she could be used to reinforce the gender role of an educated mother and wife remains controversial. Although the State's policies to regender Turkish

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42 Acar (1991): 286. In "Women and Islam in Turkey" Acar argues that the highly controversial issues such as the status of women under Islamic rule, rules and practices of Islam as polygamy, a husband's right to physically punish his wife, and two women's testimony being considered as equal to one man in a court of law, rarely appeared in the Islamist women's magasines. Acar (1994): 53.

43 Saktanber (2002): 33.

women as the wives and mothers of the faithful cast her to that role, feminist historians rightly reject that she could be read in this way.

Undoubtedly, Fatma Aliye had an unmistabale religious identification. Nonetheless, whether or not she is Islamist remains as debatable as her feminism. There is a great difference between her Ottoman Muslim Modernity in search of the the foundations of women's rights with a fresh interpretation of Islam and the traditional essentialist masculinist interpretations of gender in Islam that subordinate women to men. Fatma Aliye does not think that sexual difference is a result of creation, and could justify the attribution to women of the roles of wifehood and motherhood as primary roles. Women can be wives and mothers if they find a way to a good marriage; however their natural differences cannot confine them to this moral and political role. This is supported by the fact that, in her novels, there are also unmarried women characters, which try to stand on their own feet. The official view of Fatma Aliye as defending the role of religious, educated mothers and wives is to my mind indefensible. And one should ask whether Fatma Aliye, in this representation, could really be a model in gendering the future generations of Muslim women. Today women in Turkey do not think that the purpose of education is to make better wives and mothers. They want a professional life and economical independence. Even women who identify religiously do not go to university just to become educated mothers. Nonetheless, the conservatist, religious male discourses still support women's education for this same reason. The theological argument is that God created women to be mothers and wives; they have a nature of their own, and their primary responsibility is to give birth and raise children. In Turkish media, religious male opinion leaders keep repeating the stereotyped argument that children and husbands would be neglected, and the family as a whole would be unhappy if women work. Feminists fight this essentialist theological account of sexual difference. Evidently, what could be thought as a progressive move 150 years ago when women were excluded from education all together, is now working against women, for it really implies a step back in so far as it comes as an attack against women's employment. Instead of being prepared to share domestic responsibilities, men pretend as if they belong to women, by nature. The invocation of Fatma Aliye for the present Islamic political agenda of educating women just for a 'happy marriage' is obviously an anachronism. She considered education as a way of improving women's conditions. The Islamist ideologists of our own day, on the other hand, use this argument to create prejudices against working women and to socially reduce equal opportunity of employment. Overall, they want to reinstitute patriarchy in the old style of social norms. I think that girls who live in this political atmosphere are very much aware that education and a professional life that brings economical self-sufficiency helps escaping from the male violence that they might encounter in their lives.

Karaca rightly argues that Fatma Aliye fears a modernization that would be an imitation of the Western life style, for that would be the loss of the proper, i. e., one's own religious and cultural identity. Indeed, this horror of losing what is proper, permit me to call it 'depropriation', has been a constant worry for the Islamist intellectuals all through the twentieth Century. It becomes an essential leitmotif in all discussions on feminism. Feminism is seen as an 'alien intervention' – a monstrosity that degenerates the proper, an instrument of hybridization, a contamination by the external other, a mark of the invasion westoxifying Other. Even though she is for the improvement of women's rights, Fatma Aliye rejects the notion that this task should be achieved by importing feminist political struggles from elsewhere. Her defensive attitude against employing strategies of liberation from elsewhere implies the psychological trouble at the heart of gender debates throughout the history of modernity in Turkey – the horror of admitting that what was so far considered to be proper was in fact improper, in the sense of unfair, unjust, unjustifiable, ethically wrong. And that to claim Ottoman cultural primacy independently of the justice and the injustice of the historical practices can be as problematic as desiring to become the Other.

4 Conclusion

Feminists who uncovered the history of intellectual and activist women in the late Ottoman early modern period, have recognized Fatma Aliye as one of the figures repressed by the Kemalist revolution. However, they have argued that nationalism crushed feminism with which it was first allied. Feminist critics of the Kemalist revolutions have completely different ends. Thus feminists are both critical of her condemnation by Kemalists and her reception as an Islamist, forgetting that she was an intellectual of her own time with her own progressive political agenda. They stress that the Kemalist revolution granted rights to women while it also suppressed criticism and divergence; thus it led to the annihilation of feminist political activisim. Fatma Aliye is important for feminists, because at a time in which women were not allowed to engage themselves with literature, science, philosophy, and politics, she did make them present in the public realm as she dared to plunge herself in such activities. This makes her a revolutionary from a feminist point of view.

However, Fatma Aliye also adopted a religious identity, wrote as a Muslim woman, was critical of modernity understood as westernization, fought the orientalism of the Europeans, and worked to improve the position of women

in Islam. Her reformism seems closer to that of the Young Ottomans. She argued that there are women rights in Islam even though male dominant interpretations of the religious sources and the traditional practice of religion have not acknowledged and reinforced them. According to her, Islam did not allow men to marry more than one woman in all conditions. For a woman to know her husband before marriage is not against Islam. She argued that Islam accords with the moral and political equality between men and women. She rejected polygamy and sexual slavery as forms of exploitation, even though her defence of the Ottoman and Islamic culture has made her give an insufficient response to these phenomena from a feminist standpoint. Given the authoritarian and patriarchal atmosphere of the nation-building era, in its redesigning and gendering of women as symbols of national identity, a lot of women have lost their own voices. Writing the history of feminist movement is almost always an excavation, an archealogy of the forgotten figures. I tried to explain that Fatma Aliye is rediscovered in the 1990s and has been at the center of political and ideological appropriation. It is my contention that Fatma Aliye's recovery by the contemporary Islamists in Turkey who attempt to re-institute the classical gender roles of motherhood and wifehood in an anti-occidentalist, anti-Kemalist Islamic strand fails to be convincing as a successful performative.

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