Ottoman Feminism and Republican Reform:
Fatma Aliye’s *Nisvân-i İslâm*

THESIS

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Abstract

This thesis provides a critical reading of Fatma Aliye’s 1891 monograph Nisvân-ı İslâm against the backdrop of Hamidian society. Despite Fatma Aliye’s prominence in the late Ottoman period, and the fact that Nisvân-ı İslâm was quickly translated into French and Arabic in the 1890s, the text has remained largely unexamined, with limited scholarship devoted to the work in Turkish and even less in English. In Nisvân-ı İslâm, Fatma Aliye questioned social practices and enlarged the scope of what was possible for women within an Islamic framework. Through her writings, Fatma Aliye influenced public discourse and helped shift the definition of women in public space during her lifetime. Her pioneering efforts in opening up the privately-informed public sphere provided intellectual grist for the Republic’s efforts to improve the role of women in Turkish society.

Fatma Aliye’s legacy, however, has not been commensurate with her contributions to Turkish society. As Aliye was associated closely with the Ottoman Empire, she has suffered an ignominious fate in Turkish history. Her influence on Turkish society has been, at best, unrecognized and, at worst, denigrated. A careful reading of Nisvân-ı İslâm, however, reveals greater congruence between her feminist aims and those espoused by the Republic’s founders than her critics acknowledge. The evidence strongly suggests that Fatma Aliye’s occluded legacy needs to be reevaluated.
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Vita

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Centrist Paternalism

In his biography of the founder of the Republic, Andrew Mango writes, “Atatürk who encouraged the process from the start, deserves his fame as the hero of women’s emancipation in Turkey, even though social change was, inevitably, gradual and limited.”¹ The image of Atatürk as the sole emancipator of women is an important element in the cult of personality that surrounds him. His reforms are seen as unleashing women from the conservative fetters of the Ottoman Empire. This traditional centrist and paternalistic lens has framed the debate on the role of women and the Turkish Republic. The prevalent view in the historiography of the Republic holds that the reforms affecting women were implemented from the center without broad societal support. These reforms are said to be artificial, not organic. As Deniz Kandiyoti notes, it is commonly held that women’s rights were not “obtained through the activities of women’s movements, as in the case of Western women’s struggle for suffrage, but were granted by an enlightened governing elite committed to the goals of modernization and ‘Westernization.’”²

To be sure, the Turkish Republic realized important reforms for women. The nascent state issued a law on the unification of national education in 1924, which made primary education free and compulsory for all children. The state additionally permitted women to enter the army, instituted the principle of equal pay for equal work, and established mandatory adult literacy classes for illiterate men and women.\(^3\) The Turkish Civil Code in 1926, adopted from a Swiss precedent, has been heralded as the watershed moment of women’s emancipation. Recent scholarship from Ruth Miller and Yeşim Arat, however, has challenged the Code by illuminating its Islamic and conservative, even regressive, aspects. The Civil Code reified patriarchal hierarchies in the family and continued to evince certain tenets of Islamic law. Nevertheless, the Civil Code articulated a handful of equalizing measures for women, such as abolishing polygyny and unilateral divorce.

The architects of the Turkish Republic embedded Western values in their modernization project, and Atatürk in particular looked to the West as the epitome of progress and modernity. Turkey’s adoption of the Swiss Civil Code is emblematic of the nascent state’s Western proclivities. The Republic, however, was at times ahead of its exemplars. While women’s suffrage was finally achieved in Switzerland in 1971, Turkey granted women the right to vote and be elected in municipal elections and national elections in 1930 and 1934, respectively.\(^4\)

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Irrespective of the consequences of reform, both intended and unintended, the traditional view regarding the genesis of reforms affecting the status of women has credited elite males, principally Atatürk, as their creator. According to this perspective the model needed to explain the formulation of reform efforts was simple and straightforward; one single explanatory variable was needed. Atatürk constituted that critical factor.

**Decentralized Autonomy**

The 1980s ushered in a new wave of feminist scholarship in tandem with a burgeoning feminist movement in Turkey. This literature criticized the received wisdom of Atatürk as the emancipator of Turkish women. The dominant share of these works critiqued the corporatist state feminism of the Republic and reevaluated its impact on women. Deniz Kandiyoti declared that Turkish women were “emancipated but not liberated,” and this description was reflected and corroborated in other works. Conversely, a few studies appeared that sought to answer how women impacted the reforms instead of how the reforms impacted women. Rather than attributing the reforms to the architects of the

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6 A burgeoning literature exists that uses the press to magnify the way women gained a public voice. While the study of print culture is helpful in amplifying women’s voices muted over history, there is no book on the Ottoman press currently published in English. Beth Baron’s *The Women’s Awakening* paints a lucid portrait of the Egyptian women’s press but no English language counterpart exists for the Istanbul scene. Serpıl Çakır’s *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* is the most comprehensive work on the Istanbul women’s press and the women’s organizations that grew out of it. Aynur Demirdirek’s *Osmanlı Kadınlarının Hayat Hakları Arayışının Bir Hikayesi*
Republic and to Atatürk, these works positioned women as important actors in the theater of reform. By employing an additional lens of decentralized autonomy, these works have been able to rescue women from the margins of history and reveal the ways in which women seized the initiative in the late Ottoman period.

This thesis employs this additional lens to augment our understanding of women’s participation in the establishment of their rights. It explores the historical antecedents of women’s liberation that reside outside the domain of Atatürk. Using the prism of print culture, this paper demonstrates that women actively participated in the reformist debates from fin de siècle Ottoman society until the Republican era. This thesis does not attempt to draw a definitive causal link between female actors in the late empire and the enactment of Republican reforms, as articulated in the Turkish Civil Code of 1926. Instead, it aims to examine how women added to the public discourse and altered the traditional conception of public space to create conditions conducive for the rhetoric of the reforms. The 1926 Code, reflective of the Republic’s “authoritative allocation of values,” presents a particularly good vehicle to assess which of the many competing and, often conflicting, values prevailed in the new state. Principles similar to those promulgated by Fatma Aliye in Nisvân-ı İslâm are woven unmistakably into the fabric of the Code. While the lengthy gestation period between the publication of her principles...
and their appearance as law makes it difficult to prove the existence of a direct causal relationship, at a minimum one must appreciate how prescient her thoughts were. Thus it can be argued that Fatma Aliye’s pioneering efforts yielded dividends in a variety of ways. Through her very visible public presence she imbued women with the credo that they could engage in claim-making for themselves, rather than waiting in vain for men to advance women’s rights. She was instrumental in constructing the foundation upon which subsequent Ottoman and Turkish women could adopt public roles to frame the debate for an enlargement of their role in society. Additionally, the principles Aliye articulated many years before the advent of the Republic would be reflected in one of the most visible pieces of reform enacted by the nascent state.

Fatma Aliye

The thesis specifically focuses on Fatma Aliye, a prolific writer, who used her work to question social practices and to reconstruct a woman’s role within an Islamic framework. In particular, this essay provides a critical reading of Fatma Aliye’s monograph Nisvân-ı İslâm, a previously unexamined work in the West, against the backdrop of the changing Ottoman society of the 1890s. With Nisvân-ı İslâm and the rest of her oeuvre, Fatma Aliye created a public persona that participated in the social engineering of the period. As a result, she laid down an epistemological authority for women to engage in the public dialogue of the era. Her works provided the scaffolding for women’s authority to speak in public. Through her writings, Fatma Aliye influenced public discourse and helped shift

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8 At present, the most detailed work concerning Nisvân-ı İslâm is Mübeccel Kızıltan’s Fatma Aliye Hanım: Yaşamı-Sanatı-Yapıtları ve Nisvân-ı İslâm (İstanbul: Mutlu Yayıncılık, 1993).
the definition of public space during her lifetime. Her legacy, however, has not been commensurate with her contributions. Her rhetoric, closely identified with the empire, has been interpreted by some as being antithetical to the goals of the Republic. A careful reading of Nisvân-ı İslâm, however, reveals greater congruence between her feminist aims and those espoused by the Republic’s founders than her critics acknowledge. The evidence strongly suggests that Fatma Aliye’s occluded legacy needs to be reconsidered.

The Press and the Reconfigured Public Sphere

The thesis, as previously stated, probes Ottoman women’s history with the lens of print culture by focusing on a reading of Nisvân-ı İslâm. The emerging press in the latter half of the nineteenth century provides an aperture on the activities of Ottoman women. The press played an important role in the debates of the modernizing society. In his work on nationalism and print culture, Benedict Anderson writes that print capitalism precipitated the search for a new way of joining fraternity, authority, and time meaningfully together. He argues that print capitalism “made it possible for a rapidly growing number of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.”

As a result, in the Ottoman case the press provided a forum in which diverse actors could participate. In particular, it gave women ingress into a public arena where they could discursively interact with others. Women were able to navigate this new sphere of

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activity while the press accorded them a veil of sorts. They established a public analogue without jeopardizing their rectitude.

**A Privately-Informed Public Sphere**

Jürgen Habermas’ public sphere theory is instructive for the examination of the role of the press and women. In his paradigm, Habermas proposes that the European bourgeois sphere asserted a public presence in two forums, a political and literary public sphere. For Habermas, literary activity crafted a public sphere in the world of letters (*literarische Öffentlichkeit*). He argues, “The public sphere in the political realm evolved from the public sphere in the world of letters; through the vehicle of public opinion it put the state in touch with the needs of society.”[^10] Habermas theorizes the public sphere as an abstraction of space that provides a forum for claim-making and debate. The circulation of texts in turn helped to construct a public consciousness.

Although Habermas’ theory is instructive in understanding how texts can create new avenues for debate, it is a paradigm that is peculiar to a Western context and to a class-specific mode. Myriad feminist critiques have arisen addressing the exclusivity of Habermas’ theory. Feminist scholars such as Nancy Fraser have proposed a theory positing that women and other actors outside of bourgeois society mobilized their own constituencies and constructed counter public spheres.[^11]


A strict application of Habermas’ conception of the public sphere does not resonate in an Ottoman context. Leslie Peirce’s pioneering study on elite women of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries shows that such polarized spheres did not exist then. As a result, she complicates the “modern (post-seventeenth century) Western notions of a public/private dichotomy, in which the family is seen as occupying private, nonpolitical space.”

Boundaries were more porous in the Ottoman context than the bourgeois European culture Habermas references. Elements of the private could be spatially embedded in the public sphere and vice versa. According to Peirce, what constituted “private” to the early modern Ottoman man or woman is more challenging than the simple public/plural dualism.

The advent of print culture in the nineteenth century further served to collapse the boundaries between public and private. Female writers and others who discussed the family further sought to blur the lines between public and private domains. Fatma Aliye, for example, introduced elements of the private sphere into the public discourse. As a result, it is problematic to claim that Fatma Aliye and writers of her ilk operated solely in either the public or private sphere. The private and public in the Ottoman context can be viewed as concentric circles, in which some elements resided primarily in the domestic stratum while other elements were endemic to public society. However, there was an overlap between these circles of activity, and it was in this realm that Fatma Aliye operated. Elif Akşit classifies this overlap as the interstices between the public and private spheres. She argues, “Aliye’s writings pose interlinks between the public and

13 Ibid., 7.
private spheres and challenge the association of the family with the private sphere and religion with the public sphere.”¹⁴ Hülya Yıldız additionally asserts that writers operated in ‘the intimate sphere,’ which, she claims, “was a site for the mutual construction of the private and the public.”¹⁵ Like Akṣit and Yıldız, this essay argues that Fatma Aliye and others who discussed issues of the family and women operated in a sphere of activity that externalized elements of private experience, a privately-informed public sphere.

At first, many female writers did not sign their works, as women’s names were not to be mentioned in public. To wit, Fatma Aliye signed her 1889 translation of Georges Ohnet’s novel Volonté “Bir Kadin,” a woman. Beth Baron shows that the female Egyptian writers likewise at first revealed their gender in their works but did not disclose their names. Baron argues that “cloaked in anonymity—faceless and nameless—the writers continued to deny their public existence.”¹⁶ Although these female writers in both Istanbul and Egypt did not create an individual public existence, they laid an important first step in women’s participation in the privately-informed public sphere, which was a contested site in Hamidian society. For instance, by signing her translation “a woman,” Fatma Aliye contravened the pervasive impression that a woman was not intellectually capable of producing such a work. By showing Ottoman society that women had the acumen to engage in literary activities, she gave women a claim to speak to a wider public.

¹⁵ Hülya Yıldız, "Literature as Public Sphere: Gender and Sexuality in Ottoman Turkish Novels and Journals," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2008, 26.
Organization

The study is organized as follows. Chapter 2 examines the establishment and development of feminist discourse and activism in the Ottoman state. It stipulates that educational reforms were necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for the rise of the press and its attendant alteration of public discourse and public space. It provides an examination of the critical interplay between feminism and nationalism in the formation of the Turkish Republic. Chapter 3 provides a brief biographical sketch of Fatma Aliye, a writer often maligned as a symbol of the old guard and enemy of the Republic, who participated in fashioning the new Turkish woman that would become manifest in the Republican reforms. It highlights the themes presented in her 1891 work *Nisvân-ı İslâm* that were salient to the public discourse of the time. It concludes with an examination of Fatma Aliye’s contested legacy. Chapter 4 identifies the Ottoman-Islamic values embedded in the Republican reforms. It provides an analysis of the ways in which Fatma Aliye helped to create a vocabulary that the Republican elite could draw upon to construct the nation.

The thesis clarifies the role Fatma Aliye played in advancing feminist discourse in the late Ottoman period, as well as prefiguring themes that were to become critical to the public discourse in the formation of the Republic. It demonstrates how she helped lay the foundation for female voices to play a role in the decentralized, autonomous movement for women’s rights. Advocates of women’s rights owe an intellectual debt, one largely unacknowledged, to Fatma Aliye.
CHAPTER 2

The Press, Feminist Discourse, and Nationalism

This chapter provides a snapshot of the position of women in the pre-Republican era in order to demonstrate that decentralized autonomous voices of reform existed prior to the advent of the Republic and its centralized paternalistic responses. It reflects first on the reasons for the omission of women from the narrative of the Republic, then on the mechanisms scholars have used to coax out Ottoman feminist discourse from the margins of history.

The chapter proceeds with a broad historical view of education improvements, primarily for women, in the late Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman population could read the new press because access to education had been increasing for both sexes. It is fair to say that female voices would never have flourished if educational advancements had not tilled the soil. This section shows that despite the sporadic and poorly implemented educational reforms for women, the emerging educational climate of the empire created the conditions for a successful press to arise.

The chapter continues by sketching the contours of the press and its main themes concerning women. This thesis cannot hope to present the totality of Ottoman women’s journals, which were more than forty in number. It presents several journals for consideration that were influential and embody the dominant discourses of the time.
Finally, the chapter closes with a discussion of the interrelationship between feminism and nationalism and concluding remarks.

**Pre-Republican Women’s Voices: Lost and Found**

Since the 1980s scholars have sought to amplify women’s muted voices in Ottoman history. Although a growing body of works examines the position of women at the advent of the Turkish Republic, there remains a paucity of literature treating women’s activism in the pre-Republican era. There are several factors behind this silence. First, the Turkish Republic attempted to eschew any cultural, political, legal, and societal inheritance it owed to the empire. In fact, during “the later 1920s and particularly the 1930s, the ‘official line’ proclaimed that the Ottoman Empire should not be regarded as a legitimate predecessor of the newly founded Republic.” As a result, a false chasm between the Ottoman Empire and Turkey has arisen in Republican historiography. The artificial divide between the two has discouraged some from searching for historical antecedents in the former that could help explain initiatives in the latter. The lack of acknowledgment in some circles that the Republic was indebted to the empire renders explanations of the Republic’s policies incomplete at best. This historical amnesia is falling out of favor with myriad historians now amplifying connections between the Ottomans and the Republic.

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The collapse of this artificial divide is an important first step in understanding how the responses to the onset of modernity in the Ottoman period helped to shape the Republican reforms. Women participated in the public discourse of the Ottoman period. As Serpil Çakır states, a “feminist consciousness” arose as women “fought for social ideas and identities.” However, the term “feminism” is objectionable to some, as feminism has often been framed as a Western construct. White, middle-class women primarily helmed the feminism movement in the West, and they fought for women’s rights by engaging in mostly heteronormative praxis while ignoring class and racial concerns. Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar note that this type of feminism “sought to establish itself as the only legitimate feminism” in political practice.

Black and lesbian feminists in the 1970s and 1980s began to challenge the narrowly defined aims of the bourgeois white feminist movement. Post-colonial and “Third World” feminists additionally challenged Western feminist scholarship and critiqued its implicit Orientalist and imperialist characteristics. Chandra Mohanty demonstrates that Western feminist discourse presents “Third World women” as “a homogenous, ‘powerless’ group often located as implicit victims of particular...

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socioeconomic systems." Critiques of Western feminism from these authors are invaluable aids in understanding the many shades of female activism in non-Western environments. By shifting away from the entrenched paradigm of Western feminism, we can better understand how women in a non-Western context initiated their own struggles to articulate their aims.

Ottoman feminist activism was not a derivative of Western ideology. The feminist discourse in the Ottoman Empire was comprised of myriad clashing, overlapping, constructive, and critical voices. The Ottoman women’s press provided a platform for women and men alike to redefine women’s position in society. According to Aynur Demirdirek, some of these journals, “reflecting the effect of the Westernized lifestyle, focused on topics that were assumed to be of interest to women (such as child care, family and society, housework, and health) while others articulated a more political agenda that aimed at injecting women’s rights and demands into the public discourse.”

Some journals were explicitly feminist; others were not. Feminism is a polysemic term that provoked debate in the Ottoman era and continues to do so in the present day. bell hooks laments that “a central problem within feminist discourse has been our inability to either arrive at a consensus of opinion about what feminism is or accept a definition.” This thesis uses the language of Miriam Cooke in her work on Islamic feminism to define feminism in the Ottoman context. Cooke writes, “Feminism is much more than an ideology driving organized political movements. It is, above all, an

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epistemology. It is an attitude, a frame of mind that highlights the role of gender in understanding the organization of society.” Cooke also notes that feminism permits a woman or a group of women “to remain positively focused on constructing new systems without ever having said no to the old system.”

Cooke’s definition illuminates the Ottoman case very well. While radical voices simmered beneath the surface, many feminists demanded changes within the parameters of a conservative and patriarchal society. Fatma Aliye is an exemplar of how women demanded change within the confines of this society. She articulated a variant of feminism that embraced expanded new roles for women without rejecting the old system.

The Ottoman press provided a space for the “woman question” to be debated. As a result, it has provided scholars with the opportunity to uncover female participation in the public discourse in the late Ottoman Empire. Although a growing number of studies accord differing degrees of agency to Ottoman women, there remains debate concerning the time in which this feminist discourse and activism arose. Scholars including Serpil Çakır and Emel Sönmez argue that women began to agitate for roles outside their traditional domestic confines during the Second Constitutional Period (1908–1918).

Elizabeth Frierson, however, locates the first stirrings of feminist activism in fin de siècle Ottoman society. Frierson notes that in the 1890s “reading and writing were suddenly enough, that money and power were not base requirements for a woman to participate in

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public debates.”

In her view, the Hamidian era served as a training ground for the Young Turk period.

Increasing access to education during the Tanzimat and Hamidian periods created a small, but growing, populace who could read and write. Equipped with literacy, women used print culture to fashion a new spatial enclave in the public arena. Literacy galvanized women to contribute to periodicals and created a female consumer base. Although figures remain nebulous, an estimated one percent of Ottomans were literate in 1800. By 1900 the literacy rate had grown to between five and ten percent. While this growth in literacy created a sufficient literate public to create a demand for print materials, Ottoman literacy is low when compared to European countries of the time. In England, male literacy grew from sixty-nine percent in 1850 to ninety-seven percent in 1900. The female rate surged from one-third in 1850 to ninety-seven percent by 1900. In France, male literacy grew from sixty-eight percent to ninety-six percent, and female literacy rose from fifty-three percent to ninety-four percent.

Ottoman literacy is also low when compared to non-European countries. Average literacy rates in Latin America circa 1900 ranged from fourteen percent in Guatemala to fifty percent in Uruguay. The Chinese rate was fifteen to twenty-five percent and the

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Japanese rate was twenty-five to forty percent as early as 1800, and both countries witnessed increasing literacy throughout the nineteenth century. Rates were low in Egypt, however, with the 1897 census indicating that eight percent of Egyptian men and 0.2 percent of Egyptian women were literate. Over the next ten years female literacy rose fifty percent in comparison to the six percent increase in male literacy.  

**Education**

Although waqf-endowed schools specifically for girls, providing instruction in religion, embroidery, and needlework, were constructed in large cities throughout the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century, female access to education remained limited. Selim III (r. 1789-1807) instituted a series of reforms that aimed at increasing the strength of the central state organization. His reform campaign, however, saw no major improvements in education. Selim III attempted reform in the military institutions, which led to his deposition by the Janissary corps. Mahmut II (r. 1808-1839), “the second great figure of the Ottoman transformation,” continued where the reformist sultan Selim III had left off. He exercised a concerted effort to reform the educational system. Although most of his reforms were not realized, the sultan successfully altered the system to a modest degree. Mahmut II established special intermediate schools (rüşdiye) for graduates of mekteps, the traditional primary schools where children studied Islamic subjects, like

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32 Findley, *Ottoman Civil Officidalom*, 52.
33 Baron, *The Women’s Awakening in Egypt*, 80-81.
Qur’ânic recitation. The rüşdiye schools were secular and acted as bridges between the mektep schools and technical and professional schools.\textsuperscript{36} Mahmut II’s educational program did not embrace women, however, and many of the new institutions proved inadequate for male pupils. Nevertheless, his reign saw the first hints of education reform.

The Tanzimat (reorganization) period (1839-1876) unleashed reforms in military, bureaucratic, administrative, educational, and financial institutions. The era commenced with the pronouncement of the Hatt-i Şerif-i Gülhane (Imperial Edict of Gülhane). The driving force of the reform movement was the self-preservation of the empire, and the Tanzimat statesmen cited education as an important factor in Ottoman revitalization. The Tanzimat reforms produced sustained changes in the educational order that had been attempted in previous regimes. Although education reform for women was limited in scope, the Tanzimat created a modicum of opportunities for female students. To wit, the Tanzimat statesmen established a girls’ rüşdiye school in 1858. The institution offered a rudimentary religious education for girls with the aim of creating good Muslim wives and mothers. Due to the lack of trained female teachers, the teaching staff consisted entirely of men.\textsuperscript{37}

The final years of the Tanzimat presented more educational opportunities. The first lycée (sultanî) schools were established in 1868, and the following year saw the beginnings of major legislation on education. The Public Education Law (Maarif-i Ummiye Nizamnamesi) of 1869 demanded compulsory education for girls between the

\textsuperscript{36} Zürcher, Turkey: A Modern History, 62.
\textsuperscript{37} Selçuk Akşin Somel, The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire, 1839-1908 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 47.
ages of six and eleven, stipulated that only women should teach at girls’ schools, and laid the groundwork of the Female Teachers’ Training College (Darülmuallimat). The Darülmuallimat opened in 1870 with two teachers and fifty students. The curriculum was wide in scope, including theology, Ottoman grammar, foreign languages, teaching methods, history, science, ethics, and domestic issues. The duration of education was two years, and by 1873 graduates of the college took up their profession in the girls’ rüşdiye schools.

In *Imperial Classroom*, Benjamin Fortna argues that the Tanzimat period only produced superficial reforms in the field of education. Although he traces the blueprints of reform to the Tanzimat, he reckons that the most effective education reforms were those undertaken by Abdülhamid II (r. 1876-1909). Fortna depicts the Hamidian educational developments as defensive measures against a host of threats, in particular the loss of territory in the 1877 war with Russia. He argues that Abdülhamid II saw education reform as a method to achieve parity with the Europeans and fortify a fast-attenuating bond of solidarity among the peoples of the empire.

Under Abdülhamid II the scope of Ottoman education significantly expanded. The number of rüşdiye schools grew from 277 in 1879 to 619 in 1908, seventy-four of which were for girls. There was an additional increase in idadi (preparatory) schools,

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38 Frierson, “Unimagined Communities”, 100, 104.
39 Yücel Gelişli, “The Development of Teacher Training in the Ottoman Empire from 1848 to 1918,” *South-East Europe Review* 3 (2005), 142.
40 Somel, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire*, 57.
41 Benjamin Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 47.
from six in 1876 to 109 in 1908.\textsuperscript{42} Over one-third of school-age girls were attending elementary school (\textit{ibtidai}) by 1895, but their formal education rarely continued after this preliminary level.\textsuperscript{43}

The educational expansion weighed heavily on state coffers, and the government sought novel ways to finance the new institutions. Under the initiative of Grand Vizier Mehmed Said Paşa, the state introduced the Educational Contribution Tax (Maarif Hissesi İlanesi) in 1883, which was used to pay for the construction of new public schools.\textsuperscript{44}

The education explosion under Abdülhamid II produced a new generation of doctors, bureaucrats, and writers. This new Ottoman intelligentsia chafed under the authoritarian rule of Abdülhamid II. Some opponents of the regime convened the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in Paris and came to be known as the Young Turks. Inside the empire, as well as outside, the Young Turks successfully mobilized a growing base of disillusioned civil and military elites, and in 1908 they staged a revolution that would ultimately see Abdülhamid II deposed and the constitution reinstated. Because of the latter development, the period of Young Turk rule is often referred to as the Second Constitutional Period.

The Young Turk era ushered in more reforms. The new elite that emerged through the secular educational system began to question the state of female education. The bourgeois intellectuals desired educated wives and demanded that their daughters

\textsuperscript{44} Somel, \textit{The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire}, 146.
receive serious Occidental and Oriental education, as befitted the future spouses of important men.

The Second Constitutional Period produced a greater number of Westernized education reforms than had been seen previously. During the period of Young Turks’ dominance, more high schools and teachers’ colleges for women were established. In 1915, a Women’s university, İnas Darülfünunu, was founded, and it was merged with Istanbul University, a Hamidian creation, in 1920. With the proliferation of educational opportunities, the issue of women’s emancipation extended beyond the question of education. The CUP wanted to create a Turkish-Muslim bourgeoisie. This goal shaped the treatment of women’s issues by the Young Turks.

Deep cleavages emerged in the tumultuous atmosphere of the late nineteenth century and continued into the twentieth century. The reforms generated varied, often conflicting, attitudes towards modernization. A secular and Westernist current sought to bring the values of the West into the fold. At the same time, a more conservative and Islamist current emerged that supported some aspects of the modernization project but aimed to bring Islam to the fore. While these diverse currents confronted each other and clashes created vociferous debate in public, Carter Findley argues, “Many Ottomans and Turks identified with both currents and resisted choosing between them.” This more nuanced view argues that the different currents interacted to shape late Ottoman society. As the twentieth century commenced, a new current surged that emphasized a Turkish nationalist ideology as the best response to modernity.

46 Ibid., 18.
Secular, conservative, and nationalist currents in Ottoman society all used the position of women as a touchstone. Palmira Brummett states, “The Ottoman female was a gauge by which change could be measured.” The Ottoman women’s press emerged in these stormy waters, and the publications engaged in the debates of the period. Women’s journals had differing agendas; some sought to write about issues germane to women while others aimed to situate women’s demands in the broader public debate.

**The Press**

The Ottoman engagement with modernity provoked disparate views in society. These views were aired in the emerging press, which owed its success in part to a slowly increasing literate population. Literacy was not the sole variable in the success of the press, however. Beth Baron’s study of the Egyptian women’s press reveals that print materials reached a wider audience than simply the literate public. Baron writes, “Although it is nearly impossible to determine precise circulation figures for most Egyptian periodicals, circulation should not be confused with the size of a journal’s audience. Listeners must first be added to any estimate.”

Baron states that reading “became a private, occasionally even an antisocial, affair” with increases in literacy. Prior to widespread literacy, what we might call sociable reading was the norm. One member of a family or community would read aloud a text to a larger audience. Baron concludes that in the Egyptian case, “the audience of

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47 Palmira Brummett, “Gender and Empire in Late Ottoman Istanbul: Caricature, Models of Empire, and the Case for Ottoman Exceptionalism,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 27, no. 2 (2007), 293.

48 Baron, *The Women’s Awakening*, 91.

49 Ibid., 89.
women’s journals was probably larger than the few figures available on circulation suggest given the likely large number of listeners, the shared subscriptions, and the practice of passing periodicals around.”

Although the dynamics of the press differed in Istanbul, Baron’s depiction of the Egyptian women’s press illustrates that emerging print culture reached a broader audience than any extant figures of circulation may indicate.

The Ottoman Press

Newspapers began to appear in the Ottoman Empire as early as 1797, with the French *Gazette Française de Constantinople*. Ephemeral publications flittered on and off the scene, with the first Turkish newspaper, *Takvim-i Vekayi*, appearing in 1831. In 1843 an English expatriate, William Churchill, published the first privately owned newspaper, *Ceride-i Havadis*. Although Kemal Karpat cites Churchill’s *Takvim-i Vekayi* as the true start of Turkish journalism, Erik Zürcher locates the beginnings of the Ottoman Press in 1860 with a newspaper called *Tercüman-i Ahval*, which was published by İbrahim Şinasi. The first Ottoman women’s periodical, *Terakki-i Muhadderat*, a supplement of *Terakki*, appeared less than a decade later in 1868. The newspaper was helmed by men but included contributions from women. *Şüküfezâr*, the first women’s periodical that was both owned and written by women, appeared in 1886. *Şüküfezâr* dealt with a wide range

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50 Ibid., 92.
51 One of the main differences between the Istanbul and Egyptian press was the price of publications. Elizabeth Frierson shows that literary gazetes generally sold at low prices, around one or two *guruş*, in Istanbul. This inexpensive press contrasts with the Egyptian women’s press. Beth Baron notes that the cost of one issue in a serial was usually five to six *piasters*. She claims that the Egyptian press was not a penny or popular press. See Frierson, “Unimagined Communities,” 50; Baron, *The Women’s Awakening*, 93.
of women’s issues but did not expressly mention politics. The newspaper articulated that its goal was to showcase the intellectual capabilities of women. Şüküfezár sought to combat the chauvinistic bromide that women had “long hair and short wits” (saçı uzun, aklı kısa).\textsuperscript{54}

One of the most successful women’s magazines was \textit{Hanımlara Mahsûs Gazete}. Although most women’s periodicals struggled to stay solvent, \textit{Hanımlara Mahsûs Gazete} flourished for thirteen years (1895-1908), published 604 issues, and founded its own press.\textsuperscript{55} Elizabeth Frierson attributes the magazine’s success to its ability to negotiate high bureaucratic and imperial patronage and censorship; it additionally promoted Hamidian reforms.\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Hanımlara Mahsûs Gazete} was an enthusiastic advocate for women’s education, but it often framed education as a means to train women to be good Muslims, wives and mothers.\textsuperscript{57} This discourse of domesticity was derivative of broader trends in society that conceded women’s education only to render them better mothers. The magazine, however, also published contributions outside of these conservative confines and provided a window on women’s movements around the world.

In 1908 the Young Turks ushered in the Second Constitutional Period. Many scholars have cited this era as the beginning of female participation in the public arena. While the periodicals that appeared after the Young Turk Revolution tapped into the nationalist tenor of society, they continued to emphasize many of the same themes found in Hamidian era publications. The Young Turk Revolution not only sparked a flurry of

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[54]{Demirdirek, \textit{Osmanlı Kadınların Hayat Hakı Arayışının Bir Hikayesi}, 15.}
\footnotetext[55]{Çakır, \textit{Osmanlı Kadın Hareketleri}, 27.}
\footnotetext[56]{Frierson, “Unimagined Communities,” 64.}
\footnotetext[57]{\textit{Ibid.}, 16-17.}
\end{footnotes}
new women’s periodicals but also galvanized women to organize independently. While women’s magazines served as vehicles for the expression of the individual, women’s organizations collectively addressed the demands of women. These organizations arose from the activity in the press. Women first organized independently for the reasons of aid and assistance; soon, there were women’s aid, educational, cultural, political, and nationalist organizations, to name but a few.

Three influential magazines appeared in 1908: Kadın, Demet, and Mehâsin. Kadın was published in Salonica, the nerve center of the Young Turk Revolution. The magazine voiced its support for the Young Turks. Kadın differed from many of its predecessors in that it rarely touched upon domestic issues and did not contain any fashion sections. Demet was short-lived, but Mehâsin had a longer tenure, publishing twelve issues during 1908–1909. The latter magazine included contributions by Halide Edip, a notable novelist and nationalist. In one article she criticized feminists for being hostile to men. She stated that “reasonable young men are as feminist as women” and that a woman’s duty was first and foremost to be an Ottoman.

Kadın Dünyası was a periodical that produced rhetoric with which Edip was uneasy. It published between 1913 and 1921, halting its circulation during the First World War. While many of the women’s periodicals entertained discussions from contributors who were uncomfortable with radical definitions of women’s roles and were averse to feminism, Kadın Dünyası boldly proclaimed its feminist agenda. The journal

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58 Serpil Çakır, Osmanlı Kadın Hareketleri, 43.
60 Aynur Demirdirek, Osmanlı Kadınlarının Hayat Haksty Arayışının Bir Hikayesi, 32.
refused men’s contributions from its inception and announced, “Feminism! Always Feminism!” Kadın Dünyası provided a platform for the more radical voices of the Ottoman women’s movement.

Most women’s periodicals did not embrace as radical a program as Kadın Dünyası. We see in Mehâsin how feminism was tempered with nationalist language. The intersection between feminism and nationalism was to occupy a prominent position in the press.

**Feminism and Nationalism**

As the twentieth century unfolded, nationalists and women’s activists played off each other, creating a mutually advantageous relationship. Nationalism had become the most vociferous discourse from a cacophonous milieu of debates by the twentieth century. Nationalist currents co-opted feminist discourse in diverse settings and sought to improve women’s roles within the confines of the new nation. Nationalist rhetoric often yoked the status of women to domesticity, and portrayed them as mothers of the nation. The project promoted advances in female education, but primarily so the nation’s sons would have educated mothers.

Thus, nationalism and feminism became linked currents. The architects of the nation-state used women as symbolic pawns. However, women in turn utilized the tenor of society, aligning their aspirations with those of the nationalists, to further their own goals. Ayfer Karakaya Stump argues that nationalism played a moralizing role in

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61 Karakaya-Stump, “The Emergence of a Feminist/Nationalist Discourse in Pre-Republican Turkey,” 54.
Turkish feminism, mimicking the role evangelism played in the Western women’s movement. Many critics claimed women’s activism was only a smokescreen to impose a Western imperialist agenda on the empire. Embracing the nationalist cause provided more indigenous credentials and greater legitimacy for women’s movements. Women could exploit a new patriotic image to claim a wider public space. Their objectives were enveloped in Turkish nationalism instead of representing an alien Western ideology.

Feminists heralded female education as a sign of national vitality. In Egypt, the press shrouded education in rhetoric emphasizing the cult of domesticity to make the endeavor more palatable to the public. Feminist movements worked within this nationalist framework in order to press for a fuller realization of rights. The novelist and activist Halide Edip argued that the rights of women were no longer “a thing to be taken from the West,” and soon women’s progress was equated with the Turkish state’s progress.

Fatma Aliye, in a similar vein, attempted to align her message with Islamic precepts in order to strengthen the empire. Her push-pull relationship with Ottoman society sharpened her critical focus, resulting in cogent critiques of a woman’s place in that milieu. Her close association with Islam and empire, however, exacted a price in terms of her standing in the Republic.

The intersection of feminism and nationalism continued to be a salient issue in the formation of the Turkish Republic. Ziya Gökalp, one of the architects of the new Turkish state, amplified feminist discourse in his imagining of the republic. He emphasized the

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62 Ibid., 42.
63 Ibid., 35.
64 Halide Edib, *Turkey Faces West: A Turkish View of Recent Changes and Their Origin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), 119.
position that feminism was endemic to Turkishness. He argued, “Democracy and feminism were two bases of ancient Turkish life.”

Holly Shissler states, “While [female] voices were not the dominant voices that shaped the policies of the Republic, it would be wrong to assume that they were without influence either in official circles or in popular opinion.” The press served as a forum for women to enter the public sphere. The press hypostasized this nationalist consciousness and amplified women’s voices in the din of the public arena. Print culture reified and mobilized images of community that have been useful in constructing the “nation.” It also provided a window on the world, providing information on the strategies and tactics of Western women’s movements. There can be little doubt that women’s activism was co-opted by nationalist forces who used it to further their goals. The evidence, however, suggests that women’s press and organizations reciprocated in kind and aligned their aspirations with those of the nationalists. Women’s activism, and not just enlightened male elites, played a role in expanding the gender boundaries in the early Republic.

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66 A. Holly Shissler, “‘If You Ask Me’: Sabiha Sertel’s Advice Column, Gender Equity, and Social Engineering in the Early Turkish Republic,” Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies 2, no. 2 (2007), 5.
Concluding Remarks

This chapter has presented a brief account of the conditions that made the Ottoman women’s press possible as well as major themes present in women’s journals. These conditions provide the context for reading Fatma Aliye’s *Nisvân-ı İslâm* closely in order to establish her place as a leading feminist proponent.

Fatma Aliye, an active participant in the print culture, was a prolific author who wrote essays, novels, and newspaper articles and columns. She was redeemed from the margins of history when her image was placed on the Turkish Republic’s fifty-lira banknote in 2009. Her reappearance has catalyzed historical interest with many articles and theses, but a comprehensive study of her life and works has yet to be published. Chapter 3 contributes to this growing body of literature on this pioneering woman through a brief review of her life and an analysis of *Nisvân-ı İslâm* and its impact on public discourse.
CHAPTER 3

Fatma Aliye and Nisvân-ı İslâm

This chapter provides a brief biographical sketch of Fatma Aliye and offers a close reading of her 1891 work Nisvân-ı İslâm. Nisvân-ı İslâm was a sensation in Ottoman society and was translated into French and Arabic almost immediately. However, to date there is no English translation of the work. Following the biography of Fatma Aliye, this chapter provides a synopsis of the book before delving into the themes of slavery, marriage, divorce, property rights, veiling, Ottoman versus European dress, marital duties, and education discussed in Nisvân-ı İslâm. Each of these themes occupied a contested space in the debates concerning the modernization of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the nineteenth century. They also constituted flashpoints for Western misperceptions about the plight of Muslim women in Ottoman society.

Biography

Ahmet Midhat’s biography of Fatma Aliye, Fatma Aliye Hanım Yahud Bir Muharrire-i Osmaniye’nin Neş’eti (Fatma Aliye Hanım or the Emergence of an Ottoman Woman Writer) provides the clearest portrait of the author available. Fatma Aliye viewed Midhat

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67 According to Mahmud Zeki in an article for Hanımlara Mahsûs Gazete, Nisvân-ı İslâm was translated into English around the same time as it was translated into French. Although attempts have been made to find this translation, it has not been located. See Mûbecel Kızıltan, "Öncü Bir Kadın Yazar: Fatma Aliye Hanım", Türkülük Bilgisi Araştırmaları vol. 14 (1991), 293.
as her “spiritual father” and intellectual patron. \(^{68}\) He wrote a biography of his protégée in 1893, after she had translated Georges Ohnet’s *Volonté (Meram)* and written *Hayâl ve Hakîkat* (co-authored with Ahmed Midhat), *Nisvân-i İslâm*, and *Muhâzarât*. He drew upon recollections from family and acquaintances, as well as letters from Aliye, to construct his biography.

Fatma Aliye was born in Istanbul in the fall of 1862. She was the second of three children born to Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, an eminent statesman, historian, and lawyer, and Adviye Rabia Hanım. \(^{69}\) After brief interludes in Aleppo and Ioannina, Fatma Aliye spent the majority of her childhood in a *konak* (mansion) on the shores of the Bosphorus. Midhat reveals Fatma Aliye was a precocious child with a fondness for books and an indifference towards toys. He writes that Aliye showed her intellectual capabilities early in life and began to study French in secret when she was eleven years old. \(^{70}\) Aliye’s family was cognizant of her precociousness, and her brother, whom Midhat fashions as her ally, welcomed his sister to his sessions with his tutor. \(^{71}\)

Although it was considered inappropriate for women to learn foreign languages, Cevdet Paşa eventually relented and permitted his daughter to study French. Indeed he was impressed by his daughter’s intellectual prowess and commented, “This girl amazes me... If she had been a man and had a regular education, she would have been a great


\(^{69}\) Fatma Aliye’s younger sister, Emine Semiye (1864-1944), was a prolific writer and political activist.


\(^{71}\) Midhat, *Bir Osmanlı Kadın Yazarın Doğuşu*, 60.
genius." Midhat additionally notes in his biography of Aliye that Advie Rabia Hanım encouraged her daughter to learn French despite, reports to the contrary.

Fatma Aliye’s education during her youth was attributable to her privileged upbringing. However, when she turned fifteen she donned the face veil and could no longer meet with men. She was forced to terminate lessons with her Lebanese tutor İlyas Matar. Fortunately, Mademoiselle Alpha, a daughter of a French convert to Islam, was appointed as Aliye’s new teacher. Mlle. Alpha was familiar with literature and philosophy, and she had read countless novels. The issue of novel-reading ignited debate in Ottoman society, as in Europe and America; many believed novels were harmful to women. Midhat reveals that Mlle. Alpha did not view novel-reading as an iniquitous activity; she reasoned that novels opened her eyes to the dangerous and frightening aspects of love, thus helping her to steer clear of such situations. Mlle. Alpha discussed the morality of novel-reading with her pupil. Fatma Aliye voraciously consumed novels in French, Turkish, and Arabic and, echoing her teacher’s views on the subject, never viewed reading or writing as immoral activities or framed her literary efforts as acts of rebellion.

Ahmed Midhat writes of a close relationship between Aliye and her tutor. In 1879 Cevdet Pasa was appointed Governor (vali) of Syria, and he moved his family with him. Aliye parted company with Mlle. Alpha, but she kept in correspondence with her. When Cevdet Pasa was called back to Istanbul nine months later, Aliye was reunited with

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73 Midhat, Bir Osmanlı Kadın Yazarın Doğuşu, 56.
74 Ibid., 61
her tutor. Midhat writes that this gave Aliye much joy. Mlle. Alpha and her pupil began to plan out a course of study, but their plans would be cut short as married life beckoned Fatma Aliye.75

When Aliye turned nineteen, Cevdet Paşa arranged for her to marry Faik Bey (subsequently Paşa), a Senior Captain (kolağasi), who would later become an aide-de-camp to the Ottoman sultan.76 Conflicting stories exist about their marriage. Some observers suggest that at first, Faik Bey disapproved of novel-reading and stifled her creative processes. Once she convinced him, as well as Cevdet Paşa, of her literary ability, Faik Bey acquiesced to his wife’s wishes and allowed her to write. A family source acknowledges that their marriage was strained at times. Faik Bey had been trained abroad, and Fatma Aliye was envious that he was able to experience what she could not. Yet, despite their difficulties, they ultimately demonstrated affection for each other; Faik Paşa often brought Fatma Aliye coffee deep into the night as she wrote.77

Aliye’s first literary work was her translation of the French novel Volonté (Meram in Turkish). She published six novels: Muhâzarât (1308/1890-1), Hayâl ve Hakîkat (1309/1891-2), Refet (1314/1896-7), Udi (1315/1897-8), Levâyih-i Hayât (1315/1897-8), and Enin (1328/1912-13). Aliye was also a journalist and contributed to Hanımlara Mahsûs Gazete, Ümmet, Mehâsin, İnkılap, Tercüman-î Hakîkat, and others. She additionally published a plethora of essays and treatises, the most famous of which was Nisvân-i İslâm.

75 Ibid., 74.
76 Ibid.
Fatma Aliye produced a steady output of literary work throughout the 1890s and the first decades of the 1900s. She engaged in historical writing, and in 1915 she authored a history on the Battle of Kosovo and the Battle of Ankara entitled Tarih-i Osmani‘nin Bir Devre-i Mühimmesi Kosova Zafer Ankara Hezimeti. Aliye wrote the history while the Ottomans were embroiled in the First World War. Cevdet Kırpık argues that Aliye used the work to point “to the cause that led the state to victory or defeat, thereby sending a message to the rulers of her own time.”78 This work is significant as it provides evidence that Aliye was still interested in the affairs of the empire even as her public visibility waned.

As the twentieth century unfolded, Aliye’s work became more out of tune with the tenor of society. Fatma Aliye attempted to publish a half-finished biography of her father, Ahmed Cevdet Paşa ve Zamanı (1332/1913-4), which was a riposte to the criticisms of the Young Turk regime toward Cevdet Paşa. The work was met with deafening silence, and she abandoned publication partway through. The historian Taha Toros posits that Aliye’s more traditional and Islamic rhetoric had fallen out of favor in a climate saturated with nationalist leanings.79 Aliye’s literary style, modeled on that of her mentor Ahmed Midhat, no longer attracted an audience, and female authors such as Halide Edip saw their celebrity rise as they tied women’s causes to the nationalist project.

Personal factors were additional culprits in Aliye’s literary retirement. She had four daughters: Hatice, born in 1880; Ayşe, born in 1884; Nimet, born in 1900; and

79 Yıldız, “Literature as Public Sphere,” 156.
Zübeyde İsmet, born in 1901. In the 1920s Aliye’s health began to deteriorate, and she sought treatment in France. In 1927 Zübeyde İsmet converted to Christianity and left Turkey to join the sisters of Notre Dame, an act that left Aliye devastated.

Aliye died in 1936, virtually unknown. By the time of her death she had been cast as an anachronism in the theater of the Republic. Her identity was intricately linked to Islam and Ottomanness. Indeed, the French author Marcelle Tinayre commented, “No Muslim woman was more Muslim or more devoted to her father’s faith and her mother’s veil.” Islam and Ottomanness were seen as antithetical to the Republic, even though the architects of the new society drew heavily on Ottoman and Islamic legal values. Aliye and her work were seen as relics of a bygone era. The language reform of 1928 further served to cast her works into the shadows of the empire and rendered them inaccessible to subsequent generations.

It is highly unlikely that Fatma Aliye was against the new nation-state, a supposition corroborated by a family source. To wit, Aliye continued to partake in new activities available for women. She participated in volunteer projects and public speaking engagements during the Greco-Turkish war of 1897, the Balkan wars of 1912-13, and onwards. Aliye launched an initiative during the Greco-Turkish war to distribute blankets, bandages, and clothing to Ottoman troops, and in 1908 she

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81 Kızıltan, "Öncü Bir Kadın Yazar: Fatma Aliye Hanım,” 308.
83 Oya Soner, interview, December 14, 2010.
established the “Nisvân-ı Osmaniye İmdad Cemiyeti” (Ottoman Women’s Aid Society). In a letter to Carter Findley, Aliye’s youngest daughter Zübeyde İsmet revealed that her mother actively followed the Turkish War of Independence and welcomed the Republic. However, despite Aliye’s attempts to adapt and participate in public life, her identity prevented her from reaching a broad audience as the character of the new society began to crystallize.

Fatma Aliye was very much a product of her society. Findley notes, however, that she “was a privileged member of society that even she found oppressive.” She sought to redefine the status of the Ottoman women within the confines of her well-structured environment. Findley, citing the letter from Zübeyde İsmet, observes that Aliye was an adherent to tradition yet harbored an “avant garde” spirit that compelled her to challenge the “patriarchal household and the patrimonial state.” Nisvân-ı İslâm showcases those challenges issued by Aliye.

**Nisvân-ı İslâm**

Fatma Aliye’s *Nisvân-ı İslâm* was first serialized in *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* and subsequently published in essay form in 1309 (1891/2). Fatma Aliye was an observant Muslim who took the position that Islam held the key to women’s liberation. In *Nisvân-ı*...
İslâm, Aliye censures deleterious practices that masqueraded under the auspices of Islamic laws.\textsuperscript{89}

Due to both her father’s and her husband’s occupations, Fatma Aliye had ties to the palace. Aliye was in essence one of the “servants of the imperial harem” (perestârân-i Harem-i hümayun), as the Palace would send high-status female visitors to her to answer their questions.\textsuperscript{90} Her fluency in French allowed her to converse easily with these visitors. \textit{Nisvân-î İslâm} consists of three \textit{muhavere}, best translated as a conversation, disputation, or dialogue, in which Aliye narrates in a novelistic style three encounters she had with such European women.\textsuperscript{91}

The work offers a vocabulary elite Ottoman women could draw upon in their dealings with European contacts. Findley questions the extent to which the work could have prepared other elite Ottoman women to answer the questions of their guests but states that the work shows Aliye’s ability to do so.\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Nisvân-î İslâm}, however, has more resonance than simply as an instructive guide for bourgeois Turkish women on how to greet and entertain European female visitors. The text not only addresses European misperceptions of Turkish women but also argues for women’s rights using Islamic precepts. As a result, the work was salient to a larger audience than the one originally intended.

\textsuperscript{89} Fatma Aliye’s \textit{Nisvân-î İslâm} shares many of the same arguments of the Egyptian author Qasim Amin’s 1899 work \textit{Tahrîr al-Mar’ah} (\textit{The Liberation of Women}). Amin’s monograph is more conservative than Aliye’s, but it has garnered much more fame.


\textsuperscript{91} Sir James W. Redhouse, \textit{A Turkish and English Lexicon} (İstanbul: Çağlığı Yayınları, 2006), 1756.

\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Ibid.}, 11.
The work was well-received by the reading public. Indeed, Aliye’s literary celebrity became so widespread that many female children received the name of Fatma Aliye when they were born.\textsuperscript{93} Aliye also enjoyed an international readership as a result of \textit{Nisvân-ı İslâm}. The work was translated into Arabic and serialized in the Beirut periodical \textit{Themeret-i Funûn} and was translated into French in 1895 by Nicolos Nicolaides. In 1893 Fatma Aliye received an invitation to display her work at the Woman’s Library of the Chicago World’s Fair.\textsuperscript{94}

\textit{Nisvân-ı İslâm} was a literary success because it grappled with subjects pertinent to a rapidly changing society. The intimate and domestic sphere was exposed on a public level in the Hamidian era, and Aliye embedded highly salient domestic issues in the public sphere. With \textit{Nisvân-ı İslâm}, Aliye participated in the social engineering of the period.

\section*{Synopsis}

The monograph opens with an entreaty for cultural exchange. Aliye questions the mendacious reports of the Ottomans that she has heard from distinguished European travelers. She declares, “I believe a nation (\textit{millet}) other than ours is being discussed.”\textsuperscript{95} She maintains that the ability to remedy false perceptions lies within the people of the

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\textsuperscript{94} Three of Aliye’s works, \textit{Hayâl ve Hakîkat}, \textit{Muhâzarât}, and \textit{Nisvân-ı İslâm}, were displayed in the Women’s Library. All three remained untranslated and thus were textually inscrutable for an American audience.
\textsuperscript{95} “…kendimizden başka bir milletten bahsolumuyor zanneyledim.” In Fatma Aliye, \textit{Nisvân-ı İslâm}, (İstanbul: Tercüman-ı Hakikat Matbaası, 1309/1891-1892), 5.
\end{flushright}
empire. Aliye desires men and women to meet with European travelers to contradict their false perceptions. She, however, censures the encounters that have occurred between French-speaking Istanbulites from Pera, a cosmopolitan and trendy district of the city, and foreigners. She writes that the denizens of Pera disseminate distorted images of Turkish women. Aliye urges women to have an extensive knowledge of both French and the precepts of Islamic law. By doing so, women could not only converse with their distinguished European visitors but also rectify their misperceptions about Islam’s impact on women. The correction of misconceptions of Islam is a prominent leitmotif in Aliye’s monograph. Aliye argues that since Europeans are unable to raise objections to the precepts of Islam, they instead turn their attention to Muslim women. They cite religiously defined modes of control such as veiling and polygyny as determinants behind women’s subordination. Nisvân-ı İslâm attempts to exonerate Islam as an oppressor of women.

The first muhavere (pp. 12-70) focuses on the visit of Madame F, a member of the European aristocracy, and a nun (karabaş, rahibe). Both women have come to the narrator’s household in Bebek to partake in the iftar (the evening meal to break the fast during Ramazan). The visit has an awkward start when Mme. F mistakes a cariye (female slave) for a lady of the house. This exchange launches a lengthy discussion of slavery that is interrupted with the firing of the iftar gun.

The narrator shows the iftar table to her guests and declares that it is an imitation of the table sent down to Jesus (Qur’ân 5: 112-114). This tableau sparks the nun’s interest, and the discussion turns to the Qur’ânic view of Jesus, his disciples, and other biblical figures. Following the iftar the visitors and the narrator convene in the library to
discuss these theological matters in more detail. The conversation ranges from the prophecy of Ahmed in the Gospel of John to the Paraclete. The first muhavere concludes with the namaz (prayer). The narrator translates the verses recited from Sûrat al-Ikhlâs into French for her visitors. When namaz comes to an end, the visiting ladies express their gratitude for the things they have learned and bid farewell.

The second muhavere (pp. 71-170) depicts the encounter between the narrator and an urbane Englishwoman, Madame R. Like Mme. F and the nun, Mme. R has come to observe the iftar. The narrator is much impressed with Mme. R. The Englishwoman is highly educated and is interested in science and religion. She is able to converse fluently in French and is learning Turkish. Curious to learn more about the culture, Mme. R inquires as to which women in the household are co-wives. This sparks a lively discussion of polygyny that segues into a conversation surrounding the Prophet’s wives, women’s rights within Islam, and veiling. The women later enjoy a sumptuous iftar. Afterwards, the narrator and Madame R adjourn to the garden. While basking in the moonlight, the women discuss the stars in the clear night sky. The narrator is impressed with Madame R’s knowledge of astronomy. After they converse about the stars, the women turn their attention to religious matters, such as the Christian trinity. Following tea, Mme. R summons her carriage and bids farewell. The narrator comments that she is grateful for the intellectually stimulating conversations she has shared with Mme. R.

The opening scene of the third muhavere (pp. 171-272) differs from the preceding two sections. It depicts the narrator and two Turkish women, S Hanım and N Hanım. The women debate the merits of Turkish and European dress. S Hanım is the embodiment of the alafranga (alla franca) woman, while N Hanım conforms to the
alaturka (alla turca) lifestyle. The guests in this muhavere are two sisters, a Madame and a Mademoiselle, and their aunt, a middle-aged Mademoiselle. The visitors had requested that their hosts receive them dressed in traditional clothing. Upon viewing the Turkish women wearing a more modern dress than they were expecting, the visiting women discuss their idea of Turkish fashion with the women of the household. The narrator is quick to controvert their Orientalist imaginings of Turkish dress. The conversation also treats topics such as marriage and wifely obligations. The encounter ends on a lighter note with a discussion of music. The work concludes with the narrator and her two friends reflecting on the good society they shared with these visiting ladies.

Although Nisvân-ı İslâm is a theoretical and philosophical treatise, Aliye laces her text with comic episodes, beautifully descriptive passages, and provocative but well-mannered debate. It is simultaneously a piece of entertainment, education, and advocacy. Aliye brings domestic subjects to the fore and embeds them in the public discourse. This chapter will continue by surveying through the lens of Nisvân-ı İslâm eight themes that were used to debate the “woman question” and questions of modernization in the late Hamidian era.

**Slavery**

In the first muhavere, Mme. F mistakes the cariye at the narrator’s side for a lady and extends her hand to her. The slave girl quickly takes Mme. F’s umbrella and draws back. After surveying parts of the house, Mme. F inquires as to why the cariye is standing and not sitting with the group. The narrator informs Mme. F that the girl is not a lady but
rather a slave girl. Mme. F is surprised to hear this and comments on the girl’s fine clothing and jewelry.

The narrator launches into a discussion of the institution of slavery. She presents a narrow discussion of slavery by emphasizing its çırak variant. The çırak is brought up in a grand household, manumitted after a specified period of time, married off, and set up in a new life. The narrator relates the protections Islamic law creates for cariyes; she talks in detail about the education, gifts, and dowry the households must provide for cariyes. She discusses such provisions in a manner that causes Madame F to exclaim, “But madam, if being a slave is anything like how you describe it, then everyone will want to be a slave.”

Aliye does not advocate for slavery in the monograph, but she does reveal that the institution can be beneficial to women. She comments to Mme. F, “The information I have given you about slave girls is all based on the basic precepts of the sharia and is the requirement of humanity for families to treat others with consideration.” Aliye additionally relates to Mme. F that cariyes are attached to their households and appreciate their lives there. Discussing the case of an Abyssinian cariye, the narrator comments:

I: This is a cariye who has grown up with us since she was small, Madame. She has worked a lot. When the time of manumission came we said that we would free her, but she would not consent. She did not accept freedom.

F: Why?

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96 “Lakin madam siz esareti öyle bir surette tarif ettiniz ki herkes esir olmağa heves edecek.” Ibid., 6
97 “Cariyeler hakkında size vereceği malumat kavaid-i esasiye-i şeriye ile bir de bunlara ve insaniyetin muktezayat-i sairesine riayetkâr olan familyaların âdât ve efaline mübtenidir.” Ibid., 36
I: She did not desire it and said, “I will not be able to find a comfortable place like here.” But we gave her the option. That is to say, we gave her a guarantee that whenever she desires, she can be freed.⁹⁸

Slavery also occupies an important role in Aliye’s novel Muhâzârât, published in 1892. A sweeping epic, the work follows a protagonist, Fâzîla, who attempts suicide to escape an unhappy marriage. She has to sell herself into slavery to repay the costs of her care to the family who nurses her back to health after her suicide attempt. Fâzîla, starts a new life as a slave, adopts the name Peyman, and moves from Egypt to Beirut. Findley reveals, “As a slave, she is now freer than she was as a lady.”⁹⁹ In her analysis of the novel, Elif Akşit writes, “In the person of Fâzîla, Aliye reveals that an unhappy marriage in which she cannot move can be a cage for a woman, while slavery can be a blessing as she can move up in its preexisting hierarchies.”¹⁰⁰ For Aliye, slavery dictated by Islamic strictures could be better than marriage. The novel provides an interesting comparison between marriage and slavery and articulates the ways a woman can find rights and respect.

Ehud Toledano notes that in Muhâzârât, “Slavery to [Aliye] is just one of the experiences of womanhood. Nonetheless, even in her work, a clear distinction is maintained between the status of the ladies of the house, bond or free, and the status of the domestic slaves, whether belonging to the household or working outside in less

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F: Niçin?
Ben: Buradaki rahatı bulamam diye istemedi. Lakin biz de kendi kendisini muhayyer kıldı. Yani her ne vakt isterse kendi kendisini azat edebilmek için eline bir senet verdik.” Ibid., 22
¹⁰⁰ Akşit, “Fatma Aliye's Stories: Ottoman Marriages Beyond the Harem,” 212.
enviable dwellings.” Aliye writes about slavery in a similar vein in *Nisvân-ı İslâm*. She illumines the lives of female slaves and writes of their entitlement to rights. She, however, is quick to distinguish between free women and slave women of the household.

The conversation concerning slavery became pronounced in the *Tanzimat* era. In 1846 Sultan Abdülmecid bowed to British pressure and closed the Istanbul slave market. In 1857 the Porte issued a ban on the African slave trade. The ban did not include Circassians, however. Toledano asserts that reforms concerning Circassian slavery were the result of Ottoman initiative rather than external pressure. He notes that the Ottomans made a clear distinction “between Circassian agricultural slavery and forced slave trade, which they disapproved, and the traffic in Circassia girls intended for harem service, which they tacitly encouraged.” Indeed, the Ottomans believed Circassian women “were brought into civilization from ‘barbarism’ and by virtue of their good fortune in entering the Ottoman world, moved from ‘poverty and need’ to ‘welfare and happiness.’”

The Porte’s language towards Circassians is echoed in Aliye’s work decades later. She too shared the opinion that Circassian women benefited from their experience in the Ottoman Empire, and she argues that Circassians actively sought to sell their young girls into slavery. In the first *muhavere*, she recalls to Mme. F, “The Circassians put their

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102 Ibid., 148.
103 Ibid., 184.
beautiful girls to sleep with a lullaby, ‘Go to Istanbul! Become the Sultan’s wife! Do not forget your relations, assist [them]!’”\(^{105}\)

Female slavery was thoroughly embedded in Ottoman political, social, and cultural spheres. During the Tanzimat, statesmen launched a defense of slavery, as according to Zilfi, some of these “men of reformist repute did not forego the use of concubines in addition to or in place of a legal wife.”\(^{106}\) Slavery was an exemplar of the synthesis between the secular and Islamic currents of the contemporary debate. Slavery was not only cloaked in layers of religious defense, but it was seen as an important brick in the structure of the empire. Madeline Zilfi argues that, “the value of slavery lay in its association with authority relations of all kinds, in a period when Ottoman rulership, and sovereignty itself, were so much in peril.”\(^{107}\)

Aliye does not engage in the same polemical battle of the era. Tanzimat statesmen and the ulema (Muslim scholar-officials) supported female slavery as an essential vertebra in the backbone of Ottoman society. Aliye framed her defense in different terms, casting harem slavery as a benevolent and charitable institution that provided women with rights and a degree of flexibility. She reckoned that slavery, with the protections provided by Islam, could provide a vehicle for a woman to escape the enforced servitude of a bad marriage. Aliye’s proffer of the paradox of a slave woman who is freer than a married woman can be seen as a response to the rigid patriarchal society in which she lived.

\(^{105}\) “Çerkesler de güzel kız çocukları ‘İstanbul’a gidersin! Paşa zevcesi olursun! Buradaki taallükatımı unutma, iane et’ ninileriyle uyuturlar.” Nisvân-i İslâm, 30
\(^{106}\) Madeline C. Zilfi, Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 234.
\(^{107}\) Ibid., 235.
Marriage

The late nineteenth century saw the consensual union of marriage in the private sphere externalized in the public discourse. Polygyny and arranged marriages constituted two critical focal points for Western conceptions of Oriental despotic social structures. In Nisvân-ı İslâm Fatma Aliye simultaneously challenges her visitors’ misperceptions of Islamic marriage and advocates for an alteration of marriage within the empire.

Polygyny

The second “dialogue” occurs between an elegant Englishwoman, Madame R, and the narrator. While traveling with her husband, Mme. R desires to meet with a Turkish family and observe a Turkish household. After she enters the house, Mme. R surveys the room in hopes of catching jealous glances between the women. When she spies no antagonism, Mme. R inquires, “Among the women in this room, which ones are co-wives (ortak)?”

This question ignites a lengthy discussion of polygyny. The narrator refutes Madame R’s misperceptions of marriage in Turkish society. The narrator not only declares that polygyny is not the norm, but moreover states, “You will find that not only I but the rest of Turkish women agree with you in feeling pity for women who are married along with other women.”

She continues by explaining that Islamic law sanctions polygyny only in cases of necessity, and that in fact most Muslim leaders have not practiced polygyny. Aliye uses pejorative language to describe men with multiple wives,

108 “Bu salon içindeki hanımlardan hangisi, hangisi ile ortaktır?” Nisvân-ı İslâm, 86.
109 “…zevceleri kendi üzerine diğer bir kadınla tezevvüç eden kadınlara acımak için zalız beni değil, bütün Türk kadınlarını sizinle müttefik bulursunuz.” Ibid., 89.
likening them to roosters (horoz) while painting men in monogamous partnerships as pigeons (güvercin).

Fatma Aliye participated in debates surrounding polygyny in venues outside of Nisvân-i İslâm. Mahmut Esat, a member of the ulema, staunchly defended the practice in the press. He portrayed polygamy as an antidote to moral depravity. The majority of the ulema by this period had adopted a stance against polygyny. Esat was part of a small but vocal minority who argued for polygyny using a religious defense. Fatma Aliye, unafraid to engage in polemics with Esat, wrote a riposte to him. Aliye argued, “Islam does not order polygyny, and when [polygyny] is permitted, it must be presented in what circumstances this permission is given.”

Fatma Aliye expressed her distaste for polygyny in various settings and criticized those who argued that polygyny was the norm in Islam. She, however, never called for the abolition of polygyny. Indeed, in Nisvân-i İslâm Mme. R asks the narrator why the institution is not prohibited. Aliye argues that polygyny prevents adultery, and thus it helps to curtail the instances of children born out of wedlock. She notes that mistresses are legion in Europe and confirms that polygyny renders this phenomenon unnecessary in the Ottoman context. Furthermore, she concedes that polygyny can protect a barren or ill woman. When Mme. R states that divorce is an option, the narrator declares:

110 “İslamiyet’te taaddül-i zevca emir olmayıp meşag gösterildiği cihetle, bu müsaadenin ne gibi mecburiyetlerde işe yardığı ibraz olunmalı.” Quoted in Fatma Kılıç Denman, İkinci Meşrutiyet Döneminde Bir Jön Türk Dergisi: Kadın (İstanbul: Libra Kitapçılık ve Yayınevi Ticaret Ltd. Şti., 2009), 192.
A barren woman will not find another husband easily. Let’s put aside your thought, for she will suffer extreme poverty. How shall we give an answer to the sick wife who is thrown into the street?\footnote{“Akım olan bir kadın kolaylıkla diğer bir zevç bulamayıp sefalet çekeceğini haydi hatırınız için bir yana bırakalım; ama hastalık olan zevcenin sokak ortasına atılmasına nasıl cevap verelim?” Nisvân-ı İslâm, 93.}

Aliye’s fears for women unable to have children reflect the realities of her day. Zilfi reveals that “childless marriages were more likely to end in divorce than in polygyny.”\footnote{Zilfi, Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire, 175.}

Aliye agrees with her visitor’s disapproval of polygyny. She concedes that there have been abuses, and many men do not practice polygyny within the parameters of Islam. She observes, “I also conclude with you that there are women who have been oppressed due to misuse of the permission given to polygamy. But there have been laws established to rescue women from oppressive situations.”\footnote{“Taaddüd-i zevcata verilen müsaadeyi suistimalde kadınların mazlum kalacaklarını ben sizinle beraber hükümderim. Ancak kadınlar için o mazlumiyete adem-i tahammül halinden kendilerini kurtarmak hukuku da başka taayin olunmuştur.” Nisvân-ı İslâm, 95.}

Aliye’s ambivalence towards polygyny is evident in Nisvân-ı İslâm. She does not advocate for polygynous unions, yet she concludes that the practice can be beneficial for sick or barren women. She uses her work to show that Turkish women prefer monogamous partnerships. Furthermore, she argues that polygyny is not desirable but rather a last-resort practice that must operate with the strict parameters of Islamic law.

Although polygyny was a provocative topic of discussion in the late Ottoman period, instances of polygyny were in reality quite low. In their pioneering study Istanbul Household, Duben and Behar affirm that between 1885 and 1906 an average of 2.29 per
cent of all married men in Istanbul were in polygynous unions. Furthermore, unlike slavery, which had widespread support, polygyny over time was met with increasing disapproval in Istanbul. Aliye’s attitudes towards polygyny mirror the broader societal sentiments towards the institution.

**Arranged Marriages**

While she voiced her support for monogamous marriage in her texts, Fatma Aliye did not use her work as a platform to support love marriages. Duben and Behar note that translations of French novels began appearing on the Istanbul literary scene in the 1860s. An eager reading public consumed the novels, and soon French notions of love, or *amour*, were permeating Istanbul culture. Many Istanbulites viewed love as a pernicious influence on society.

Fatma Aliye grapples with the naissance of discussions concerning love and marriage in her monograph and ultimately endorses a traditional view of arranged marriage. She claims that arranged marriages are not ordered by Islam, but rather are a societal construct. Aliye ultimately views arranged marriages as a source of stability. She finds that the chimera of romantic love cannot sustain a marital union. She comments:

> In our system of marriage, around eighty to ninety out of 100 contracts of marriage result in good compatibility. This contrasts with marriage that results from a courtship in Europe where good marriages do not occur. Because those

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who marry while in love frequently fall out of love in the middle of the marriages.\footnote{“Bizim şu usul-ı izdivaçla yüz mümkünkenin sekseni doksanı yine hüsn-i imtiza ile netice-pezir olup, buna mukabil Avrupa’da alelumum be-muşaşaka neticesi olan mümkünkenin kaddesinde hüsn-i imtiza görüldüğü vaki değildir. Zira birbirleriyle aşk ve sevda ile tezvüç edenler miyanında kendilerinde o aşktan eser kalmayanlar epeyce çoktur.” \textit{Nisvân-ı İslâm}, 123.}

Additionally, while ideas of uninhibited love were rife in the pages of translated European works, Fatma Aliye shrewdly points out that, unlike the depiction in novels, many young women are not left to freely choose young men in Europe.

Marriage was an important institution in maintaining the social structure of the empire, and Aliye argued for monogamous and arranged marriages in order to cultivate healthy marital relationships to preserve the social order. Aliye does not accept the European model of marriage as an exemplar for Ottoman society. Instead, she shows that Ottoman mores favor women.

This argument is manifest in an episode in the third \textit{muhavere}. S Hanım asks the middle-aged aunt why she is not married. The aunt recounts her tale of heartbreak to the Turkish women. When she was young her family lost their wealth, but she met a handsome, hard-working man who wanted to marry her despite her lack of a dowry. However, when her wedding day was approaching she discovered her fiancé was born out of wedlock. She broke off her engagement, lamenting that she could not sully her family’s name or ruin her potential children’s futures by marrying a “bastard” (\textit{piç}). The aunt states that she failed to attract other suitors due to her lack of a dowry. S Hanım’s sympathies lie more with the aunt’s erstwhile fiancé, inquiring what happened to him. The aunt inquires if unmarried women are found in Ottoman society. Aliye responds,
“One could not be found among a million. In our society ugly women are not old maids. Neither are the poor.”

In sum, Fatma Aliye paints marriage as a stabilizing societal structure. She supports arranged marriage, a more conservative position than the westernized notion of love marriage. She sets forth a vision of marriage, however, that is monogamous, a less conservative stance, when compared to proponents of polygyny. Importantly, she claims to speak for all Turkish women with her disapproval of polygyny.

**Property Rights**

The second *muhavere* includes an exchange concerning women’s property rights. The narrator informs Mme. R that Islamic law protects women. The narrator avers:

> When it comes to the subject of demands, women in our society do not have less respect than women in yours. In some respects it is greater [….] In Islam, the Qur’an gives women a degree of respect.

This passage is illustrative of Fatma Aliye’s desire to look within, rather than outside, the empire in order to enact change. While she respected many of the opportunities European women were accorded, she was not fixed upon foreign society for models of change and reform. As Frierson notes, “She did not take European women unquestioningly as representing the ideal to be attained.”

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119 Elizabeth Frierson, "Unimagined Communities," 199.
In the third *muhavere*, Aliye explains her belief that Muslim women have more rights than their Christian counterparts. When discussing the rights of wives within Islam, she states, “In your society women cannot sell any of their possessions without the permission of their husbands. As for us, a woman is free to sell her possessions independently.”¹²⁰ She argues that a husband must furnish his wife’s *mahr*¹²¹ at the time of marriage and put aside part of the money as a credit. If the husband and wife divorce, the husband is responsible for the wife’s full support (*nafaqa*) during the post-divorce waiting period (*idda*).

Fatma Aliye argued that many emancipatory features lay within Islam. Her columns in *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* often dealt with women from other countries. She was able to critique their situation and illuminate the instances where Ottoman women were actually better off than their European or American counterparts. This critique was sounded in the wider women’s press as well. Women’s journals offered a window to international fora, and they published articles illustrating both advancements and setbacks for women. Ottoman men and women, therefore, were not presented only with an idealized image of the West.

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¹²¹ Judith Tucker in *In the House of the Law: Gender and Islamic Law in Ottoman Syria and Palestine* defines *mahr* as “the dower; the first or collection of gifts given to the bride by the husband, without which the marriage is not valid” (207).
Divorce

While Mme. R, in the second dialogue, sees divorce as potentially damaging to women, the narrator comments that women could use the practice to their benefit. The narrator states that if a woman’s husband takes another wife, she can utilize the solution of divorce to find another husband.

The topic of divorce appears again in the third muhavere. S Hanım believes that divorce is potentially harmful to women. She states, “Divorce, however, is the men’s prerogative.” The conversation continues with S Hanım addressing the narrator:

The other day you said, “How difficult a problem in Christianity! If a wife or husband is cruel, the other is forced to devote his or her life to [his or her spouse]. We, however, have divorce as a solution.” […] But] although men divorce women whenever they want with ease, women in that case must divorce their husbands when they do not want to.

Aliye counters S Hanım’s assertion with an ethnographic tale of divorce practices in Antakya. She declares that when a woman wants to divorce her husband, she simply has to don a blue dustcoat (ferace) and leave their house. The narrator’s friend thinks such a story must be a fairy tale, but the narrator continues by saying that this is a valid custom in the small town. N Hanım inquires how such a practice manages to fit within the parameters of the Islamic law. The narrator responds that marriages in Islam are concluded by contract, and there is much variability with respect to the contract. She

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122 “Talak ancak erkeklerin yedd-i ihtiyarındadır.” Nisvân-ı İslâm, 213.
states that in the case of Antakya, “The woman says it is a contract that she will divorce as soon as she wears the blue dustcoat!” Fatma Aliye posits divorce as not only a liberating practice for women but also a fluid practice that could adapt to the peculiarities of a town or region. In her view divorce could provide an avenue of escape for a woman trapped in the stultifying environment of an unsatisfactory marriage. Fatma Aliye’s interpretation of the divorce options permitted women in Islam is in keeping with her commitment to expanding the choices for women to enhance their status in society.

Veiling

The subject of veiling (tesettür) kindled a fierce public dialogue in the late Ottoman period, not unlike the one that continues today. Fatma Aliye addresses the provocative issue in her introduction and in her second and third dialogues. In her introduction she declares:

According to the Sharia, while it is incumbent upon women to cover their hair, they are not to veil their faces. However, a group of our women reverse these instructions. They veil their faces and leave their hair uncovered. In short, we have no middle. It is as if we do not know which side to take. Nevertheless, excess and deficiency in everything is bad. It is necessary to be moderate in every circumstance. (The best of things is its middle.)

In the second muhavere, Madame R states that she has seen Muslim women fully covered while walking in the street. She inquires about the level of veiling Islam

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124 “Kadın mai feraceyi giydiği gibi boş düşecek diye bir mukavele!” Ibid., 216.

requires. The narrator responds that it is sufficient to cover the hair. She declares that because a woman’s hair is a jewel, it is to be hidden from the male gaze, but she argues that Islam never demands that a woman cover her face. She categorizes Muslim women who do not cover their hair as sinners (günahkâr).

Fatma Aliye saw the headscarf as a directive of Islam, and thus she covered her own hair. However, she was photographed later in life with her hair uncovered. Indeed, her image on the fifty-lira bill in circulation is one in which she is not wearing a headscarf. While the story is difficult to corroborate, Fatma Barbarosoğlu reports that Aliye received a photographer with a headscarf on but took her headscarf off before he took a photo of her.¹²⁶

No survey data are available, however, to assess public opinion at the time to verify if she spoke, as she believed she did on polygyny, for Turkish women on this issue. Representing what she considered to be in the interests of women was important to Aliye who, no doubt, believed she championed the position that benefited women within the confines of Islam.

Ottoman and European Dress

The opening scene of the third muhavere features the narrator and two friends, S Hanım and N Hanım, discussing fashion. In the tableau, S Hanım is the embodiment of the alafranga lifestyle: educated by an English governess, fluent in English, and well-informed of the latest European fashions. The more traditionally-minded N Hanım has a

penchant for *alaturka* dress. Yet, despite her disregard for European fashions, she is obliged to dress in modern styles for certain events, like weddings and social functions.

Although S Hanım adores European fashion, she complains that she is not able to get used to the suffocating corset. When the narrator suggests she abandon the uncomfortable girdle, S Hanım cries that she will have no form without one. Islamic customs stipulate that women’s dress should conceal their shapes, and S Hanım bemoans the loose-fitting dress of the *alaturka* style. The narrator directs her attention to Ahmed Midhat’s *Musahabet-i Leyliye*, which discusses the corset. Midhat Efendi writes that if a woman desires a highly esteemed or grand life (ömr-i aziz) she should not wear the corset, but if she desires a delightful life (ömr-i leziz) then she should wear it.127 Findley argues that a woman’s choice between European and Islamic dress differs from the “(male) Ottoman constitutionalists’ night-and-day polarity of freedom versus despotism. Implicitly, hers is a choice between the demands of patriarchy European-style and those of patriarchy Islamic-style.”128

The narrator remains neutral as S and N Hanım quibble over the advantages of the *alafranga* and *alaturka* lifestyles. She is a liminal figure who acknowledges the benefits of both. In this discussion, we see how Fatma Aliye challenged the mores of elite Ottoman society. She used the European template at times to argue for change in the status of Ottoman women. Yet she recognized and valued the traditional aspects of society. Her stance on European versus Ottoman dress was a reflection of her ties to both lifestyles.

Much to S Hanım’s chagrin, the European ladies want the women of the house to receive them in *alaturka* dress. S Hanım hesitates to meet the European ladies in this garb. “I feel ashamed to go out like this,” she whispers. N Hanım quickly replies, “Then don’t go out, Miss!”¹²⁹ In the end, S Hanım’s desire to meet with the European ladies wins out.

Nevertheless, the European ladies are displeased with their hosts’ attire. They reiterate their wish to view Turkish-style dress. When asked what they perceive to be Turkish style, the ladies respond, “A short jacket that must be embroidered with silver, a thin shirt, and embroidered baggy trousers (*şalvar*).”¹³⁰ The narrator pulls out an album and shows a picture of a woman clad in the attire the European women were expecting. The narrator declares that no Turkish Muslim woman would ever wear this dress. She reveals that the woman in the photograph is actually a Christian woman who is posing in inauthentic, exoticized clothing. Her *kaffiyeh* is Arabian, and her vest and *şalvar* are Albanian. Aliye notes that the woman’s hair is even swept up in a European style. Ottoman women’s dress differed from the Orientalist image pervasive in European society.

Aliye dedicates much of the third *muhavere* to fashion, as it offered a modicum of choice for women and was the physical manifestation of a woman’s ideological leanings. With S and N Hanıms, we see that their dress is reflective of their lifestyles. It served as a statement of their position in the culture wars of the late Ottoman period. However, they were still restrained by patriarchal modes of clothing. The corset was just as

restrictive as the veil, and those who wore European dress still were required to wear the face veil in public. It was not as simple as a strict demarcation between Ottoman and European dress.

Fatma Aliye deals with fashion in the third muhavere in a delicate manner. She acknowledges S Hanım’s dress and perfection but also gives notice to N Hanım’s more traditional dress. Nora Şeni suggests that Fatma Aliye tried “to justify herself in the eyes of the West while at the same time tracing the narrow path fraught with the ambiguities between the contemporary modernist position and respect for tradition.”

While Fatma Aliye writes of the exchange between the two friends in a comic manner, the issue of fashion reflected cultural anxieties, which were to grow even more pronounced over time. In her essay on the satirical press of the Young Turk period, Palmira Brummett writes of the contested space costume and dress occupied. She notes, “Paris fashion became an easy way to suggest luxury, frivolity, and a dearth of patriotic spirit.”

While Fatma Aliye did not envision Europe as an arcadia of women’s rights, she was concerned with presenting a good image to visiting European ladies and gaining their favor. In so doing, Aliye could become an even more effective ambassadress for the Ottoman Empire.

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Marital Duties

The third conversation continues with a glimpse into the wife’s obligations in a marriage. The narrator dismisses her visitors’ impression that Turkish women are secluded, in essence prisoners to their husbands. The younger Mademoiselle tells Aliye, “We have heard that all Turkish women were very fat,”¹³³ due to their seclusion. She replies that Turkish women are not inert and corpulent as the visitors presume, but rather are allowed to venture out of the confines of the household whenever they desire.

The other sister remarks that in Turkish society “men use women like servants.”¹³⁴ In response the narrator explains, “In our society household duties are the responsibility of wives and maintenance is the responsibility of the man.”¹³⁵ She contends that this is a universal duty and not peculiar to Turkish culture. However, she claims that these duties fall more heavily on Christian women. Muslim women are accorded more freedom and rights, in the narrator’s view.

Aliye maintained that Islamic law accorded women rights in marriage. She writes that Christianity demands that a wife’s livelihood depends on her husband and that she be wholly devoted to him. In this case, if a husband goes anywhere, he can take his wife by force. Fatma Aliye questioned polygynous marriage, but she did not advocate for a redefinition of women’s roles in matrimony. That cause would have to wait for another century to become part of public discourse.

¹³³ “Bizde işitmiş ettik ki türk kadınlarının hepsi gayet şişman olurmuş.” Nisvân-ı İslâm, 253.
¹³⁴ “...kadınları erkekler hizmetçi gibi kullanılmış.” Ibid., 249
¹³⁵ “Bizde hane idaresi zevcelerin, infâki erkeklerin vazifesidir.” Ibid.
Education

While Aliye does not make an explicit plea for women’s education in the text, her admiration of Mme. R in the second *muhavere* brings into focus her attitudes towards education. Mme. R is a very learned woman who has been educated by her father in topics ranging from languages and religion to the “hard” sciences. Following the *iftar*, Mme. R asks the narrator if she has any knowledge of astronomy. When the narrator responds in the negative, the Englishwoman describes the constellations and planets in great detail. She then turns her attention to more terrestrial matters with a discussion of plants and minerals.

Mme. R fears that her scientific discussion may seem boring, but the narrator is fascinated. The narrator says, “Even though I so wanted to thank you for your knowledge and for what I have acquired of your beautiful words and wisdom this evening, I didn’t dare cut you off.”¹³⁶ When Mme. R leaves, the narrator reflects on the intellectually stimulating conversation they shared and says that meeting someone with such an intellect was a pleasure.

The debates in Ottoman society not only dealt with whether women should be educated or not but also with what type of education they should have. In an article for *Mehâsin*, Zehra Hanım wrote:

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A woman’s knowledge must not increase to such a degree that she can use mathematics to calculate the distance between far-away stars. The high sciences, which even most men cannot understand, would be too dry for women.\textsuperscript{137}

With the character of Mme. R, Aliye shows that women are intellectually capable of learning astronomy. Furthermore, she shows that traditionally masculine subjects were not defeminizing. At the beginning of the \textit{muhavere}, Aliye comments that she has received a letter from a woman requesting a discussion of philosophy and the religious sciences. She reflects, “I had inferred from the letter that this woman was an aged philosopher. But the woman I saw standing across from me was around thirty years old and extremely beautiful.”\textsuperscript{138} Aliye emphasizes Mme. R’s feminine beauty while at the same time stressing her erudition.

Aliye also entertains a discussion of education in the third \textit{muhavere}. The women discuss cultural and material exchanges between the East and West. Aliye comments, “Science and education and industry are necessary to every civilization.”\textsuperscript{139} She does not explicate women’s roles within education, but from her own education and her admiration of Mme. R, it is evident that she is supportive of expanding educational opportunities for women.

\textsuperscript{138} “Şahib-i mektubun rivayetinden iktibas eyledigiime gore karisma salhurde bir feylesof madam cikacagi zanninda bulunmus iken otuz yasinda kadar, gayet husna bir madami karsimda gordum.” Nisvân-i İslâm, 74.
\textsuperscript{139} “Ulum ve maarif ve sanayi hep medeniyet ile lazim ve melzum gibidir.” \textit{Ibid.}, 263.
Concluding Remarks

*Nisvân-i İslâm* presented domestic issues in a publicly circulating text. In the monograph Fatma Aliye’s role as a pioneer in reshaping public discourse is evident. She embraced the newly configured public sphere as a space in which to promote positions aimed at improving the role of women in society. Fatma Aliye challenged patriarchal structures with the use of Islam as a corroborating agent. Given the era in which she was writing, it is not surprising that she used Islamic precepts to underscore her arguments for women’s rights. If she had not done so, her work likely would not have been published. While we cannot know the depths of her belief that Islam provided the necessary conditions for women’s education and progress, promotion of those beliefs was a necessary condition for the publication of her work.

Aliye was well versed in Islamic history and practices. *Nisvân-i İslâm* clearly displays her extensive knowledge of Islam and the key figures of early Islamic history. She provides a wealth of information on the Prophet’s wives. Aliye’s knowledge of female characters is evident in her other writings as well. In a column for *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazette*, Aliye writes, “Although I wrote a biography of Madame [Mary Wortley] Montagu, I became aware of the need to write a biography on one of the famous women in Islam.”[^140]

women could operate at the intersection of Islam and modernity. In making these women conspicuous, she sought to bring women to the forefront and make them role models for other women. She clearly believed that one had to look within society and Islam to answer the “woman question.”

In the end, Fatma Aliye introduced provocative themes into the society that both created her and frustrated her. With *Nisvân-ı İslâm*, she brought issues concerning women into the privately-informed public sphere. She effectively collapsed the public and private and carved out a space for women’s voices to be heard. Aliye utilized this new arena to give voice to criticisms of the patriarchal state. It is important to note the date of *Nisvân-ı İslâm*’s publication. Aliye was breaching the barriers of the seemingly impermeable domestic and public spheres seventeen years before the Young Turk Revolution. While the Young Turks did not liberate women, they dismantled many of the traditional structures of Ottoman society. Aliye was also writing at a time of much state intervention in the press. She was linked to the Palace as well, leaving her little room to explicitly criticize the Ottoman state. Duben and Behar maintain, “During the Hamidian years, when political oppression and censorship did not permit an analysis of the body politic, the family became a kind of displacement for the frustrations and anger felt by many about society at large.”

Aliye exploited this vulnerability in the censorship apparatus to expose what was viewed traditionally as familial problems. The

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141 The biographical genre was often used to articulate female space within the new construct of modernity. For study of the biographical genre in the Egyptian context see Marilyn Booth’s *May Her Likes be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politics in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
heretofore private issues she raised reverberated profoundly throughout the public sphere. Viewed within these strictures, *Nisvân-ı İslâm* is a remarkably provocative piece.

Although *Nisvân-ı İslâm* was an important text in its time, it fell into the abyss of history. The language reform of 1928 rendered Aliye’s works unintelligible for the Turkish public. Her name was in a sense expunged from the historical record. Her work, to those who were aware of it, seemed to encapsulate a period fixed in history that had no salience to the Republican era. When the binaries of secularist-versus-Islamist and Turkist-versus-Ottomanist are removed, a more clearly focused image emerges. Her works were representative of debates in late Ottoman society, but the themes she addressed continued to be salient in the formation of the Turkish Republic. The following chapter will reveal the congruence between her themes and ideas and those espoused by the Republic.
CHAPTER 4

Fatma Aliye and the Republic

This chapter underscores the themes from Nisvân-ı İslâm that were made manifest in the new Republic. The chapter begins by discussing the unwarranted claims currently lodged against Fatma Aliye. It then exonerates her from the false accusations that she was opposed to the Republic and many of its policies affecting women by showing the congruity between the language accompanying the Kemalist reforms and her work. The chapter focuses primarily on the Turkish Civil Code of 1926, as this document has long been heralded as the watershed moment for women’s rights. The themes Aliye introduced in her work are present in the reformist language employed by the Republic’s founders. This chapter does not argue for a direct causal link between Nisvân-ı İslâm and the Republic’s reforms. Indeed a significant interval separated the publication of Aliye’s monograph and the promulgation of these reforms. Intervening factors surely influenced the architects of the Republic. Instead, this chapter aims to show that Fatma Aliye envisioned an enlarged scope of rights for women in Nisvân-ı İslâm and was instrumental in folding these issues into the public discourse. Fatma Aliye, among others, provided a vocabulary that the architects of the Republic could draw upon to craft their reforms that led to enhanced, if still limited, rights for women.
False perceptions

Fatma Aliye has suffered an ignominious fate in historiography and the Turkish consciousness. Although the fifty-lira Turkish banknote issued in 2009 helped to generate interest in her life, Fatma Aliye’s introduction to modern society was not without protest. Some claimed Aliye was an Islamist; a campaign was launched to expunge her from the banknotes. The protest spread to social media; a Facebook group titled “We don’t want this woman, an enemy of Atatürk, on our banknotes,” launched a vitriolic campaign against Aliye. One member of the group inveighed against her presence on the bill, stating, “Whenever I withdraw money from an ATM, if I get a TL 50 bill, I become elated because it gives me the opportunity to walk into a bank and immediately demand to exchange it for other banknotes.”

Media outlets outside of Turkey picked up the story. The Guardian quotes a member of the pro-Atatürk Kemalists Thought Association stating that Aliye’s inclusion was part of an Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) agenda, whereby “the next step will be to introduce gradually more conservative figures until you get people who negate the values of the Republic.” Other critics questioned why the more famous author Halide Edip was not chosen.

Amidst this din, journalists and historians began to reassess Fatma Aliye’s representation as an adversary to the Republic. Aliye’s new visibility brought the

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scholarly debate surrounding Ottoman feminism into public view. As feminist literature continues to eschew the androcentric discourse that accompanies discussions of Atatürk’s reforms, more opportunities arise to locate the roots of women’s rights in an Ottoman setting. By dismantling the artificial barrier between the Ottoman and Republican periods, this scholarship can demonstrate how the Turkish Republic adopted and expanded many norms from the empire, albeit under a secular guise. Aliye was not an enemy of the Republic. In fact, she created demands for change in Ottoman society, and the architects of the Republic employed many of these appeals in the legal arena.

Ottoman Reform

The Ottoman state did not articulate legislation on gender relations, especially in the realm of the family, as family law was the purview of the sharia courts and their Jewish and Christian cognates. The CUP government initiated the process of codifying family law across religious lines. In 1915 two imperial edicts (irade) were promulgated, which granted women the right to sue for divorce in cases of desertion or of a husband’s debilitating disease such as leprosy or venereal disease, that stunted conjugal relations.145 Two years later, the CUP issued its first and only systematic attempt to codify family law. The 1917 Family Law (Hukûk-ı Aile Karannamesi) was an amalgam of different Islamic precepts culled from the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence.146 It, however, was

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145 John L. Esposito, Women in Muslim Family Law (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982), 53.
not a purely Islamic document, as it included provisions from Christian, Jewish, and secular European law as well.\(^{147}\)

The Family Law included the first attempt to legally curtail polygyny; Article 38 stipulated that a woman had the right to forbid her husband from taking a second wife.\(^{148}\) The law additionally mandated a higher marriage age, seventeen for girls and eighteen for boys. Any couple younger than the legal marriage age was required to obtain the permission of the judge, and marriage between a girl younger than ten and a boy younger than twelve was prohibited.\(^{149}\) The law also granted women the right to initiate divorce.\(^{150}\)

The Family Law not only included provisions from religious and secular origins, but also codified practices peculiar to the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman women included certain stipulations in their marriage contracts. As noted previously the narrator in *Nisvân-ı İslâm* informs her friends about divorce practices in Antakya: Antakyan women stipulate in their marriage contracts that they only need to put on a *ferace* to divorce their husbands. Nicole van Os reveals that the possibility of making stipulations like the Antakyan case was codified in the Family Law.\(^{151}\)

Although the Family Law appeared to codify gains for women, it was poorly written and implemented. According to van Os, the decree “left a lot to be worked out by the persons involved. Details such as exact procedures to be followed or the implications


\(^{148}\) Duben and Behar, *Istanbul Households*, 150.

\(^{149}\) Martykánová, “Matachin Sharia and ‘Governmentality’,” 169.

\(^{150}\) Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 418.

when one failed to follow the rules laid out in the decree were lacking.” The Family Law was replete with contradictions and unclear language. It was also deeply unpopular; Islamists criticized the secular provisions of the law, secularists noted the “ecclesiastical and customary provisions,” and non-Muslims resented the law. It was declared void in June 1919 during the Allied occupation of Istanbul.

İlber Ortaylı states that the law was “far from perfect,” but its importance stemmed from the fact that “it laid much of the groundwork for the Republican Civil Code of 1926.” The new Civil Code built upon the tentative scaffolding the Family Law had erected; unlike its predecessor, both the promulgation and, to some extent, the reception of the Civil Code were a success.

The Turkish Civil Code

The 1926 Civil Code, long held to be a transplant of the 1907 Swiss model, has been hailed as the linchpin of the symbiosis between feminism and nationalism. It allegedly folded women into the fabric of the nation-state and legislated gender parity. Kemalist feminists cite the clauses on family law as the mechanisms that wrenched women from the clutches of the restrictive norms and laws of the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, Halide Edip, reflecting on the Code four years after its promulgation, observed, “It was perhaps one of the two most significant and important changes that have taken place during the

152 Ibid.
153 Berkes, The Development of Secularism in Turkey, 417.
154 Martykánová, Matching Sharia and ‘Governmentality’,” 170.
dictatorship.” Edip claimed that the new Civil Code emancipated women and “brought the [women’s] movement to its highest and historically its most important stage.”

Foreign commentators also heralded the Code. The foreign press framed the Code as the product of an enlightened elite attempting to civilize a backward populace. An article in the *Washington Post* contained the byline “Turks fill their harem before law ends polygamy,” and included an interview with a Turkish man who declared, “Evil days have come to this land.” Other observers focused on the female reception of the Civil Code. Rose Lee in the *New York Times* applauded the Code but remarked:

> For the time being the mass of Turkish women are enjoying as much liberty as they can handle, and might well be embarrassed by an extension of their rights. From the feminine angle, as from every other, this is an Era of Reconstruction in Turkey. The Woman Question is only a question of how swiftly the women can take practical advantage of the freedom proclaimed by the government.

It is easy to see why contemporary observers heaped approbation upon the Code. The Civil Code outlawed polygyny, officially sanctioned Western-style civil marriage ceremonies over Islamic ceremonies, gave women inheritance rights equal to men’s, outlawed unilateral divorce, and permitted marriage between members of different

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157 Ibid., 229.
Indeed, the Code continued to be praised and remained remarkably untouched by criticism for many years after its promulgation.

The Civil Code was celebrated as a secular document that freed women from the shackles of Ottoman tyranny and Islamic despotism. Recent studies by Yeşim Arat, Ruth Miller, and Umut Özsü, however, have challenged the notion that the chapter on Family Law eschewed Islamic precedents and embraced strictly European legal values. Arat maintains that the document was a product of its time and reified the patriarchal norms of society. Miller argues that the document is in fact a compromise between Ottoman and Islamic legal values and the Swiss articles that were introduced in the document. She reveals a number of discrepancies between the Swiss and Turkish codes. Furthermore, she shows that the Turkish code lifted parts of the 1917 Ottoman Family Law, which framed its codification of family law in Islamic terms.

Özsü and Miller both argue that the authors of the Code preserved elements of “traditional” practices to make it more palatable to the public. The 1917 Family Law’s tenure was short, as it provoked outrage. Miller contends that the architects used the Civil Code “to place Turkey conceptually and definitionally within ‘the great civilized familial bloc,’ while producing a text which would cause as little popular discontent as possible and interfere as little as possible with the actual lives of the people.” Özsü additionally claims that the authors of the Law retained elements of Ottoman and Islamic

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162 Ruth A. Miller, "The Ottoman and Islamic Substratum of Turkey's Swiss Civil Code", *Journal of Islamic Studies* 11, no. 3 (2000), 361.
163 Ibid., 356-7.
legal norms that they thought were important enough “to be strategically valuable for maintaining those practices which they saw as either resistant to immediate eradication or instrumentally relevant to their ‘civilizing mission.’”

The Turkish Civil Code acted to codify many Ottoman and Islamic legal articles beneath the patina of European and secular language. It was not a mere appropriation of the Swiss Code but rather a synthesis of secular articles with Ottoman and Islamic legal values that did not disappear with the end of the empire. By acknowledging the presence of Ottoman and Islamic ideas in a seemingly secular and European document, the historical antecedents of the Republican reforms can be traced outside of a secular framework. Conservatives and those who engaged with reformist currents in an Islamic context had introduced a vocabulary upon which the architects of the nation-state drew.

As demonstrated in Chapter 3, Fatma Aliye was a prominent actor in the debates of the fin de siècle empire. She offered her own vision of women’s space, status, and agency in the context of a patriarchal and conservative society. She was an established female voice in the arena of claim-making and debate, and she brought issues germane to women into the public domain. The topics she treats in Nisvân-ı İslâm were not peculiar to Hamidian society but continued to have resonance in the Young Turk era and into the early years of the Republic.

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164 Özsu, “Receiving’ the Swiss Civil Code,” 80.
Slavery

Female slavery lingered into the twilight of the Ottoman Empire even as abolitionist legislation was introduced. Although female slavery held out longer than any other type of slavery, Toledano asserts, “With the end of empire and the dissolution of the imperial household, it too had to go.”\textsuperscript{165} Although instances of female slavery most likely persisted, the issue was no longer an important component of debate as it had been in the late empire.

Aliye did not align her defense of slavery with the health of the empire. She instead wrote about it as a potentially beneficial institution for women. In her account, girls are raised in a household, are manumitted, and are set up in a new life. She repeatedly emphasizes the humaneness and charitable nature of the institution. In her novel \textit{Muhâzarât} she reveals that slavery can present women with a better life than that experienced by some who are imprisoned in bad marriages. By placing slavery over marriage in some cases, she exposed the realities of marriage in Ottoman society. She reckoned that slavery could provide women with a pathway to secure a better life, a path that was denied to a woman in an unsuitable marriage.

While Fatma Aliye’s defense of slavery might seem to be out of step with the new order, it represented her attempt to seek out avenues for women to expand their roles within the strictures of an Islamic society. The tightrope she walked to fashion additional opportunities for women, while adhering to Islamic values, was one traversed by the framers of the 1926 Code as well.

\textsuperscript{165} Toledano, “Ottoman Concepts of Slavery in the Period of Reform,” 61.
Marriage

As Duben and Behar indicate in their demographic study, instances of polygyny in Istanbul were minimal. They state:

The outcry against polygyny during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Istanbul was part of a larger ideological battle for egalitarian gender relations and a modern way of life; it probably had little effect on what were rather low polygyny rates even at the beginning of the period.  

Fatma Aliye’s stance on polygyny reflected the tenor of her society. Debates on polygyny and public support for monogamous marriages stretched back into the Ottoman period. The Republican reforms codified the final step in cementing the societal aversion to polygyny.

As demonstrated above, the Family Law limited polygynous unions, but the decree was short-lived. The nation-state pursued a course of intervention vis-à-vis the family, and new marriage procedures occupied an important space in the Republican Civil Code. Duben and Behar reveal that the first drafts of the Civil Code in 1924-5 included more stringent clauses against polygyny than those found in the 1917 Family Law. The final version of the Code in 1926 made polygyny illegal. Although rates of polygyny were low in Istanbul and other urban centers, “The symbolic value of the Code was very great, as it put the official stamp of legitimization on the direction family life had been taking over the previous fifty years or so.”

\[166\] Duben and Behar, *Istanbul Households*, 158.
Fatma Aliye was not alone in her disapproval of polygyny, but she was instrumental in bringing a female perspective to the public discourse. She problematized the Islamic defense of polygyny, and she was the first woman to engage in a polemical debate with a member of the religious establishment. Her views on polygyny were echoed in the reforms of those who sought to put distance between themselves and the earlier Ottoman period.

**Divorce**

Both the Swiss and Turkish Civil Codes allowed for six considerations for divorce: adultery, grievous insult, insult to honor, abandonment, mental illness, and undetermined causes.\(^{169}\) Ruth Miller reveals that the translators of the Swiss Code altered three of these articles in minor ways: adultery, grievous insult, and abandonment.\(^{170}\) Miller notes the Turkish Code most drastically altered the notion of abandonment, by expanding its meaning and stipulating a shorter waiting period than the Swiss Code. The waiting period in the Turkish Code was derived from Islamic law.\(^{171}\) Miller highlights the Code’s Islamic stance on alimony as another indicator of the persistence of the old order.\(^{172}\) Fatma Aliye, both a beneficiary and a critic of the old order, cloaked her defense of divorce in Islamic terms. Her rhetoric and that of the reformers, who embraced secularism, was similar despite the significant passage of time between her work dealing with divorce and the adoption of the Code.

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\(^{169}\) Miller, “The Ottoman and Islamic Substratum of Turkey's Swiss Civil Code,” 350.


Property Rights

Yeşim Arat argues that the reforms proved deleterious for women’s property rights. She asserts:

Men earned income and could buy property in their own name with their income. However, women’s labor at home, which made it possible for men to earn money outside the house, was not paid and not recognized in monetary terms. Particularly in cases of divorce, women were left without income, property, and protection.”

Arat additionally notes that the Code continued to identify the man as the head of the family and contained stipulations about property rights that actually worked against women. She states, “This formal equality in the ownership of property worked against women, because most women were homemakers who could not earn the money necessary to acquire property.”

In Nisvân-i İslâm, Fatma Aliye argues that Islam provides women with property rights. In clauses pertaining to property rights, the Turkish Civil Code, however, echoes its Swiss progenitor without infusing any of the provisions for women mandated by Islam. On this issue, Fatma Aliye and the reformers did not speak the same language.

Veiling

Tesettür (veiling) was a provocative issue in the early Republic. Atatürk launched an attack on religious symbols and directed some harsh criticism toward the veil. He once

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174 Ibid.
averred, “But friends, our women have minds too […] Let them show their faces to the world, and see it with their eyes.” In another speech he declared,

In some places I have seen women who put a piece of a cloth or a towel or something like it over their heads to hide their faces, and who turn their backs or huddle themselves on the ground when a man passes by. What are the meaning and sense of this behavior? Gentleman, can the mothers and daughters of a civilized nation adopt this strange manner, this barbarous posture? It is a spectacle that makes the nation an object of ridicule. It must be remedied at once.

The Republican view of the face veil cast tesettür as antithetical to nation-building. By imputing barbarism to the veil, Atatürk rhetorically excluded veiled women from the “civilized” Turkish state. He also impugned veiled women’s femininity by casting aspersions on their ability to be good mothers and daughters. However, while the Republic used highly inflammatory rhetoric to discourage tesettür, the veil was never banned. Nermin Abadan-Unat states, “Whereas the turban and fez were outlawed by the Hat Law (No. 671-25.11.1925), only local ordinances were directed against the veil.”

Fatma Aliye supported the headscarf but was against full veiling. She saw the face veil as the product of cultural and societal modalities. Grace Ellison, an English traveler and journalist, praised Aliye’s feminist activism. However, in her 1915 book, she commented:

But feminist though she is, she strongly opposes any attempt to modify the veil, not because the veil has to her a religious meaning, but to her it is one of the traditions of her race, and therefore sacred. No woman in Turkey has made a

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175 Quoted in Mango, Atatürk, 434.
more thorough study of the Koran than she, and I am grateful to her for the pleasant moments spent in her “real Turkish” house whilst she has explained to me the position of women in Islam.\textsuperscript{178}

Ellison’s claims are incongruent with the arguments Aliye espouses in \textit{Nisvân-ı İslâm}. Aliye privileges religion over cultural customs or traditions. In the text, Aliye never demands the abolition of the face veil, but she explicitly states that the garment lay outside the domain of Islam and was to be discouraged. As evidenced in Chapter 3, Aliye could not advocate for anything that was prohibited under the Hamidian regime.

\textbf{Dress}

The Kemalist elites were concerned with the Republic’s portrayal on a global stage. Dress served as an image they could project to the outside world as a marker of Turkey’s successful encounter with Westernization. Dress figured prominently in the Western Orientalist imagination of the Turkish woman, oscillating between odalisques in seductive dress and faceless figures fading into darkness in \textit{çarşafès}. The spread of \textit{alafranga} costume in late Ottoman society could not diminish this ingrained Orientalism. A 1911 article from \textit{The Washington Post} announced, “Goo-Goo Eyes in the Harem: Turkish Women Learn Flirting After Adopting Modern Dress.”\textsuperscript{179} The Republic coupled a domestic discourse with modern attire in order to present a favorable image of the new Turkish woman.

\textsuperscript{178} Grace Ellison, \textit{An Englishwoman in a Turkish Harem} (London: Methuen, 1915), 109-10.

Atatürk was calculating in his self-presentation. His sartorial penchant for sharp suits, cravats, and top hats reflected his Western orientation. The Republic banned the fez and the turban, but it never issued any cognate legislation for women’s dress. Nevertheless, the reformists emphasized dress that would signify women’s roles as mothers. The nation-state sought to bring a chaste, modest, and modern image of the new Turkish woman to the world stage. Turkish women who adopted more modern clothes could now imagine themselves as members of the nation-state. The onus still fell upon women, however, to present a chaste image. They had to balance both tradition and Western conduct.

Fatma Aliye adopts a synthetic stance on alaturka and alafranga dress in Nisvân-ı İslâm. Women enjoyed a choice with clothing that they could not find in other areas of society. However, Aliye strikes down the notion of the bipolar identities of alaturka and alafranga, as a woman who dressed herself in European fashions still had to cover her hair.

With their reforms, the Kemalist elite sought to crystallize a hegemonic femininity, which was maternal and chaste, within the framework of a patriarchal state. Aliye showed how women used dress as a mode of expression in the Ottoman era, but she noted the patriarchal constructs that undergirded both styles. The issue of dress is not so much a topic on which Aliye created demands for a shift in views but rather an instance in which she shows the imbrications between Ottoman-Islamic and European-secular values. Despite their rhetoric extolling the modern, Europeanized woman, the Turkish elite, and Fatma Aliye, continued to promote an image of a woman as simultaneously modern and traditional.
Marital Duties

Even those who admire the Republican reforms concede that the Civil Code reinforced the patriarchal model of family.\textsuperscript{180} Arat notes that the Code assumed women’s dependence on men. The Code cast the wife as the husband’s helper, where men were the primary breadwinners. Arat also notes that the Code gave fathers the last word in questions of guardianship of children.\textsuperscript{181}

The language in the Code was congruent with Aliye’s portrait of marital life. She, too, ascribed the maintenance of the woman to the husband. The Civil Code, however, provided less flexibility than the image of marriage Aliye produced in her work. She emphasizes a symbiotic relationship in marriage, whereby wife and husband work together. Furthermore, she writes that a husband can never forcibly move his wife. With the elision of Islamic precepts, the Code did not give the protection that Aliye believed was important for family dynamics.

Feminists have claimed that the legal subordination of women’s position in the family in the 1926 Civil Code contributed to serious violations of women’s human rights. The husband enjoyed a position of absolute legal supremacy in the family, with the legally sanctioned authority to make choices over domicile, children, and property.

Women would have to wait until October 2001 and the promulgation of the new Civil Code for a redefinition of marital roles. Article 41 of the Constitution was amended

\textsuperscript{180} See Nermin Abadan-Unat, “The Modernization of Turkish Women.”
\textsuperscript{181} Arat, Women's Rights and Islam in Turkish Politics,” 239.
to read, “The family is the foundation of Turkish society and is based on equality between spouses.”

**Education**

The architects of the Turkish Republic echoed Fatma Aliye’s sentiments concerning education. Atatürk adopted pro-education rhetoric often. He aligned women’s education with modernization and declared, “If knowledge and technology are necessary for our society, both our men and women have to acquire them equally.” There were discrepancies, however, between this rhetoric and implementation. In reality, the number of schools for girls remained a fraction of the number of schools for boys, and the mandate of primary education was not applied to girls in more rural corners of society.

The constitution of 1924 established compulsory education for all children between seven and twelve years old. The Republican education bill brought secularized education under governmental control and made provision for equal educational opportunities for both sexes. Women took advantage of the new opportunities presented to them. The Republican reforms are often heralded as giving a new, revitalized life to the Turkish people, but they did not reach all strata of society. In fact, women’s education remained class-bound, with a very uneven distribution of the benefits of reform.

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Fatma Aliye’s Legacy

While Aliye’s Islamic rhetoric seems at first antithetical to the goals of Turkish statecraft, a more critical analysis of the Republican reforms offers another story. As evidenced in the 1926 Civil Code, the Republic “emancipated” women with legal articles that synthesized European and secular mores with Ottoman and Islamic values. The Kemalist elite was presented with a vocabulary they could draw upon to write and frame these reforms. They were able to utilize language that was introduced by Fatma Aliye and other “conservatives” who participated in social engineering of an earlier era. Aliye’s arguments were connected to a larger, over-arching web of ideology that helped to shape the Kemalist reforms.

Grace Ellison was well acquainted with Fatma Aliye and observed Aliye’s attempts to reconcile change and tradition. In *An Englishwoman in a Turkish Harem*, she comments,

Fâtimâ Alié is a feminist. She is strongly in favour of women leading an active, useful life, and working at a profession if necessary, but she is decidedly opposed to the adoption of European fashions in literary style, as well as in clothing and furniture. To her the picturesque stuffs of Broussa are worth more than all the wares in shops of Paris put together, and to her neat compromise between a dressing-gown and a dress which covers her uncorseted form and to her easy, if not elegant, slippers, she will remain faithful to the end of her days.\(^{186}\)

Aliye did not play a starring role in the Republic’s theater of reform, but her work nevertheless deserves credit for creating the necessary conditions for reform to occur. She challenged the patriarchal society and envisioned higher status for women in the

public arena. In the context of the Hamidian regime, Aliye had to tread the line between tradition and change and did so with deft balance. Carter Findley notes that the Young Turk Revolution helped to dismantle the traditional structures that had forced Aliye to balance this tradition and change. He concludes that Aliye herself had something to do with the new order that emerged in the Young Turk era. Although many factors and inputs would help to shape the policies of the nascent Turkish nation-state, Aliye’s contributions to the public discourse continued to have resonance in the new regime.

Aliye additionally challenged the biases Ottoman society had towards women and demonstrated that women were intellectually capable of engaging in polemics and augmenting the public discourse. By first signing her translation “Bir Kadının” and later signing her name to her works, Fatma Aliye provided the prototype for other women to speak in public. Women who entered into the public theater of debate in the Second Constitutional Period were much indebted to her. Indeed, in the case of Halide Edip, Pelin Başıci reasons, “Her predecessors, particularly Fatma Aliye, unburdened her from the responsibility of being a trail-blazer as a female writer.”

The women whose public visibility increased in the Second Constitutional Period and into the early years of the Republic benefited from opportunities that had been denied to Aliye. Halide Edip’s life offers an interesting point of comparison. Edip was born in 1884, 22 years after Aliye. Her early life has many similarities to Aliye’s upbringing: Edip’s father was connected to the Palace, and she received private tutoring. She,

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however, was able to take advantage of new educational opportunities for women. Edip was the first Muslim young woman to complete her studies at the American College for Girls. In her memoirs, she reflects, “As a whole, college had a liberating effect upon me, giving me a much greater balance and opening up to me the possibility of a personal life with enjoyments of a much more varied kind.”

Edip and other women of her generation enjoyed a more systematized education than had been offered to Aliye. When the Young Turks staged their revolution in 1908, they sought to create a new climate that dismantled structures from the old order. The women who had more education did not have to balance tradition with change to the same extent as Aliye. While education may have been a liberating experience for these elite women, Aliye was instrumental in fashioning the platform that launched them towards fuller participation in society.

Returning to the definition posited by Miriam Cooke, feminism permits actors to remain positively focused on constructing new systems without ever having to say no to the old system. Fatma Aliye was caught between the push and pull of a new and an old system. She problematized gendered hierarchies and issues in Ottoman society without calling for a reversal of all societal structures. She aimed to enlarge women’s space in a patriarchal society and expand what was possible for them. With Nisvân-ı İslâm she speaks to the standing of women not simply within Ottoman society but within Islam in general.

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Conclusion

There was a patriarchal continuum between Ottoman and Republican society. The architects of Turkey pursued a policy of a corporatist state construction in which they produced synthetic legislation that balanced both secular and Islamic values. The Republic enhanced women’s rights by passing such legislation, but the sentiments behind the laws were not *sui generis*. By highlighting the Ottoman antecedents of Kemalist reform, we can coax out Ottoman actors and fill the lacunae of Turkish women’s history. Fatma Aliye’s work constitutes an important piece of the puzzle for understanding the hybrid nature of the reforms in the Republican period. Her commitment to the advancement of women within the parameters of an Islamic society provided a key intellectual linchpin for the reformers. They, while adopting a secular public posture, heard the echoes of the writings of a woman who embraced Islamic values. By weaving those values into the 1926 Code, the reformers found themselves indebted, consciously or unconsciously, to Fatma Aliye. Her pioneering efforts in opening up the privately-informed public sphere provided intellectual grist for their efforts to improve the role of women in Turkish society. Fatma Aliye’s contributions to the advancement of women surely are undervalued at fifty-liras.
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