

The Representation of 'the New Woman' in Kate Chopin's *the Awakening* and in Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil's *Aşk-ı Memnu* *Kate Chopin'in Uyanış ile Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil'in Aşk-ı Memnu Romanlarında "Yeni Kadın" Temsiliyeti*

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Abstract: Social changes take place when a culture is confronted with the influence of another culture which is more dominant or 'higher' with predetermined sets of values. In Kate Chopin's work, *The Awakening*, the Creole culture is changing due to the influence of the North (of America) and similarly in Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil's novel, *Aşk-ı Memnu*, Turkish culture is affected by the West (Europe). The results of these influences are observed best through women characters and conceptions about womanhood because in the 19th century women started contributing more and more to the socio-economic lives in their societies both in America and the Ottoman Empire. Two heroines of these novels, Edna and Bihter, do not conform to the norms of their society, they disobey the rules that have been arranged for them and eventually give up on their own lives. Both heroines represent the new type of woman or the 'New Woman', who seeks to set the rules of her own life and enjoys the same social freedom as men do. However, these women cannot manage the overwhelming social changes and eventually falter. The representations of the "New Woman" in both novels show that women who have sought their independence cannot go beyond the limitations set for them by society and they fail in asserting their individuality because of that very reason. The American and Ottoman societies in the 19th century are not ready yet and these women cannot go outside the norms. These novels of the same period with two very different settings put forward the same dilemma about the "New Woman" and how she tried but failed in the face of the conflicts arising from her choices. The aim of this article is to analyse how social, economic and political changes affect the conceptions about women and femininity, and how women characters struggle against the challenges they confront in contending for their freedom as the liberated "New Woman".

Keywords: New Woman, the 19th century Istanbul, Creole, Kate Chopin, Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil, Feminism.

Öz: Bir kültür, kendisinden daha baskın, 'daha yüksek' ve önceden belirlenmiş değer yargıları olan başka bir kültür ile karşılaştığında, toplumsal değişimler meydana gelir. Kate Chopin'in *Uyanış* isimli eserinde, Creole (Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin güneydeki Louisiana eyaletine ait, yerel bir kültür) kültürü,

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ABD'nin kuzeyinin etkisi altında değişime uğramış ve buna benzer bir şekilde, Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil'in *Aşk-ı Memnu* romanında Osmanlı-Türk kültürü, Batı'nın (Avrupa'nın) tesirine girmiştir. Bu etkilerin sonuçları, kadın karakterlerde ve kadınlıkla ilgili kavramlarda en iyi şekilde gözlemlenmektedir çünkü 19. yüzyılda hem Amerikan toplumunda hem de Osmanlı toplumunda kadınlar, sosyal ve ekonomik hayata giderek daha çok katkıda bulunmaya başlamışlardır. Söz konusu eserlerdeki ana kahraman olan kadın karakterler Edna ve Bihter, toplumsal normlara uymayarak kendilerine dayatılan kurallara karşı çıkmışlar fakat en sonunda intihara sürüklenmişlerdir. Bu iki kadın, kendi hayatlarının kurallarını kendileri koyan ve esasında erkeklerin sahip olduğu özgürlüklerle hareket eden "yeni kadın" tipini temsil etmektedirler. Ancak bu kadınlar, böylesine büyük toplumsal değişimler karşısında tutunamayıp kendi attıkları adımların sonucunda bozguna uğrarlar. Her iki romandaki "yeni kadın" temsili, özgürlüklerini arayan kadınların, toplumun kendilerine çektiği setlere takıldığını ve tam da bu sebepten kadınların, kendilerini ifade etmelerinin engellendiğini göstermektedir. 19. yüzyıldaki Amerikan ve Osmanlı toplumları, kadınlara bu imkânı verememektedir çünkü hazır değildirler ve kadınlar da toplumsal normların dışına çıkamazlar. Aynı dönemde yazılıp çok farklı arka planlara sahip olan bu iki roman, "yeni kadın" ile ilgili aynı ikilemi ortaya atmakta ve bu "yeni kadın"ların, hayatlarındaki çatışmalara yenildiklerini göstermektedir. Bu makalenin amacı; sosyal, siyasi ve ekonomik etkenlerin, kadınlar ve kadınlık ile ilgili kavramları nasıl etkilediğini ve söz konusu romanlardaki kadın karakterlerin, "yeni kadın"lar olarak özgürlüklerini ararken ne türlü zorluklarla karşılaştıkları incelemektir.

Keywords: Yeni Kadın, 19. Yüzyıl İstanbul, Creole, Kate Chopin, Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil, Feminizm.

Introduction

The 19th century sensationally witnessed many great changes in economic, cultural, and political aspects of life both in the West (Europe and America) and in parts of the world under the West's influence, such as the Ottoman Empire. Industrialisation, urbanisation, and the rise of the middle, or bourgeois class affected the dynamics of social and cultural life as well. Norms regarding how people should behave, what they think and feel about certain aspects of life such as love and family relationships, daily affairs, housing, work, and so on, all underwent important developments in this century. Women's role in society changed as well. They participated a lot more in social and economic matters and started to recognise their subservient positions in governing their own lives. Many women began to question their places in society and deduced that their submissive roles resulted from patriarchal rules, so they demanded to be educated, employed, and given equal rights as men were (Leuchtenburg, 1958: 159).

Novels depicting the lives of the middle-class women were prominent in both Western (European, American) cultures and other cultures that came under the influence of these such as Turkish culture. These novels highlighted the problems arising from the developments in society and many novelists, male or female, used women characters as their protagonists. The novels

analysed in this study, *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin and *Aşk-ı Memnu* by Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil, reflect the middle class struggles in two very different settings, Louisiana Creole and Ottoman Istanbul. In these novels, the heroines are the representatives of the rapidly changing cultures, with their non-conforming attitudes towards their social roles. For example, Edna Pontellier – the heroine of *The Awakening* – does not feel that being a good wife and mother should be the sole purpose of her life and essentially wants to experience life outside the domestic sphere. Also Bihter– the female protagonist of *Aşk-ı Memnu* – and other women in her family, who are called ‘Melih Bey Takımı’ (Melih Bey’s Clan), do not fit the Ottoman woman prototype in the society because of their promiscuity and their love for extravagance and luxury. The so-called Melih Bey Clan represents the new type of woman who is independent and seeks for the fulfilment of her desires. As a result, a different type of femininity emerges in these novels, which are the products of the uniqueness of their ages. In the 19th century, women already started to participate in life outside home and many women voiced their ideas about their basic rights such as voting and education. Beginning to leave the traditional mindset that had bound women to their homes, women realised that they could have needs and aspirations to lead their own lives, just as men could. As examples of their age, Edna and Bihter question their roles in their families and by committing adultery, they disobey the rules of society and its norms. Even though the society (American and Ottoman) still expected women to be chaste and complying to these norms, women’s opinions regarding these norms were changing. They assert their individuality in this way. They represent the “New Woman” who arose from the 19th century and its peculiar socio-economic conditions. Also, both novels were published in 1899, right at the turn of the century and this period is identified with the socio-political changes in both Louisiana Creole and Ottoman Istanbul communities. Chopin and Uşaklıgil, coming from vastly different parts of the world and with considerable differences in experience as Chopin, an American woman, and Uşaklıgil, an Ottoman man, handle a similar issue in their works: women who are oppressed by patriarchy and affected by the changes in their respective societies.

In both works, representation of women is dependent on the cultural background of the related setting and conservative society norms. Chopin and Uşaklıgil lived around the same time, during the preceding years of the First World War. Kate Chopin was one of the well-known feminist writers who gained a reputation after her death (although she never identified herself as a feminist). Her book was banned after its release in the 1890s in America (Heilman 2008: 101). During that period, Chopin adventurously dealt with very bold subjects such as adultery, race, and social class. Among the characters she depicted were women who could not resist temptation or went up against social norms defining the gender and identity of a person. Chopin handles such

issues by reflecting the conflicts that arose from the rapidly changing Creole society. In a completely different part of the world, novelist, and short story writer Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil depicts the developments of the Ottoman society. He drew characters who had difficulty in adapting themselves to the altered socio-economic conditions of their time. Although Uşaklıgil did not predominantly portray female protagonists like Chopin did, some of his heroines were noteworthy for their struggles against oppression. Usually in Uşaklıgil's novels and short stories, female characters are victimized by patriarchy and unable to change their conditions. However, in *Aşk-ı Memnu*, Bihter is a stronger female character who seeks her freedom, and she is much like Edna in *The Awakening* in this sense. The common point in both writers is their depiction of this feminine frailty and strength at the same time in one character, in the new type of woman. The "New Woman" arose out of the conditions that had set her coming. To better understand why Edna and Bihter can be considered as the examples of the "New Woman", it is important to define what that term means.

Women and the Concept of "New Woman" in the 19th Century USA

The term "New Woman" emerged during the last decade of the Victorian Era or Fin de siècle, an era that was described with adjectives such as "morbid, 'decadent', 'degenerate', 'neurotic'" (Cunningham, 1978: 1). The "New Woman" was a figure of controversy, much discussed by both men and women, and at first, she was mocked for her outspokenness and her ideas of freedom (2-3). Later the term came to define strong, independent women who sought after their rights of education and employment and demanded to be treated with the same moral principles as men were (Buzwell, 2014). As a literary trope, the "New Woman" was depicted in many Victorian novels and portrayed with mixed attitudes: some writers, both male and female, criticized her to be overly masculine and doomed to fail, and some depicted her struggles as a search for freedom and individuality (Cunningham, 1978: 3-4). The ideas of the "New Woman" regarding marriage and domestic life changed as well because women were becoming economically more and more independent; as a result, they could have a say in choosing to marry or not to marry at all (West, 1955: 56). Being able to decide on whether being a housewife and mother or a working woman, transformed the way many women think about extra-marital sex in general. Many women realised how moral norms regarding sexual relations favoured men and condemned women who only did what other men had already been doing, that is having extra-marital relations (West, 1955: 59-60). So, it can be deduced that women started to change their beliefs about gender roles that chain them to domestic life and always side with men. During the same period, America was going under similar changes in public and private opinions regarding women's rights as a result of the developments that took place in the land.

The 19th century American society faced a lot of turbulence and witnessed a great deal of economic, political, and social changes. American South, or the Confederacy, most of whose livelihood depended on agriculture and therefore slave labour, was the defendant of slavery against the American North, on the other hand, the Union, having a much more improved industry, sought the abolishment of slavery (Faust, 2009: 28-35). The American Civil War (1861-1865) ended in the North's favour and slavery was finally abolished. A lot of men died in war; women who lost their husbands and fathers, had to fend for themselves by taking up jobs or businesses. All these developments caused a major socio-economic transformation in southern states because women entered the workforce which had previously been occupied by men (Cruea, 2005: 191).

During the early 19th century, the dominant idea that shaped the lives of the middle- and upper-class women, was the "Cult of True Womanhood" (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985: 13). According to this value system, a woman was valued according to four essential criteria: "piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity" (Welter, 1966: 152). Her life should be set around the principles that helped her to serve perfectly to her husband, family, and the larger community. However, her most important duty was to be pious and raise children in a true Christian tradition. According to Susan M. Cruea, this idea of "True Womanhood", helped women to extend their roles out of home, in spreading the morality which they had already been bestowed upon (Cruea, 2005: 189). Thus, many women got out of their homes to fulfil their moral duties for the larger community (190). In addition, the economic changes brought about by the Civil War were the other factors that made women get out of their homes because many women had to earn a living without depending on a man. This shift of status for women made them abandon the idea of "True Womanhood" and adopt a different understanding of the roles of women, which is termed as "the Ideal of Real Womanhood" by Frances B. Cogan (2010). With this ideal, women were more liberated than in "True Womanhood" because now they could get education to better themselves and did not have to depend on men for their sustenance but still, their greatest duty was to their families (Cogan, 2010: 8). Nevertheless, a woman was free to live in a place if she did not feel that she was being appreciated for her faithful endeavours (20). This change is quite remarkable in that it gave relative autonomy to a woman to change the course of her life from a house-bound existence to a more liberated one.

The progress of the ideas surrounding how a woman should behave kept on advancing as the socio-economic factors changed. According to Cruea, the next step for the 19th century woman before she fully emancipated herself as the "new woman", is the "public woman" (2005: 193). Glenna Matthews asserts that women who entered the workforce during the 19th century also vitalized a new understanding about the place of women in society (1992: 28). First, women risked

being called out for abandoning their traditional roles as wives and mothers so they chose occupations that can be accepted as women's natural duties, such as looking after children (being teachers) and the sick (being nurses). Cruea asserts that all these changes prepared women for their new roles as working women in society as they would continue to take on other professions (2005: 192-196). "During the 1880s and 1890s, the New Woman emerged" out of the three steps that led to her formation and her priority was her liberation from the old conventions that had kept her locked within the confines of social expectations for her character (198). New woman desired to live her life freely without having to explain her choices about her own life: getting married and having children, holding a job, having extra marital sex, and so on. Especially, she asked for her sexual freedom and demanded to be judged by the society on equal terms with men (201). As an American woman writer of the late 19th century, Chopin depicts this "New Woman" by personifying her as Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening*, where Edna is trapped in her domestic life and strives to find her freedom.

1890s Louisiana Creole and The Awakening

The setting of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* is New Orleans, Louisiana in the 1890s. Louisiana is distinguished from other states of America, with its distinctive history and mixed cultural heritage, which is generally referred to as Creole. The term 'Creole' now refers to mixed race people and the culture of those people, who come from and/or still currently reside in Louisiana, however, in 18th-19th centuries it encompassed all the native residents, born and raised in Louisiana and it did not necessarily mean having a 'coloured' ethnic background (Eble, 2008: 44-46). The foundation of communities in this state dates back to the 17th century when the French established plantations in the area. Spanish settlers, who came there in the 18th century held the state for a while, then it went back to French rule one last time (2008: 48-51). Later in 1803, Louisiana was bought from the French by the USA with the 'Louisiana Purchase', one of the biggest purchases in the history of the USA (Howe, 1904: 77-81). The local native Indian communities, indentured labourers, French colonists, and Spanish colonists, all contributed to the formation of this unique 'Creole' culture and the Creole culture is identified with its conservative structure, which gives women extraordinarily little freedom to run their own lives (Eble, 2008: 52). When women got married, they became "the legal property of their husbands" (Culley, 2008: 67). "A Louisiana woman could not own any property or 'sign any legal contract [...] without the consent of her husband' and was deemed as 'absolutely incapable of bearing witness to testaments'" (67). Most women, in this way, were not given any chance to make important decisions about their lives and they were only left with the obligation to fulfil the role of a perfect wife and mother. Chopin starts the novel with the perfect metaphor of a parrot kept in a cage, singing in many

languages. “A green and yellow parrot, which hung in a cage outside the door, kept repeating over and over: “Allez vous-en! Allez vous-en! Sapristi! That’s all right!” (Chopin, 2011: 17) The parrot symbolises Edna and other Creole women in the 1890s, who may speak in many languages, yet their voices are not heard by the men in their society.

The 1890s, in which *The Awakening* is set, is marked with a difference because of the socio-economic changes of the period when “class divisions, and urbanization and industrialization continued to challenge traditional ways of life” and with these changes, “the new woman” or “the liberated woman” emerged as a result (Culley, 2008: 66). What ‘the New woman’ wanted was freedom to make her own choices, to be treated equally with men and to make her voice heard. The New Woman wanted to live her life freely without having to explain her choices about her own life: getting married and having children, holding a job, having extra marital sex, and so on. Especially, she asked for her sexual freedom and demanded to be judged by the society on equal terms with men (Cruea, 2005: 201). In *the Awakening*, Edna Pontellier can be considered to be that type of woman: she questions her life, her marriage with Léonce Pontellier and her own passions in life. Edna is a Protestant woman from Kentucky, a northern state in the USA, and her husband, Léonce, is a Catholic Creole in Louisiana. After marrying her husband in defiance of her parents, she finds herself in this southern state. She does not fully understand the norms and values of this culture and that is why she falters in conforming to it. Léonce cannot understand Edna’s confusion and thinks that she is disregarding her wifely duties: “He reproached his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children. If it was not a mother’s duty to look after her children, whose on earth was it?” (Chopin, 2011: 22)

Edna’s best friend, who is a foil to her adventurous character, Adèle Ratignolle, is the perfect prototype of a faithful and obedient Creole woman. Adèle is caring for her children, dutiful to her husband and devoted to her homelife: “They were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels.” (Chopin, 2011: 24) Edna is the perfect opposite of Adèle because she does not feel that much attached to her domestic life, on the contrary, Edna searches for her own wants and desires. In search of her true passions in life, she falls in love with a young Creole man named Robert Lebrun and becomes fully aware that there are other things in life out of which she can take joy, other than bearing children and taking care of a house.

Edna experiences her sexuality freely when she is away from her husband, with a young womanizer named Alcée Arobin and feels things that she has never felt before: “When he leaned forward and kissed her, she clasped his head, holding his lips to hers. It was the first kiss of her

life to which her nature had really responded. It was a flaming torch that kindled desire.” (2011: 141) Her best friend Adèle, recognizing that her friend’s behaviour is against the Creole society rules, warns Edna. However, Edna, with her newfound freedom, follows her own instincts. Edna comes from another state to New Orleans, and she is actually an outsider to the new culture, nevertheless, she is a woman living in the 19th century USA. As a result, her abandonment of married life and experiences outside her home, cannot be considered a model for any woman of her stature because social norms regarding women still have not changed in this period (Solomon, 2008: 62). However, her search for individual freedom, marks her difference from other more obedient women like her friend Adèle Ratignolle and puts Edna in the category of the new, liberated woman, who is not afraid of asking for her personal space to make her own decisions. Her search for freedom from the patriarchal society of the time and her mixed feelings of doing something seemingly wrong yet making her feel good, show that the change in women’s ideas regarding their own place in society has been well under way: “‘One of these days,’ she said, ‘I’m going to pull myself together for a while and think—try to determine what character of a woman I am; for, candidly, I don’t know. By all the codes which I am acquainted with, I am a devilishly wicked specimen of the sex. But some way I can’t convince myself that I am. I must think about it.’” (Chopin, 2011: 140)

Edna ventures against the society which rejects women to have their own free life as individuals. She moves away from the roles that have been sewn by the society for her. She is blamed for not internalizing the marriage as her friend, Adèle Ratignolle does, by her husband and friends. Therefore, she abandons her duties such as caring for kids and housework. As a married woman when Edna hangs out with a young, handsome, and single man, she behaves contrary to the values of the society. In this context, “Edna instinctively rebels against the larger social dictates of Creole society” (Thornton, 2008: 54). This is not acceptable in such a society where men make the rules and hold the ultimate power. When her husband leaves for town, Edna feels the freedom in her whole body and when he returns to confine her, she is compelled to go back to the social roles, which are predetermined for her: to be a mother, to act like a married woman and to be “the angel in the house”. According to Chopin’s biographer Emily Toth, Chopin believed that freedom was not only to have one’s own choices in life, it also should help the individual to experience his/her desires. (1975: 663) However, in Creole Louisiana, only men had this right: “In Creole society, men have the economic power and have the ropes of women to control them. Women cannot choose anything without the permission of their men but are easily chosen. The patriarchal community identifies the roles for women, which they must obey” (De Palencia, 1947: 177).

As mentioned before, Creole society has rigid rules regarding women and Edna breaks some of these rules by abandoning her family and committing adultery. Heilman points out that if women awake and follow their passions or do not conform to the norms, then they must face struggles (2008: 91). Thus, awakening of a woman is dangerous for society, therefore, like the parrot in the beginning of the novel, who is trapped in a cage and forced to sing forever, a woman is not clear as mud and had better be trapped in the home and settle for her fate. In the 19th century women's major duties in life are marriage and motherhood. The main reason for the importance of these two concepts is that childbearing represents a woman's responsibility for the society she is in. From the beginning to the end of the novel, we are aware of Adèle Ratignolle's pregnancy and at the end of the book, she delivers the baby. This shows how motherhood is important in such societies. However, for Edna, pregnancy is a kind of captivity. Her voyage for seeking freedom never happens yet she may know that ending her life can obtain freedom, so she could end her life with death to gain her freedom. Just like the parrot who is trapped inside the cage, Edna is confined to her house through marriage and motherhood. By breaking those bonds, Edna tries to be free. However, the fact that Edna's struggles in finding herself and her freedom came to a bitter end shows that the time (the end of the 19th century) is not ripe enough for women to fully achieve that goal.

1890s Ottoman Istanbul and *Aşk-ı Memnu*

Another woman from the same exact period and from a completely different part of the world, is Bihter in *Aşk-ı Memnu* (Uşaklıgil, 2020). In *Aşk-ı Memnu*, the setting is 1890s in Ottoman Istanbul. Bihter is the heroine of the novel, around whose choice to marry an older and rich man, changes the lives of many other characters in the novel. The period in which the novel was written is characterized by reformations and ensuing sanctions by the authorities. In the 19th century Ottoman Istanbul, there appeared a movement called "Young Turks", who sought to modernise all elements of social and especially political life in Ottoman Empire (Mardin, 2000: 18-21). Although people from different backgrounds were associated with this movement and that it was not exactly a uniform movement, almost all the adherents argued for reformation and modernisation in state institutions (25). Along with the political turbulence in many parts of the empire, many Young Turks and their associates were being apprehended for their unruly actions (30-35). The idea of reformation was not confined to the political and economic sphere as there were many changes in the attitudes of men and women in dealing with the problems of daily life. They were adjusting their lives to the ideas that came from Western European culture, such as adopting freer manners, dressing in the fashion of Europeans, and so on. Some families integrated these new norms of behaviour into their lives. The heroine of the novel, Bihter, comes from such a family, who is

regarded as 'Melih Bey Takımı', meaning Melih Bey's Clan (Uşaklıgil, 2020: 30-45). This 'new type of woman' is quite different to the general understanding of how a Muslim woman should behave at that time. They dress more provocatively, they are more liberal in their encounters with men and Bihter's mother, Firdevs Hanım, has affairs with men even when she was married. Bihter, at first denies being like her mother, however, she realises she is just like her: "She would not do it, she would not be like Firdevs Hanım. [...] While she promised not to be like her mother, something else was troubling her mind. People used to say that she resembled her mother, whereas Peyker took after her father. She was afraid of this resemblance" (Uşaklıgil, 2020:210). However, Bihter is different from her mother in some respects. For example, she is quite outspoken and even insults her mother when she (her mother) does not let her marry an older but rich gentleman, Adnan Bey. Firdevs Hanım confronts Bihter about her choice and asks her this question: "Since when have girls started talking avowedly to their mothers about marriage?" (Uşaklıgil, 2020: 30)¹ This shows Bihter's unyielding and unapologetic nature. She even confesses to her mother about her love affair with the wannabe 'Young Turk' Behlül, who is actually just a libertine without any significant political ideas and declares that he cannot marry her stepdaughter, Nihal.

Bihter, with her promiscuity and her outspoken personality, is just like that 'new, liberated woman' in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. Both Bihter and Edna are married women although they experience sexual freedom. Their affairs lead to very bitter ends naturally, because their behaviours are not acceptable in their societies, respectively Ottoman Istanbul and Creole Louisiana. Nevertheless, these characters are the consequences of the socio-politically turbulent ages in their larger communities.

Ottoman Modernisation and the Rights of Women

Uşaklıgil gave life to Bihter in the last decade of the 19th century. This period in Ottoman history is significant because it was marked by many major reforms affecting the whole way of affairs in society and therefore the lives of every Ottoman citizen. During the modernisation and reformation period which is called "Tanzimat", the Ottoman Empire had to give some rights to women as a result of the outbreak of feminist movements all over the world (Keskin, 2003: 50-59). After accepting constitutionalism, Ottomans gave certain privileges to women such as re-establishing the education system and enabling more girls to go to school, regulating the law of heritage in favour of women and some other adjustments that improved the lives of women (16-21). These reforms not only helped women to get out of the house but also opened new ways to raise their voice in the written world. For example, the opening of new schools only for girls was

¹ All the quotations taken from *Aşk-ı Memnu* are translated from Turkish to English by the authors of this article.

the triumph of women in accessing education and these schools enabled girls to receive proper education (81-83).

Outspoken and brave women who had been educated in the European style demanded more rights for Ottoman women. These were women such as Fatma Aliye, Emine Semiye Önasya, Makbule Leman, Fatma Şadiye Hanım who were the pioneers of Ottoman feminist movement and they followed the footsteps of other feminists in other parts of the world (Çiçek et al., 2015: 279). There were also Ottoman-Armenian feminists such as Elbis Gesaratsyan, Sırpuhi Düsap, Zabel Asadur, Zabel Yesayan, Hayganuş Mark, all of whom contributed to the feminist movement in the Ottoman Empire (Bilal and Ekmekçioğlu, 2017).

Such exceptional Ottoman women accelerated the process of feminist movement and its flourishing extremely fast during the decline of the Ottoman Empire. Apart from these women, many other ladies in this period expressed themselves via the press. They came together and started to write with their own names in different journals, magazines, and newspapers. Eventually, a new women's magazine, funded by the Ottoman Empire, was published under the name of "*Kadınlara Mahsus Gazete*" - Newspaper for Ladies - between 1895 and 1908. The aim of the journal was to "educate future generations" (Keskin, 2003: 45). Among the issues handled in the journal were how to become a good parent, a dutiful wife for her husband and a pious Muslim woman (47).

Gaining these kinds of rights helped women to search for their individual identities and many women started to question their place in society yet still there were a lot of restrictions and prohibitions that prevented free speech. To achieve their economic welfare, women needed to find rich husbands of higher status. These types of relations usually resulted with deception and betrayal. Hence, Bihter, the heroine of *Aşk-ı Memnu*, is forced to marry Adnan Bey by the norms of the society she is in. Upon learning of a marriage proposal by Adnan Bey, Bihter immediately thinks about the level of wealth she is going to acquire: "After hearing the news that the big mansion will be hers, a sweet and pinkish blush appeared on Bihter's face" (Uşaklıgil, 2020: 19). She imagines all the riches she is going to get and rejoices in the idea of marrying Adnan Bey.

Bihter, as an unmarried woman, does not believe that she has any other choice but to accept Adnan Bey's proposal because she has no other prospects in life: "If a twenty-two-year-old girl, for the first time in her life, gets a very acceptable marriage proposal and speaks her mind, I suppose she wouldn't be too hasty about this" (Uşaklıgil, 2020: 17). Bihter knows that her existence depends on her future-husband's wealth, so she has to choose Adnan Bey who is older than her and who apparently does not have any sex appeal for her. Being a young and ambitious woman,

Bihter tries to have it all with a star-crossed marriage. She has sexual attraction to her older husband, refusing his advances:

Adnan Bey was touching her, holding her shoulders to control whether she was cold or not. After then, abruptly feeling his wife's body under his hands, he bent down, longing to kiss her. She was trembling, afraid of this husband who had come so unexpectedly into her room in the dark. He now seemed a stranger, a man she had never seen, a beast that took advantage of dark nights to shred and slay its victim. She was almost screaming. She was flailing under his touch, turning her face away to avoid being kissed, wishing to slide out of his arms. (140)

Bihter's cheating on her husband is the result of the unhappy marriage she has made and even when her betrayal is to be unearthed, she does not refrain from her aims. In comparison to Bihter, Edna is more self-righteous because Edna seeks for her freedom outside the house. *Aşk-ı Memnu* deals with the affairs inside an enclosed space as a result of the sanctions applied on the written word during the period Uşaklıgil lived in (Kaya, 2019: 60). Many writers had to avoid dealing with political matters in their works and Uşaklıgil was one of them. Nevertheless, Bihter is still an outspoken character and there are reflections of the socio-political developments on her traits as Uşaklıgil portrayed her. Even though Uşaklıgil was a man, he was successful in portraying a young woman's dilemma in the 19th century. His depiction of Bihter's struggles with society and within her own conscience was not judgmental of a woman who commits adultery, yet descriptive of the facts that surrounds Bihter's suicide.

Conclusion

In the 19th century, social norms forbid women to follow their own passions and put a lot of burden on them, however, with the changing socio-economic conditions and more women getting education and entering the workforce, new ideas appear in shaping the lives of individuals in a society. Yet still, the time is far away from being ripe enough for women to live as freely as men do. The authors in both novels, *The Awakening* and *Aşk-ı Memnu*, portray women who struggle against the norms of society. The heroines get married to fulfil their roles as women (to be a man's wife, to bear children for him) and eventually get frustrated. When these two characters experience their sexuality in a way which their respective societies condemn, they are punished for it; for example, Edna hangs out with a foreigner and sleeps with a well-known womanizer, and Bihter sleeps with her husband's nephew. As they venture into the terrain that is deemed forbidden to them, they make mistakes in expressing themselves: Edna is trapped in home and family life and cannot live freely, and Bihter finds herself in an unhappy and unfit marriage. These women feel captured within the confines of domestic life and marriage and cannot free themselves as a result of the socio-economic conditions of women in their respective societies.

In both American and Ottoman societies, socio-economic and political conditions are changing, and more women are starting to receive education. More and more women get out of their domestic sphere and participate in life outside their homes: they become teachers, nurses, factory workers and so on. Women asking for their basic civil rights open the way for many other women to question their places in society. In cultures under the influence of the West (Europe and America) such as Ottoman Empire, educated Ottoman women seek out their rights as well. Perceptions about women and womanhood go under serious changes and when women no longer believe that their sole duty in life is being wives and mothers, they start to pursue their freedom. Assertive women like the “New Women” ask to be treated equally with men. They contend that moral norms should apply to both genders fairly and challenge such concepts as love and marriage. However, both Creole and Ottoman societies are not ready for this type of liberties for women. Consequently, Edna and Bihter falter in their endeavours seeking for freedom. As they both experience the ‘awakening’, they get too close to the sun just as the mythical Icarus does when he gets his wings. They do not act wisely with their feelings and go against social norms in their new-found freedom. And just like Icarus, when they go too far from the society and its norms and disobey them, they are punished for their actions. Even though he has wings, Icarus is not a real bird, and he cannot fly so close to the sun. Similarly, Edna and Bihter are not liberated and when they act freely, they cannot support themselves. How these women even try to assert their individuality and sexual freedom, reflects the changing conditions of the late 19th century Creole Louisiana and Ottoman Istanbul cultures with their rapidly transforming socio-economic and political circumstances. These women represent the “New Woman” who is the creation of its age.

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