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Emel Zorluoğlu Akbey \*

### KADINLAR DÜNYASI'NDA FEMİNİZM VE MİLLİYETÇİLİK SÖYLEMLERİ

**Özet:** Osmanlı kadınlarının haklarını aramadıkları, ancak bu hakların kendilerine bahşedildiği yönünde yaygın bir kanı vardır. 1980'lerde filizlenmeye başlayan feminist araştırmacıların çabalarıyla tarihin derinliklerine gömülü kadınlar keşfedilmeye başlanınca bu efsane de yıkılmış olur. Osmanlı kadını mücadelesine ışık tutan bu çalışmalar sayesinde anneannelerimizin zorlu şartlar altında çetin bir mücadele verdikleri bilgisine ulaşırız. Osmanlı kadınları sadece ulusal sınırlar içinde haklarını elde etmek için değil, aynı zamanda seslerinin uluslararası alanda duyulmasını engelleyen oryantalist ikilemleri de aşmak için mücadele etmişlerdir. Osmanlı kadınları tarafından yazılan ve yayınlanan birçok dergi bulunmaktadır fakat bu makale çerçevesinde *Kadınlar Dünyası* dergisinde yaşanan feminist ve milliyetçi tartışmaların bağlamsal bir okuması gerçekleştirecek ve o dönemin kadınlarının feminizm ve milliyetçilik konusunu nasıl ele aldığı tartışılacaktır. Osmanlı kadınları kendilerini feminizm kelimesi ile ilişkilendirmişler midir yoksa kendilerini savunmak için yeni bir yol mu bulmaya çalışmışlardır? Batılı feminist idealler ve Doğulu milliyetçi normlar çerçevesinde kendilerini nasıl konumlandırmışlardır? Bu yazıda, bu oldukça zıt kavramların kadın özgürlüğü söylemine nasıl karıştığı tartışılacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Kadınlar Dünyası*, *Feminizm*, *Osmanlı Kadın Çalışmaları*, *Kadın Hakları Mücadelesi*.

### FEMİNİST AND NATIONALIST DISCOURSE IN KADINLAR DÜNYASI

**Abstract:** There is a widespread assumption that Ottoman women did not demand their rights, but that these rights were bestowed upon them. The burgeoning feminist studies of the 1980s, however, debunked this long-lasting myth when they discovered what had been buried within the annals of history. Through the efforts of these studies to shed light on the emancipation of Ottoman women, we learn that our grandmothers fought a valiant battle under challenging circumstances. Ottoman women struggled not only for their rights within national borders, but also to circumvent Orientalist dichotomies that traditionally prevented their feminist voices from being heard internationally. Although there are several notorious women's periodicals published for women during this period, in this paper, a contextual reading of the feminist and nationalist discussion in the women's journal *Kadınlar Dünyası* (Women's World) will be conducted to discuss how the women of this period took up the issue of feminism and nationalism. Did they hold on to the word feminism or did they try to find a new way to defend themselves? How did they position themselves within the framework of Western feminist ideals and Eastern nationalist norms? The main purpose of this paper is to discuss how these rather opposing concepts are intertwined in the discourse on female freedom.

**Key Words:** *Kadınlar Dünyası*, *Feminism*, *Ottoman women studies*, *Women Emancipation*.

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## Introduction

It is a common misconception that Ottoman women did not ask for their rights; rather, these privileges were granted to them. However, the emerging feminist studies of the 1980s dispelled this enduring myth upon unearthing what had been hidden in the records of history.<sup>1</sup> Even after being discovered from the long-forgotten dusty shelves, accessing what has been discussed by our grandmothers was neither simple nor straightforward. As Ottoman women recorded their struggle in the Ottoman script, their ideas could not be conveyed effortlessly and needed transliteration into Latin script.<sup>2</sup> Thanks to the transliteration project of women periodicals carried out by The Women's Library and Information Centre, what had been discussed by our grandmothers became accessible.<sup>3</sup> Within the frame of this paper, I will conduct a contextualised reading of the feminist and nationalist discussion that has taken place within the Women's journal *Kadınlar Dünyası* (*Women's World*) and discuss how women of that time took the issue of feminism and nationalism. Did they relate themselves to the word, feminism, or tried to find a new way to defend themselves? How did they situate themselves within the frame of Western feminist ideals and Eastern nationalist norms? In this paper, I will mainly discuss how these rather opposite terms entangled within the discourse of female freedom.

While Ottoman women were asking for their rights, they were also squeezed between significant turning point ideals of the century in which they were born both figuratively and literally. When *Kadınlar Dünyası* is analysed, it can easily be noticed that Ottoman women struggled for a long

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<sup>1</sup> For more detailed analysis of Ottoman women studies, please see Adil Baktıaya, *Bir Osmanlı Kadınının Feminizm Macerası: Hamidiye Modernleşmesi* (İstanbul: H2O Kitap, 2016), Aslı Davaz, *Esitsiz Kız Kardeşlik: Uluslararası ve Ortadoğu Kadın Hareketleri, 1935 Kongresi ve Türk Kadın Birliği* (İstanbul: Kültür Yayınları, 2014), Meral Akkent, "Osmanlı Büyükannelerin Feminist Talepleri Geçmişe Kısa bir Bakış," in *Kadın Hareketinin Kuruluşması Fırsatlar ve Rizikolar*, ed./translated. by Meral Akkent (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları. 1994), Nicole Van Os, "They Can Breathe Freely Now: The International Council of Women and Ottoman Muslim Women (1893–1920s)," *Journal of Women's History*, 28. (2016): 17-40, Serpil Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2016), Yaprak Zihnioğlu, *Kadımsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhittin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği* (İstanbul: Metis, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Serpil Çakır, "Feminism and Feminist History-Writing in Turkey: The Discovery of Ottoman Feminism," *Aspasia* 1(2007):61-83.

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to the Projects carried out by The Women's Library and Information Centre Foundation the women periodicals written in Ottoman script were transliterated into Latin script: *Kadın* (1908-1909), *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* (1895-1908), *Kadın yolu/Türk Kadın yolu* (1925-1927), *Kadınlar Dünyası* (1913-1921), *Türk Kadını* (1918-1919), *Genç Kadın* (1919), *Aile* (1880), *Hanım* (1921).

time to find their own voices. While they always sought to be in collaboration with the Western feminism and Eastern nationalism, they also recognised that they needed to find their own distinct voice to exist as they wanted to exist. These women did not want to be manipulated by the Western ideology, which would have direct associations with 'Eastern backwardness' and also created a master-slave dialect rather than sisterhood, but they also did not want to obey the eastern patriarchal rule makers. Between these two dynamics, Ottoman women sought to find their own voices that could appeal to their fellow sisters and create a harmony of sisterhood without losing their own distinct melody.

### **A Feminist Journal: *Kadınlar Dünyası***

*Kadınlar Dünyası* began its journey in 1913 as a daily journal and became the main official organ of the Osmanlı Müdafaa-i Hukuk-i Nisvan Cemiyeti (The Association for the Defence of Ottoman Women's Rights ). It continued on its path until 1921.<sup>4</sup> The in-depth study of *Kadınlar Dünyası*, conducted by Çakır in her book *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* (Ottoman Women's Movement) becomes the one that brings this long-forgotten women's journal back to life and reveals that *Kadınlar Dünyası* could be classified as the first feminist journal of the Ottoman era.<sup>5</sup> Other pioneering critics who provided invaluable insights can be cited as follows: Emel Aşa's doctoral thesis documenting all the periodicals concerning Ottoman women, Elife Biçer-Deveci's study presenting an intricate history of feminism, interrelations and networks, Hülya Yıldız's analysis of women's print culture, and Serpil Atamaz-Hazar's study on how the discourse in *Kadınlar Dünyası* can deconstruct the written history of the constitutional era.<sup>6</sup> Yet, none of these studies offers a reading of the journal from the vantage point of feminism and nationalism.

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<sup>4</sup> Though the journal started its journey as a daily journal, after three months it became a weekly journal.

<sup>5</sup> *Kadınlar Dünyası* became the first journal to advocate for equal citizenship, equal access to school and work, and reform of women's clothing. For further information, see Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi*. (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2016), 133-163.

<sup>6</sup> Emel Aşa, "1928'e Kadar Türk Kadın Mecmuaları" (Unpublished MA thesis: İstanbul University, 1989), Elife Biçer-Deveci, "The Movement of Feminist Ideas. The Case of *Kadınlar Dünyası*," in *A Global Middle East. Mobility, Materiality and Culture in the Modern Age, 1880- 1940*, ed. by Liat Kozma/Cyrus Schayegh/Avner Wishnitzer (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015.), Hülya Yıldız, "Rethinking the Political: Ottoman Women as Feminist Subjects," *Journal of Gender Studies* 27.2 (2018), Serpil Atamaz-Hazar, "Reconstructing the History of the Constitutional Era in Ottoman Turkey through Women's Periodicals," *Aspasia* 5.1 (2011): 92-111.

Not only the founder of the journal, Ulviye Mevlan, but the entire editorial board were women.<sup>7</sup> On the very first page, the journal claimed to be a defender of the rights of women regardless of gender or sect. The journal even expressed that *Kadınlar Dünyası* would not open its pages to men until women had equal rights.<sup>8</sup> The editors of the periodical further suggested that it would be more beneficial if men interested in improving the situation of women wrote in men's publications, which normally do not report on women's issues.<sup>9</sup>

Yes, we are aware that some of the Ottoman men defend women. We notice that and we thank them! We even meet those who consider themselves the representatives of our class, like Doctor Abdullah Cevdet. We, the Ottoman women, have our own grace and our own manners. The male writers cannot understand us in the sense that a woman can. Please let them leave us to ourselves [...] We can defend our rights ourselves with our own efforts.<sup>10</sup>

As is clear from the passage quoted above, these women shouted in every single sentence how earnestly and competently they demanded their rights and emphasised that they did not need anyone, particularly Ottoman men, to interfere in their affairs. As Yıldız also notes, *Kadınlar Dünyası* "took a stronger position for women's rights than most European women's journal".<sup>11</sup> From the very first page of the first issue, the journal signalled that both the writing committee and the articles will embark on a feminist debate with their sisters around the world and oppose male domination over them. This is also reflected within the rhetoric of the journal. Although the journal takes up various topics such as health, childcare, clothing, history, nationalism, motherhood, literature, job opportunities, the articles and letters dealing with

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<sup>7</sup> Serpil Çakır, "Kadın Tarihinden iki isim: Ulviye Mevlan, Nezihe Muhittin," *Toplumsal Tarih Dergisi* 46 (1997): 8.

<sup>8</sup> Çakır, "Feminism and Feminist-History Writing in Turkey," 69.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> *Kadınlar Dünyası* Editors, "Hukuk-u Nisvan-4 Nisan 1329," in *Kadınlar Dünyası: 1.-50. Sayılar* (İstanbul: Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı, 2009), 3. Unless otherwise indicated all the translations from the journal are mine.

<sup>11</sup> Yıldız, 185.

women's emancipation, men's treatment of women, women's right to be considered equal citizens, feminism, and the need for international sisterhood predominate. Some of the titles of their writings regarding these issues can also illustrate how passionate they were about their rights: "We are not fruits", "Are men really defenders of freedom? ", "What do women want? ", "Are we prisoners? ", "We are not prisoners! ", "On the road to womanhood", "Enough is enough", "We should demand our rights", and "Womanhood has awakened".<sup>12</sup> Along with these articles, Bint-ül Halim beautifully express the burning desire to see the prosperity and happiness of womanhood:

I pray God to live a little longer, O my God, I say. Let this helpless concubine live a little longer! Until she sees the development and progress of our womanhood, her flourishing and happiness. And so, before she dies, she can at least once believe in and experience earthly happiness.<sup>13</sup>

As clear from the titles and the quoted text, the women constantly questioned their place within the society and even asked if "the word 'people' (insanlar) excludes women".<sup>14</sup> They also spoke plainly: "Do you know what womanhood wants? womanhood wanted to have full control over their bodies, to be unbounded, to live humanly, to learn how to maintain their dignity, to stop being submissive. They want to learn what a human being means, what a child means, what father, mother, wife, family and life mean"?<sup>15</sup>

Contrary to Van Os, an eminent researcher on Ottoman women, who claims that Ottoman women were reluctant to use the word 'feminism' and called themselves feminists,<sup>16</sup> it is seen that these women were not afraid of using the word 'feminism'. As Çakır points out, they used the word 'feminism' without having any doubts.<sup>17</sup> Even though the women endeavoured to make their community comprehend what they meant by 'feminism' and explicate

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<sup>12</sup> See *Kadınlar Dünyası: 1.-50. Sayılar* (İstanbul: Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı, 2009), 67, 76, 109, 140, 157, 158, 382, and *Kadınlar Dünyası: 51.-100. Sayılar* (İstanbul: Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı, 2009), 24, 151, 152, 218, 340.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi*, 198.

<sup>14</sup> Nebile Akif, "Hikmet-i İctimaiye ve Nisvan," in *Kadınlar Dünyası: 51.-100. Sayılar* (İstanbul: Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı, 2009), 448.

<sup>15</sup> Cited in Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadınlar Dünyası*, 184.

<sup>16</sup> Nicole A.N.M. Van Os, 'Osmanlı Müslümanlarında Feminizm,' in *Cumhuriyete Devreden Düşünce Mirası: Tanzimat ve Meşrutiyet'in Birikimi*, ed. Tanıl Bora and Murat Gültekinil (İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları 2001), 338.

<sup>17</sup> Çakır, 'Kadın Tarihinden iki isim: Ulviye Mevlan, Nezihe Muhittin,' 9.

that this word should not have further connotations other than women's demand for equality, the male writers of the time rejected the idea and wrote about it in many journals claiming that it did not belong to their culture.<sup>18</sup>

Despite opposition, women continued to use this particular word, and Mükerrerrem Belkıs, defined it in *Kadınlar Dünyası* as follows: "Feminism is not a movement that destroys morality and the family. It is not a current that destroys happiness. On the contrary, feminism is a way to ensure a better understanding of happiness by adhering to the principles of morality: Feminism eliminates injustice, helplessness and inequality, and instead creates a new and humane organisation shaped by the judgement of morality and conscience to create sincere stability in communities and families".<sup>19</sup>

The use of the word 'feminism' for their struggle was of utmost importance to these women. It would mean that all the women of the world were under the same umbrella and working for the same cause. Another ardent advocate of feminism, Nimet Cemil, explains why they needed to use the word 'feminism': "There are many important things (such as the telegraph, automobile, or boat) that exist in every country, yet not every language has a word or even a translation for them. Therefore, we do not need the words *nisailik* (womanishness) or *nisaiyun* (womanhood). We prefer to use the word 'feminism' (*feminizm*) as it is. What harm can one more foreign word do to our language? For the existence and necessity of feminism cannot be denied".<sup>20</sup> Although considered an exclusively Western term, feminism became an umbrella term, a term that women from different parts of the world fought for, a symbol of the embodiment of collective subjectivity.

### **Significance of Being a Community**

While struggling for their rights, women were also struggling to be part of a larger movement and to be empowered by other women. They were, therefore, in dire need of forming local and international clusters. History, as Lerner notes, did not provide women with knowledge about the female tradition: "as though each of them were a lonely Robinson Crusoe on a desert island, reinventing civilization".<sup>21</sup> In order not to be a lonely Robinson Crusoe, they needed other women. Writing in journals, then, created the very space

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<sup>18</sup> Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi*, 181.

<sup>19</sup> Cited in Feryal Saygılıgil, "Sunuş," in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce*, Cilt 10/Feminizm, ed. by Feryal Saygılıgil, Nacide Berber (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2020), 15.

<sup>20</sup> Cited in Çakır, "Feminism and Feminist-History writing in Turkey", 71.

<sup>21</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to the Eighteen-Seventy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 220.



these women craved: a sense of community, a place where they could speak out on common problems and see that they were not alone. The formation of a women's community within *Kadınlar Dünyası*, was a fundamental step for women to empower each other. Within their community, women from all walks of life found the opportunity to express their ideas - even sometimes opposing opinions - on the same page. The importance of being together is also emphasised by Mükerrerrem Belkıs: "We should actively encourage all our women, whether a scholar or ignorant. Please do not underestimate when you say ignorant, we need every single woman".<sup>22</sup> Later in another letter she continues: "I sincerely believe that we cannot perform any act unless we are together. That is why I desperately want to collaborate with fellow sisters like yours".<sup>23</sup> As indicated by Belkıs, recognising the efforts of all women, knowing that there are others who share the same desperation, would create a female tradition and help these women to become stronger.

Ottoman women sought contact not only with their fellow sisters, but with every woman in the world. This is also reflected in the *Kadınlar Dünyası* as it presents an international network of women on its pages. *Kadınlar Dünyası* summons various women writers from different countries to write for the journal. Foreign reporters of the journal are as follows: "the Romanian journalist Lia Hurşi, Dr Frieda Oscar, the German journalist Odette Feldmann, The Times journalist and English travel writer Grace Ellison, and Dr Amelia Frisch".<sup>24</sup> *Kadınlar Dünyası* also published supplementary issues in French. With the French supplement, they aimed to "expose European audience to the lives and struggles of Ottoman women".<sup>25</sup>

Through their journals, these women not only formed a community of women on a national level, but also reached out to their foreign sisters, other women in the world who were fighting for the same cause. As Ellen Fleischmann points out, it was no coincidence that the rise of organised women's groups is "not an isolated occurrence but was part of a broader global phenomenon in almost all parts of the world".<sup>26</sup> Thus, Ottoman women also wanted to be part of this movement and take their place in a larger

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<sup>22</sup> Cited in Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi*, 192.

<sup>23</sup> Mükerrerrem Belkıs, "Açık Muhabere- 3 Temmuz 1329," in *Kadınlar Dünyası: 51.-100. Sayılar* (İstanbul: Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı, 2009), 436.

<sup>24</sup> Yıldız, 182.

<sup>25</sup> Biçer-Deveci, 348.

<sup>26</sup> Cited in Weber, Charlotte. "Between Nationalism and Feminism: The Eastern Women's Congress of 1930 and 1932," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 4.1 (2008), 84.

community.<sup>27</sup> Holding on to the same ideal was fundamental for women. Lerner also highlights that "male thinkers grew taller by standing "on the shoulders of giants," each making his small or larger contribution to building a common heritage".<sup>28</sup> So, Ottoman women also needed this protection of sisterhood and bourgeon from what was written and discussed by their European and American contemporaries.

From the very first issue, *Kadınlar Dünyası* made it clear that they were closely following the American and European women's movements by reading their books and articles and closely following how women's emancipation was thriving all over the world.<sup>29</sup> These women also support their causes by referring to their European and American contemporaries: "We Ottoman women are no different from the women of other nations. We certainly have the talent and skills found in the womankind of other nations. However, we need a revolution in our manners, in our education, in our salary and in our lives. We believe that any sensible person can attest to this".<sup>30</sup> These women were openly feminist and wholeheartedly defended the cause of women as one of the only solutions to end their problems. But they also made it clear that they were culturally different from their Western sisters and therefore needed to raise their own voices: "As we walk the path this movement has laid out, we shall remain within the confines of our own traditions and customs".<sup>31</sup> Another woman exclaims: "If what we want and what we will do resemble their [western women's] demands and actions, this should not lead to the conclusion that we are imitating them. This issue, the woman question, should be the number one priority in the new minds, minds of correct reasoning, bred by this century".<sup>32</sup> It is clear from these quotations that these women were particularly concerned to walk the fine line between collaboration and imitation. While they never denied that they needed the support and partnership of their European sisters, they vehemently resisted the idea of being manipulated.

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<sup>27</sup> *Kadınlar Dünyası* Editors, "Hukuk-u Nisvan-4 Nisan 1329," 3.

<sup>28</sup> Lerner, 166,

<sup>29</sup> *Kadınlar Dünyası* Editors, "Hukuk-u Nisvan-4 Nisan 1329," 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Kadınlar Dünyası* Editors, "Erkekler! Kadınlar Yalnız Meyve Değildir -11 Mayıs 1329," in *Kadınlar Dünyası: 1.-50. Sayılar* (İstanbul: Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı, 2009), 382.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 70.

<sup>32</sup> Cited in Çakır, "Feminism and Feminist-History writing in Turkey", 70.

## **An entangled relationship: At the Juncture of Feminism and Nationalism**

Experiencing the transition period of their respective countries put these women into a position where they could neither refute their countries position nor relinquish the shield of 'sisterhood' as they needed an intersectional feminism. As there was an entangled relationship of feminism and nationalism, the topics addressed in *Kadınlar Dünyası* were not only feminist oriented but also nationalist. While it is certainly true that women wanted to form sisterhood with their international sisters, they also wanted to promote their own values. "As a woman I have no country", Woolf writes; however, these women could not free themselves from the need to have a nation. As Weber states "women from countries with secure national identities could afford to separate feminist politics from nationalist politics and frequently misread the nationalist activism of 'Third-World' women for whom the distinction was not so easy as a betrayal of internationalist feminism".<sup>33</sup> Rupp in her seminal article, "Speaking truth to power in Transnational Feminist History" cite an Arab woman: "the economic and political situation of my country is so desperate that it is extremely difficult for us women to give our whole-hearted energies to the cause of feminism alone".<sup>34</sup> This woman's outburst becomes reminiscent of Ottoman women's in-betweenness. Though these women sought connection with other women and believed in sisterhood, they also knew that without developing a national identity they could not promote their distinctive voice and ask for their own rights. To establish a feminist self, these women needed to have a respected national identity and understand their roots. Thus, recurring tropes of nationalist discourse emerge throughout the pages of *Kadınlar Dünyası*. While nationalist discourse mainly centres on revenge, motherhood, land, flag, and religion, within the scope of this paper I will refer to how these women responded to the arrogant attitude of the West and incorporated "a politics of patriotic motherhood in their rhetoric".<sup>35</sup>

The editors of *Kadınlar Dünyası* state that the European press had congratulated them and praised their efforts by publishing several articles in

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<sup>33</sup> Charlotte Weber, "Unveiling Scheherazade", 145.

<sup>34</sup> Leila Rupp, "Speaking Truth to Power' in Transnational Feminist History." *Journal of American Studies of Turkey* 38 (2013): 20.

<sup>35</sup> Charlotte Weber, "Between Nationalism and Feminism: The Eastern Women's Congress of 1930 and 1932," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 4.1 (2008): 86.

their newspapers even before the Ottoman men. They even accentuate that a reporter from the *Berliner Tageblatt* and the *Matin* newspaper came to them personally to congratulate them and ask for detailed information about the periodical. However, they also emphasise that they are aware of the "European press and how they have been lecturing [them], the Ottomans, all along on every subject. [...] Therefore, in order to leave no room for miscomprehensions, [they] wanted to jointly present and declare the goal [they] are striving for".<sup>36</sup> The women writing for the periodical made clear that though they were primarily concerned about their rights they sought to correct Western ignorance and arrogant attitudes towards the East.

While women writing for *Kadınlar Dünyası* criticised their own clothing on many instances, they made perfectly clear that this was their own matter and desired to handle it on their own way. Emine Seher Ali comments on the use of veil. Using veil, she claims, is a religious issue. She questions how the most prominent intellectuals have the right to comment and interfere in a practice that does not concern them. She further claims that this is not the veil but patriarchal interpretation of the religion that posits women into an inferior state. "We consider it our duty to advise those commenting on veil to learn first what the purpose of Hijab is. If a person talks about what s/he does not know, it would immediately reveal that that person is indeed ignorant. Hijab is a religious issue. It would be resentful for the ones who are not from this religion to intrude in this matter".<sup>37</sup> Later, another harsh and incensed criticism appears within the pages of *Kadınlar Dünyası*: "Let us now throw the European scarves into the smiling face of Europe. Let us slap them in the face with it and look into their eyes that despise us and shout to them that we also have our own minds and ideas. We also know how to work. We will keep ourselves alive. We will return to you everything with which you have poisoned and condemned us. Please do not send them again. If you send them, be sure that they will rot and be destroyed".<sup>38</sup> With this letter, P.S[at] makes it clear that Western concerns about their dress cause real discomfort

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<sup>36</sup> *Kadınlar Dünyası* Editors, "Avrupa Matbuatı Münasebetiyle- 17 Nisan 1329," in *Kadınlar Dünyası: 1.-50. Sayılar* (İstanbul: Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı, 2009), 135.

<sup>37</sup> Emine Seher Ali, "Tesettür Meselesi – 12 Mayıs 1329," in *Kadınlar Dünyası: 1.-50. Sayılar* (İstanbul: Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı, 2009), 394-395.

<sup>38</sup> P.S[at], "Tesettür'I-Nisvan – 21 Haziran 1329," in *Kadınlar Dünyası: 51.-100.. Sayılar* (İstanbul: Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı, 2009), 309.

to these women. They perceive it not as an act of kindness to solve the problem of women, but as a way of asserting Western superiority over the East.<sup>39</sup>

Later, they interweave their nationalist discourse with a 'politics of patriotic motherhood' and justify their demands for women's education by pointing to the role of the mother in producing excellent children. Similar rhetoric runs throughout the periodical: "Women are the educators and trustees of humanity. To equip our children well, we, women, need education and knowledge first and foremost. We should not deprive our children of that".<sup>40</sup> "The upbringing of children depends on a benevolent mother. The better a mother is educated and brought up, the more the children brought up by her benefit from it".<sup>41</sup> This also becomes reminiscent of Mary Wollstonecraft's discourse on motherhood: "[Wollstonecraft's] chief argument to both men and women was that better educated women would make better wives and mothers".<sup>42</sup> Motherhood, according to these women, is the link between now and then, a gateway to the new generations, so that the mother should be the flag bearer of civilisation. By creating a discourse that permeates both feminism and nationalism, these women actually responded their oppressors in quite a wise manner. Deconstructing the patriarchy's argument of 'motherhood' and altering it to power to gain more rights can be considered as 'empowering passivity'. By attacking both Western arrogance and Eastern patriarchal norms, the women made it clear that they define feminism in their own way.

### Conclusion

In short, Ottoman women sought, fought and challenged the presumed ideas regarding womanhood and feminism. Learning about emancipation of Ottoman women, questioning and rewriting historical perceptions by restoring the past and bringing up women who have not yet gained an important place in history is of utmost importance in shaping historiography and women's memory. As Çakır points out the experience of the past

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<sup>39</sup> Leila J. Rupp, "Challenging imperialism in international women's organizations, 1888-1945." *NWSA journal* 8.1 (1996): 10, Charlotte Weber, "Unveiling Scheherazade: Feminist Orientalism in the International Alliance of Women, 1911-1950," *Feminist Studies* 27.1 (2001), 152-152.

<sup>40</sup> *Kadınlar Dünyası* Editors, "Avrupa Matbuatı Münasebetiyle- 17 Nisan 1329," 135.

<sup>41</sup> Mehlika Rifat, "Esir Değiliz-14 Nisan 1329," in *Kadınlar Dünyası: 1.-50. Sayılar* (İstanbul: Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı, 2009), 109-110.

<sup>42</sup> Lerner, 136.

empowers women as collective subjects.<sup>43</sup> The key to understanding the struggle of Ottoman women has been unlocked through the rigorous work of renowned researchers since the 1980s. But the entire corpus has yet to be unlocked. Unheard, buried and lost voices have yet to be retrieved from dusty shelves to come to light again. Once the entire corpus on the emancipation of Ottoman women is uncovered, we will definitely have more insights into the past and, more importantly, into the future.

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<sup>43</sup> Serpil Çakır, "Feminist Tarih Yazımı: Tarihin Kadınlar İçin, Kadınlar Tarafından Yeniden İnşası," in *21. Yüzyıla Girerken Türkiye'de Feminist Çalışmalar*, Prof. Dr. Nermin Abadan Unat'a Armağan, ed. by Sancar, S. (İstanbul: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2011), 507.

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