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Encounter, Translation, and Affective Mediation in Fatma Aliye's *Nisvan-ı İslam**

FATMA ALİYE'NİN *NİSVAN-I İSLAM*'INDA KARŞILAŞMA, TERCÜME VE DUYGULANIMSAL DOLAYIM

FATİH ALTUĞ**

ABSTRACT

This article explores *Nisvan-ı İslam* (1891) by Fatma Aliye as a layered site of intercultural and intersubjective mediation, where Ottoman Muslim womanhood is not simply represented but reconfigured through dialogic, translational, and affective encounters. Drawing on Bruno Latour's theory of translation and Brian Massumi's affect theory, the study examines how Aliye stages her conversations with European women, using narrative strategies that blur the boundaries between testimony and fiction, experience and narration. These encounters revolve around contested topics such as slavery, polygamy, and veiling, enabling a strategic translation of Islamic principles, including reciprocity, modesty, moral intention, juridical reasoning, into terms legible to a Western audience. Beyond conceptual reframing, the text also stages affective scenes of encounter, conveyed through spatial detail, bodily gestures, irony, and sensory resonance. *Nisvan-ı İslam* thus performs a form of "world-making translation", a situated, relational practice that holds divergent lifeworlds in tension without collapsing difference. The article further analyzes the work's French and Arabic translations, highlighting how its transregional afterlives extend and transform its mediating function. By framing translation as a precarious, affectively charged negotiation, the article repositions *Nisvan-ı İslam* as both a pioneering text of Ottoman Muslim feminist thought and an Islamic mode of intercultural address.

Keywords: Fatma Aliye, Cultural Translation, Ottoman Feminism, Islam and Gender, Affect Theory.

ÖZ

Bu makale, Fatma Aliye'nin *Nisvan-ı İslam* (1891) eserini, kültürlerarası ve öznel karşılaşmaların sahnelendiği, Müslüman kadınlığın temsilinden çok yeniden tasavvur edilmesine olanak tanıyan katmanlı bir dolayımlayıcı metin olarak ele almaktadır. Bruno Latour'un tercüme kuramı ile Brian Massumi'nin duygulanım kuramı ekseninde yapılan çözümleme, Fatma Aliye'nin Avrupalı kadınlarla gerçekleştirdiği diyalogları nasıl kurguladığını, tanıklık ile kurmaca, deneyim ile anlatı arasındaki sınırları nasıl muğlaklaştırdığını göstermektedir. Bu karşılaşmalar, cariyelik, çok eşlilik ve tesettür gibi tartışmalı konular etrafında şekillenmekte, Fatma Aliye'nin karşılıklılık, iffet, niyet, şer'î yorum ve toplumsal düzen anlayışı gibi İslam'a dair ilke ve pratikleri Batılı muhatapları açısından kavranabilir hale getirmeye yönelik stratejik bir tercüme süreci yürüttüğünü ortaya koymaktadır.

Bu karşılaşmalar kavramsalın yanı sıra duygulanımsal düzeyde de işler; ayrıntılı mekân betimlemeleri, bedensel jestler, tereddüt, ironi ve duyusal müşterekler aracılığıyla karşılıklı etkileşimler bir duygusal ortam içinde sahnelenir. Çeviriyi, duygusal, siyasal ve epistemolojik olarak riskli fakat üretken bir ilişki biçimi olarak kavramsallaştıran bu okuma, *Nisvan-ı İslam*'ı hem Osmanlı Müslüman feminist düşüncesinin öncü bir örneği hem de İslamî bir kültürler arası hitap biçimi olarak yeniden konumlandırmayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Fatma Aliye, Kültürel Çeviri, Osmanlı Feminizmi, İslam ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Duygulanım Kuramı.

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INTRODUCTION

Fatma Aliye's *Nisvan-ı İslam* (Women of Islam), first serialized in Ahmet Mithat Efendi's newspaper *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* between October and November 1891, before being published in book form in 1893, stands as a remarkable artifact of late Ottoman intellectual and social life.[1] Structured around three distinct dialogues (*muhavere*), the work documents encounters between Fatma Aliye, a prominent female Ottoman intellectual, and several non-Muslim Western women within the intimate setting of her Istanbul home. These conversations navigate complex and often contentious terrain, grappling with core issues pertinent to Western perceptions of the Ottoman Empire and the Islamic world, specifically the status of women in Islam, the institution of slavery (*cariyelik*), and the practice of polygamy (*taaddüd-i zevcat*).[2] Yet, *Nisvan-ı İslam* transcends the boundaries of mere polemic or apologetics. While ostensibly centered on intellectual debate and the correction of misconceptions, the text simultaneously weaves a rich tapestry of personal interaction, portraying moments of burgeoning friendship, shared vulnerability, mutual curiosity, aesthetic appreciation, and the navigation of complex affective dynamics. It emerges as a unique textual space where women, ideas, religious frameworks, and diverse modes of relating to faith converge and interact, generating possibilities born from the very friction of encounter.

Fatma Aliye adopts a distinctive narrative strategy that blurs the lines between factual testimony and fictionalized narrative, between direct experience and curated storytelling. The ideas within *Nisvan-ı İslam* do not circulate in a vacuum; they are produced and received in a specific environment, within a particular network of relationships, amidst certain emotions, and in a specific context. Aliye masterfully constructs this context for the reader, offering an atmosphere of ideas, feelings, and relationships. Through vivid descriptions of settings (from the domestic interior to the moonlit Bosphorus garden), detailed accounts of clothing and appearance, and attention to the subtleties of gesture and tone, the intellectual exchanges are imbued with materiality and affective resonance. Moments of potential connection or distance between the participants become palpable, and underlying tensions coexist with expressions of shared understanding or pleasure. This approach invites a reading that moves beyond simply evaluating the arguments presented, urging attention to the complex interplay of thought, feeling, body, and environment that constitutes the encounter itself.

In this article, I use "translation" in an expanded sense that foregrounds intralingual and intercultural practices of mediation and rearticulation across social worlds and discursive codes. Interlingual transfer across languages is treated as a particular instance of this broader

1 Hülya Argunşah, "Nisvan-ı İslam", *Türk Edebiyatı Eserler Sözlüğü* (accessed on 11 June 2025).

2 For a foundational rethink of how Western and Middle-Eastern women's voices both sustained and unsettled Orientalist tropes of the harem and Muslim femininity, see Reina Lewis's trilogy of interventions: Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996); Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004); Reina Lewis - Nancy Micklewright (ed.), *Gender, Modernity and Liberty: Middle Eastern and Western Women's Writings—A Critical Sourcebook* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006). Lewis demonstrates that nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century female authors and artists were not passive purveyors of an inherited Orientalist gaze, but active producers of cross-cultural knowledge who inserted their own classed and racialised positionalities into representations of Ottoman domestic life. Fatma Aliye's dialogic strategy in *Nisvan-ı İslam* can thus be read as an intra-Ottoman counterpart to the culturally reflexive texts Lewis uncovers: it confronts Western misconceptions from within, while simultaneously negotiating intra-imperial debates on modernity, gender, and Islamic reform. By staging intercultural conversation rather than voyeuristic description, Aliye transforms the harem from a spectacle into what Lewis calls "a contact zone of female agency," thereby anticipating later feminist critiques of the East/West binary.

process, and I return to it when analyzing the French and Arabic versions of *Nisvan-ı İslam*. My emphasis, however, falls primarily on translation as relational mediation and reconfiguration. In this framework, I approach "translation" through the lens of Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, not as a linear act of conveying fixed meanings between preexisting cultural or linguistic codes, but as a complex and contingent process of *displacement*, *transformation*, and *reassembly*. Latourian translation, as further developed by Iwona Janicka[3] and Stephen Muecke[4], involves four interrelated operations: dislocating entities from their original contexts; enrolling them into new networks; translating their functions or meanings into alternative terms; and establishing temporary alliances that hold only as long as they remain performatively sustained. Rather than preserving identity or equivalence, translation here entails active negotiation, the forging of new relational configurations, and the constant risk of failure, betrayal, or excess. It is a process that simultaneously *mediates*, *reconfigures*, and *compromises*, thereby creating hybrid spaces where partial legibility becomes possible without collapsing difference.

In the context of *Nisvan-ı İslam*, this conceptualization of translation allows us to track how Fatma Aliye mobilizes diverse epistemic, affective, and cultural elements, such as Islamic ethics, Ottoman social norms, Western feminist discourses, embodied experiences, to articulate a situated and strategic form of mediation. Rather than merely transmitting Ottoman Muslim women's voices to a Western audience, she performs translation as *world-making*: assembling new patterns of intelligibility across historically asymmetrical terrains. In doing so, she does not erase the tensions between divergent worldviews but sustains them through acts of composition, repositioning, and affective attunement. Translation, in this Latourian sense, is not a solution to difference but a method of inhabiting and negotiating it.

In parallel with Latourian translation, I draw upon Brian Massumi's affect theory,[5] particularly his emphasis on the primacy of relation and the emergent nature of encounter as a thinking-feeling event, to approach *Nisvan-ı İslam* not simply as a vehicle of ideological communication but as a site where affective processes give rise to new relational and epistemic possibilities. For Massumi, affect is irreducible to personal emotion or ideological content; it emerges as a pre-individual intensity, a relational force that exceeds representation and yet structures how bodies and discourses come to matter. Encounters, in this framework, are not exchanges of fixed positions but emergent events charged with differential capacities: they recalibrate bodies, alter perceptual fields, and open onto unanticipated becomings. Through this lens, the intersubjective scenes in *Nisvan-ı İslam*, including the hesitations, tonal shifts, digressions, and non-verbal cues, can be read as affectively charged moments where divergent worldviews do not merely confront one another but co-compose new registers of intelligibility. What matters is not simply what is said but what passes between, what fails to be articulated yet nonetheless shapes the field of possible meaning.

Bringing Latourian translation and Massumian affect into dialogue allows for a multi-layered understanding of encounter as both a semiotic operation and a sensory-affective unfolding. While Latour emphasizes the heterogeneity of actants and the performative labor

3 Iwona Janicka, "Processes of Translation: Bruno Latour's Heterodox Semiotics", *Textual Practice* 37/6 (2022), 847–866.

4 Stephen Muecke, "Bruno Latour and Translation", *Theory, Culture & Society* 41/5 (2024), 97–104.

5 Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015).

of holding together partial alliances across asymmetrical networks, Massumi attunes us to the atmospheric, pre-conscious, and eventual registers that inflect these very assemblages. Translation, in this combined sense, is not merely the transportation of content but the modulation of affective intensities and relational potentials. It involves both the work of assembling actors (Latour) and the process of activating a field of emergence where meaning is not yet determined but felt (Massumi). In *Nisvan-ı İslam*, this means that the act of mediating between Ottoman Muslim and Western interlocutors cannot be reduced to ideological explication or cultural clarification. Rather, it involves sensing the fragile contours of emergent understanding, negotiating dissonance, and attending to the affective texture of exchange itself. The politics of such a mediation lie precisely in its unfinished, generative, and affectively charged character.

These theoretical perspectives, Latour's account of translation as networked mediation and Massumi's insistence on affect as a preconceptual, relational force, together offer a framework for analyzing *Nisvan-ı İslam* not only as a site of dialogic engagement, but as an event situated in multiple contexts. Crucially, this event is not confined to the fictional or discursive space of the dialogues alone. It continues to unfold through the text's material and translational afterlives, through the forms, agents, and trajectories that carried it across linguistic, cultural, and geopolitical boundaries. If, as Latour reminds us, translation entails the enrollment and transformation of heterogeneous actors into new assemblages, and if, as Massumi argues, encounters generate affective intensities that overflow established meanings, then the history of *Nisvan-ı İslam*'s translations itself becomes an extension of its original dynamics: a dispersed yet coherent field of mediated encounters, reconfigured contexts, and affectively charged re-readings. It is to this history of circulation, mediation, and recontextualization that I now turn.

This interplay of relational affect and networked translation does not end with the original dialogues; rather, it reverberates through the text's multilingual and transregional journeys. The affective and epistemic charge of the work finds new forms of articulation in the very acts of its translation and circulation. The significance of *Nisvan-ı İslam* as a nexus of encounter is further underscored by its remarkable history of circulation. In an era when translation of Ottoman works into other languages was not commonplace, Fatma Aliye's book achieved the rare distinction of being translated twice into French, twice into Arabic, and once into Urdu (via an Arabic translation). This translational trajectory extended the encounters staged in Aliye's Istanbul home across linguistic and geographical boundaries, generating new audiences and interpretations. The identities of the translators themselves speak volumes about the complex networks involved: Olga de Lebedeff, a Russian Orientalist; "Nazime Roukié," the pseudonym adopted by two Greek sisters (daughters of the Ottoman bureaucrat Hristo Forides) translating under the guise of a Muslim woman; and Zaynab Fawwâz, a leading figure in Arab literature and feminism, who incorporated an Arabic translation into her own influential work on Muslim women. These acts of mediation highlight the text's perceived importance and its ability to travel across different cultural and political landscapes.[6]

6 For a comprehensive account of *Nisvan-ı İslam*'s multilingual and transregional life, see Marilyn Booth and A. Holly Shissler's detailed study of its Arabic and French translations. Their analysis demonstrates that the book's dissemination was not merely a matter of linguistic transfer but entailed substantial ideological and representational negotiations. Particularly illuminating

In this context, the prefaces to the two French translations are particularly illuminating, revealing different translational strategies employed to frame the work for a European audience. The preface to the first translation, *Les Musulmanes Contemporaines*[7] (1894) by "Nazime Roukié" (the Forides sisters), adopts a framing strategy that foregrounds the author, Fatma Aliye, stressing her high social standing and intellectual pedigree as the daughter of Cevdet Paşa, a renowned statesman, historian, and legislator (author of the *Mecelle*). It highlights the sensation the book created within Ottoman high society, attributing this to both the author's gender and status. This preface emphasizes the text's literary qualities, such as its "elegance," "interesting details," and "vivacity of narration," and claims fidelity to the original's "authenticity and Asiatic flavor," hoping to convey the author's "spirit." Rather than directly combating stereotypes, as Labedeff does later, Roukié's preface seeks to establish the author's credibility and the work's intrinsic literary merit, positioning it as a significant cultural product emerging from the heart of Ottoman elite society.

In contrast, the preface to the second translation, *Les Femmes Musulmanes* by Olga de Labedeff[8] (published in 1896 or slightly thereafter), directly confronts Western stereotypes of Ottoman women as ignorant and passive figures concerned only with adornment. It presents the book as an "original picture painted by the model," emphasizing authenticity and positioning it as evidence of a "transformation" underway, particularly highlighting women's education in history, geography, science, and the arts under the reforms of Sultan Abdülhamid II. This preface frames the work as proof of Ottoman progress, appealing to Western curiosity while simultaneously validating the Sultan's modernization efforts.

These contrasting prefaces demonstrate how the act of translation extends beyond the text itself; the mediators actively shape the conditions of the encounter for the receiving audience. Each preface employs a distinct strategy to render *Nisvan-ı İslam* legible and significant within a French context, highlighting the complex negotiations involved in transmitting a work across cultural boundaries.

The translation of *Nisvan-ı İslam* into Arabic further illustrates the work's capacity to resonate within different intellectual and cultural networks, again mediated through specific framing choices by its translators or presenters.[9] One of the earliest Arabic translations was

is their discussion of the serialized Arabic translation in *Thamarât al-Funûn* (1891–1892), edited by reformist intellectual Abd al-Qâdir al-Kabbânî, who framed the text within the broader discursive currents of the Arab *Nahda* and serialized prose fiction. Booth and Shissler show how this platform positioned *Nisvan-ı İslam* as a "riwaya", a narrative genre increasingly aligned with novelistic and socially didactic forms, thus challenging its presumed nonfictional or polemical nature. In parallel, Zaynab Fawwâz's inclusion of the full Arabic translation within her biographical compendium *al-Durr al-Manthûr* reframed the work as an exemplar of female Islamic intellectual achievement, embedding it in a genealogy of Muslim women's contributions to public discourse. The authors further analyze the two French translations, emphasizing contrasting strategies of cultural proximity and foreignization. Olga Lebedeva's preface underscores Fatma Aliye as both an "authentic" Muslim subject and a token of Ottoman modernization under Abdülhamid II, whereas "Nazime Roukié" adopts a more Ottomanized framing, preserving key lexicons and social hierarchies. Booth and Shissler argue that these translations not only shaped reception but also instantiated new modes of feminine authorship, readership, and authority across imperial and colonial boundaries. See: Marilyn Booth - A. Holly Shissler, "Fatma Aliye's Nisvân-ı İslâm: Istanbul, Beirut, Cairo, Paris, 1891–6", *Ottoman Translation: Circulating Texts from Bombay to Paris*, ed. Marilyn Booth - Claire Savina (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), 327–388.

7 Fatma Aliye (Alihé Hanoum), *Les Musulmanes Contemporaines: Trois Conférences*, trans. Nazime Roukié (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1894)

8 Fatma Aliye, *Les femmes musulmanes*, trans. Olga de Labedeff (Paris: Bibliothèque du journal Orient et La Turquie, 1896).

9 The first Arabic translation of *Nisvan-ı İslam* appeared in serialized form in the Beirut-based newspaper *Thamarât al-Funûn* beginning in December 1891. The translator was not explicitly named, but the editorial introduction referred to Fatma Aliye as

published in Cairo by Ibrahim Fârisî's *al-Maktaba al-Sharqiyya* (The Eastern Library) in 1893.[10] Farisi's preface explicitly situates *Nisvan-ı İslam* within the context of the Egyptian Nahda (Arab Renaissance) and the burgeoning discourse on social reform. He presents the book as part of a publishing initiative aimed at disseminating valuable contemporary works on literature, sociology, and history, significantly mentioning the prior publication of Qâsim Amîn's seminal *Tahrîr al-Mar'a* (The Liberation of Woman) as the catalyst for the "greatest intellectual revolution" regarding women's status in the East. By associating Aliye's work with Amîn's, Farisi positions *Nisvan-ı İslam* as a key text contributing to "women's modernization and rebirth" in Egypt. While acknowledging Aliye's prominent lineage, the preface emphasizes the book's rich and diverse intellectual content, listing topics ranging from slavery and religious virtues to astronomy, fashion, and music. It highlights the text as demonstrating the author's "vast knowledge, broad understanding, depth of thought," and patriotic commitment. This framing translates the work not just as a product of an exceptional individual, but as a vital contribution to the ongoing intellectual and social debates animating Arab reformist circles at the time, useful for both male and female readers engaged in societal progress. A shorter, supplementary biographical note largely mirrors the details that would later be echoed by Zaynab Fawwâz.

Shortly afterward, *Nisvan-ı İslam* was also included in Zaynab Fawwâz's extensive biographical compilation of notable Muslim women, *al-Durr al-Manthûr fî abaqât rabbâti'l-hudûr* (The Scattered Pearls Concerning the Classes of Mistresses of the Inner Quarters, 1893–1896).[11] Fawwâz's preface functions primarily as a detailed biography of Fatma Aliye, meticulously recounting her lineage (daughter of the illustrious Cevdet Paşa), birth, extensive multilingual education (Turkish, Arabic, Persian, French), deep learning in both Islamic and rational sciences (often from her father), musical talents, and even her domestic proficiency. Fawwâz emphasizes Aliye's role as a pioneer among Ottoman women writers, tracing her literary debut to the anonymously published translation of Georges Ohnet's novel *Meram* and highlighting Ahmet Mithat Efendi's crucial encouragement in her career. Within this biographical framework, *Nisvan-ı İslam* is presented as a natural outcome of Aliye's established fame, which drew European women travelers eager to engage with her. The dialogues are thus framed as significant conversations emerging from these encounters, validating both Aliye's intellectual stature and the importance of her interactions with the West. Fawwaz praises the work's style and creativity, situating Aliye as an unparalleled figure and her book as a testament to female Islamic achievement. This act of translation firmly embeds *Nisvan-ı İslam* within a narrative celebrating accomplished Muslim women for an Arab audience.

These Arabic prefaces, like their French counterparts, reveal distinct translational strategies aimed at specific audiences and intellectual currents. While both emphasize the author's biography and prestige, Fârisî leverages it to align the work with the progressive spirit of the Egyptian Nahda, whereas Fawwâz uses it to position Aliye within a pantheon of

"al-fâdila," emphasizing her virtue, lineage, and seclusion. In this context, *al-fâdil/fâdila* would signify not only social eminence but also intellectual distinction. This early translation framed the work within a broader reformist discourse and marked one of the first moments of Fatma Aliye's entry into the Arab intellectual sphere. See: Booth - Shissler, "Fatma Aliye's Nisvân-ı İslâm", 346.

10 Fatma Aliye, *Nisâ' al-Islâm*, (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Sharqiyya, 1893).

11 Zaynab Fawwaz, *al-Durr al-Manthûr fî abaqât rabbâti'l-hudûr* (Bûlâq: al-Matba'a al-Kubrâ al-'Âmira, 1312), 368–426.

accomplished Muslim women. These framings underscore the active role of translators and publishers in mediating the text, embedding it within new networks of meaning and shaping its reception across the diverse landscape of the late Ottoman and Arab worlds. The multiple lives of *Nisvan-ı İslam* in translation thus testify not only to the original work's perceived significance but also to the complex processes by which ideas and encounters travel and are reinterpreted across cultures.[12]

This article, however, will now turn from these external framings to the internal dynamics of Fatma Aliye's original text. I will begin by analyzing the foundational arguments and translational strategies laid out in the "Mukaddime", before proceeding through detailed analyses of the three dialogues. Utilizing the combined lenses of Latour and Massumi, I will explore the interplay of intellectual translation, affective encounter, and relational dynamics that constitute the core of *Nisvan-ı İslam*.[13]

1. Setting the Stage for Encounter: The Intellectual Foundations of *Nisvan-ı İslam* in the "Mukaddime"

Fatma Aliye's *Nisvan-ı İslam* stands as a seminal work navigating the complex terrains of Ottoman modernity, female identity, and intercultural dialogue.[14] Comprising three distinct

12 The display of *Nisvan-ı İslam*, along with *Hayal ve Hakikat* and *Muhadarat*, in the Woman's Building Library of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair positioned Fatma Aliye as a literary voice capable of contesting Orientalist representations on an international stage. As Enaya Hammad Othman shows, these works introduced an Ottoman Muslim woman writer to an American audience as both culturally refined and intellectually autonomous, thereby destabilizing dominant Western narratives of Muslim female passivity. Aliye's inclusion in the Fair, amidst speeches and publications by Western women that often portrayed Islam as inherently oppressive, offered a counter-image grounded in Islamic ethical reasoning, reformist thought, and narrative authority. Her texts thus operated simultaneously as internal interventions and transregional responses to global discursive asymmetries. See: Enaya Hammad Othman, "Fatma Aliye's Invisible Authorship: A Turkish Muslim Woman Writer's Challenge to Orientalism and Patriarchy", *Global Voices from the Women's Library at the World's Columbian Exposition*, ed. Marija Dalbello - Sarah Wadsworth (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 177–193.

13 For comparable readings of *Fatma Aliye*, and especially of *Nisvân-ı İslam*, that foreground different scholarly angles, see: Firdevs Canbaz Yumuşak, "Muhafazakâr Müslüman Bir Kadın Portresi: Fatma Aliye Hanım", *Muhafazakâr Düşünce* 10/37 (September 2013), 103-112, which presents Aliye as a model conservative Muslim woman, emphasizing her advocacy for Islamic family structures and portraying *Nisvân-ı İslam* as a central text in her defense of Ottoman-Islamic gender ethics; Fatma Eroğlu Genç, "Türk Düşünce Dünyasında Fatma Aliye Hanım'ın Keşfi ve Konumlandırılması", *Medeniyet ve Toplum Dergisi* 8 (2024), 188–207, which reconstructs the modern Turkish reception of Aliye, reading *Nisvân-ı İslam* as evidence for her stance as a "religious enlightened woman" caught between Islamist, conservative, and feminist appropriations; Şefika Kurnaz, "Emine Semiye'nin Ablası Fatma Aliye'ye Mektupları", *Türkbilig* 14 (2007), 131–142, whose edition of four family letters illuminates Aliye's activist network and shows how the dialogic strategy of *Nisvân-ı İslam* grew out of real-life exchanges with Ottoman and European interlocutors. In *Kanatlanmış Kadınlar*, Senem Timuroğlu analyzes *Nisvân-ı İslam* as a text in which Fatma Aliye mobilizes Islamic discourse not only to defend women's rights but also to assert Ottoman Muslim women's intellectual agency. Rather than reading the work solely as an apologetic treatise, Timuroğlu emphasizes its polemical structure and dialogic form, which allow Aliye to recast Muslim women as active, reasoning subjects. The text, she argues, opens Islamic principles to discussion rather than presenting them as fixed doctrines, thus transforming *Nisvân-ı İslam* into a site of cultural negotiation and representational struggle. See: Senem Timuroğlu, *Kanatlanmış Kadınlar: Osmanlı Kadın Yazarların Edebi Temsilleri* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2022), 80–85.

14 Ansev Demirhan's two graduate theses frame *Nisvân-ı İslam* as a pivotal intervention in the late-Ottoman "woman question." In her M.A. study *Female Muslim Intellectuals: Understanding the History of Turkey's Woman Question through the Construction of Islamic Tradition* (2014), Demirhan shows how Fatma Aliye dismantles Orientalist portrayals of Muslim women by turning to Qur'ânic principles, legal reasoning, and lived experience; the book's dialogue form, she argues, lets Aliye recast issues such as polygamy, veiling, slavery, and arranged marriage so that Muslim women appear as informed interlocutors capable of speaking for themselves and defending their rights within an Islamic framework. Demirhan's Ph.D. dissertation *"We Can Defend Our Rights by Our Own Efforts": Turkish Women and the Global Muslim Woman Question, 1870-1935* (2020) places Aliye and *Nisvân-ı İslam* at the start of a trans-regional debate that continued through the Constitutional era and early Republic. She contends that the text supplied later Ottoman and Turkish activists with a repertoire, rooted in Islamic ethics yet oriented toward international audiences, for critiquing both Euro-centric prejudices and local patriarc-

dialogues between the author, pseudonymous Western women (e.g., Madame F and Madame R), and occasionally her own Muslim friends (S and N), the book transcends simple apologetics. It crafts a unique space, a textual *majlis*, where ideas, assumptions, emotions, and embodied experiences converge and clash. While the sensory dimensions of these encounters, including shared meals, conversations in physical proximity, moments of empathy and amusement, are palpable throughout the text, it is the intellectual architecture underpinning these interactions that demands primary attention. This foundation is meticulously laid out in the book's "Mukaddime" (Introduction), which serves not merely as a preface but as a crucial theoretical framework outlining the motivations, challenges, and conditions for the cross-cultural understanding Fatma Aliye seeks to foster. Analyzing the "Mukaddime" reveals the intricate intellectual dynamics that shape the ensuing dialogues and Fatma Aliye's strategic positioning as a cultural mediator in an era of accelerating global interconnectedness and profound representational anxieties.

The "Mukaddime" commences with a broad anthropological reflection on human nature and societal development. Fatma Aliye posits that humanity is inherently social and interdependent. Civilization progresses through collective action, initially fulfilling essential needs and gradually cultivating more refined, "perfecting" needs. This process, however, inevitably leads to diversification, with the emergence of distinct languages, customs, and traditions. Significantly, Fatma Aliye does not present this differentiation as inherently negative or leading inevitably to conflict. Instead, she embraces both universal human commonality (interdependence, need for progress) and cultural particularity (diversity of languages and customs) simultaneously. She affirms the multiplicity of human lifeways but laments the consequence: a historical separation where linguistic and geographical differences fostered profound mutual ignorance among peoples, each living within its own confined sphere. This initial framing establishes a key tension that resonates throughout the work: the simultaneous affirmation of cultural difference and the critique of isolationist tendencies that hinder mutual understanding.[15]

This delicate balance between shared humanity and cultural specificity, Fatma Aliye argues, is dramatically disrupted by the advent of modernity, characterized primarily by technological acceleration. The invention of steamships, railways, and the telegraph revolu-

hal practices, thereby positioning Muslim women as autonomous actors in a "global Muslim woman question." See: Ansev Demirhan, *Female Muslim Intellectuals: Understanding the History of Turkey's Woman Question through the Construction of Islamic Tradition* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Department of History, M.A. Thesis, 2014).; Ansev Demirhan, *"We Can Defend Our Rights by Our Own Efforts": Turkish Women and the Global Muslim Woman Question, 1870-1935* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Department of History, Ph.D. Dissertation, 2020). Elizabeth Paulson Marvel reads *Nisvân-ı İslam* as a programmatic intervention that weds Islamic argument to feminist critique, arguing that Fatma Aliye exposes slavery, polygamy, veiling, education and property rights to rigorous debate, showing each practice's scriptural limits and its cultural distortions. She further suggests that through three French-language dialogues with European visitors, the text dismantles Orientalist clichés while modelling how literate Ottoman women could speak for themselves in cross-cultural settings. Marvel also stresses that Aliye deliberately collapsed the boundary between home and street, turning "domestic" concerns into matters of public policy and thus helping to reconfigure the late-Ottoman public sphere. She argues that the book's call for women's self-advocacy, its insistence on Qurânic equity, and its defense of female education supplied both vocabulary and precedent for early Republican reforms, especially the 1926 Civil Code. Finally, Marvel contends that Aliye's legacy was eclipsed not by ideological mismatch but by language reform and selective nationalist memory, and that her work merits restoration as a cornerstone of Ottoman-Turkish feminist thought. Elizabeth Paulson Marvel, *Ottoman Feminism and Republican Reform: Fatma Aliye's "Nisvân-ı İslam"* (Columbus: The Ohio State University, Graduate Program in History, M.A. Thesis, 2011), 5–6, 37–39, 61–63.

15 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam* (İstanbul: Tercüman-ı Hakikat Matbaası, 1309/1893), 2-3.

tionized travel and communication, drastically reducing the time required for information to traverse vast distances. News that once took a year to travel could now be transmitted in an hour. This compression of time and space fundamentally reshaped the world. A significant consequence, pertinent to her project, was the heightened curiosity of Europeans, depicted as being habitually engaged in investigation and analysis, towards the Ottoman Empire and its Muslim populations.[16]

However, this increased proximity and curiosity did not automatically translate into greater understanding. Instead, Fatma Aliye identifies a central paradox of her time: the very forces enabling unprecedented global connection seemed to concurrently fuel the proliferation of profound misconceptions, particularly regarding the lives of Muslim women. Through her own encounters with "respectable European lady travelers", she became acutely aware of the "astonishingly incorrect" notions held in the West. The depictions of Muslim women she heard were so alien that she felt they must be discussing another nation entirely. This leads her to critique European travelogues, suggesting that many resemble imaginative fiction rather than accurate accounts of reality.[17]

Crucially, Fatma Aliye refrains from attributing these distortions primarily to deliberate malice or specific agendas. While acknowledging the existence of prejudice, she portrays reputable travelers as genuine seekers of truth, willing to expend resources and endure hardship to enlighten themselves and their compatriots.[18] Instead of solely blaming the observer, she directs critical scrutiny inward, advocating for self-reflection within her own community: "Let us first seek the fault within ourselves."[19] This principle of prioritizing self-critique before evaluating the flaws of the 'other' not only demonstrates intellectual magnanimity (*uluvv-i cenap*) but also strategically frames the problem of misrepresentation as, at least partly, a failure of Muslim self-articulation. The correction of European misperceptions, she implies, must be preceded by an internal reckoning with the ways Ottoman Muslims present, or fail to present, themselves accurately.

Having established the problem, namely accelerated contact fostering inaccurate representation, particularly concerning women, Fatma Aliye proceeds to diagnose the specific obstacles hindering authentic intercultural understanding and subtly positions her own work as a remedy. True comprehension of a nation's reality, she argues, requires more than superficial tourism like visiting markets or famous sites. It necessitates direct conversation with its people, significantly including both men *and* women. Here lies the immediate challenge: the customs of female seclusion largely prevent interaction between Muslim women and foreign men. While educated European women could potentially bridge this gap, another significant barrier emerges: language. Even if encounters occur, mutual unintelligibility renders them superficial, reducing interaction to mute observation.[20]

The search for suitable intermediaries reveals further complexities within Ottoman society itself. Fatma Aliye identifies two problematic extremes among Muslim women who might

16 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 4.
17 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 4-5.
18 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 5-6.
19 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 6.
20 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 6-7.

potentially engage with foreigners. The first are those Ottoman women who *do* speak French. However, she critiques many of them for having adopted a purely Westernized (*alafranga*) upbringing, learning French not for genuine intellectual enrichment but merely to appear thoroughly European. Ignorant of Islamic jurisprudence and having abandoned their own national customs, conversing with them offers no insight into authentic Islamic life; it is akin to talking with European families in the Pera district. Worse, these women, often alienated from or resentful towards certain traditions like veiling, may inadvertently misrepresent Islamic principles and customs, conflating mutable social practices with immutable religious law, thereby reinforcing disparaging perceptions of Islam.[21]

At the other end of the spectrum are conservative families steeped in tradition but resistant to foreign languages and even advanced education for women in Turkish, viewing it with suspicion or as religiously inappropriate. Such families, she notes with disapproval, are often unaware of the rich history of learned women in early Islam. This group, while potentially representing a more 'authentic' connection to tradition, lacks the linguistic tools and perhaps the inclination for cross-cultural dialogue. Fatma Aliye laments this lack of a middle ground: "We have no middle way. It is as if we have lost our direction... Excess and deficiency are bad in everything. Moderation is necessary in all matters." This internal societal fragmentation hinders the possibility of presenting a coherent and accurate self-image to the outside world.[22]

Therefore, the ideal conditions for genuine understanding require encounters with Muslim families who occupy a specific, balanced position: those who are both knowledgeable in French *and* actively maintain their religious knowledge and national customs according to Islamic principles. Finding such families is difficult for foreigners, often reliant on ill-informed translators based in Europeanized districts like Pera, whose inaccurate or speculative answers further contribute to the fictionalized representations.[23]

Within this carefully constructed analysis of the obstacles to intercultural understanding, Fatma Aliye subtly yet clearly carves out a unique space for herself. Possessing fluency in French, a deep grounding in Islamic knowledge and Ottoman culture, and access to both traditional and modernizing circles, she embodies the very synthesis she identifies as necessary for authentic dialogue.[24] Her home becomes the locus for the kind of encounters she prescribes. The "Mukaddime" thus functions not only as an analysis but also as a justification for the dialogues presented in the book. Her motivation to write stems directly from the shock of realizing the depth of European misconceptions, particularly the pervasive notion of Muslim women as oppressed victims, which she identifies as the primary point of Western critique. Compelled by this realization, she transforms her private conversations into a public text, aiming to correct the record and offer a more nuanced, insider perspective on the lives

21 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 7-9.

22 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 9-10.

23 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 10-11.

24 In the introduction of her annotated Turkish edition, Mübeccel Kızıltan underscores that Aliye "does not approach the issues as a Westerner, yet neither wholly as an Easterner" but instead charts an intermediate course aimed at correcting foreign travellers' misconceptions of Ottoman Muslim women. Kızıltan argues that this negotiating stance, rooted in Aliye's bilingual education and firsthand encounters with European visitors, is integral to understanding *Nisvan-ı İslam* as a self-conscious exercise in cultural mediation, precisely the "in-between" positionality that the present article theorises as world-making translation. Mübeccel Kızıltan, *Fatma Aliye Hanım: Yaşamı-Sanatı-Yapıtları ve Nisvan-ı İslâm* (Istanbul: Mutlu Yayıncılık, 1993), 7-8.

and thoughts of Muslim women.[25] The "Mukaddime" brilliantly sets the intellectual and socio-cultural stage, defining the terms of engagement and positioning Fatma Aliye as a crucial voice navigating the complex currents of representation and encounter in the late Ottoman world.

The intricate web of motivations, obstacles, and aspirations detailed in Fatma Aliye's "Mukaddime" resonates powerfully with Bruno Latour's expansive concept of *translation*. As elaborated by Janicka and Muecke, Latourian translation extends far beyond mere linguistic conversion, encompassing the complex processes of mediation, displacement, enrollment, and the forging of equivalences between disparate entities, interests, and worlds. Fatma Aliye's introduction meticulously maps out a terrain rife with the need for such translation: bridging the *hiatus*[26] between European perception and Ottoman reality, particularly concerning Muslim women. Her diagnosis of misrepresentation stems precisely from failed or incomplete translations, namely the inaccurate European travelogues that resemble fiction more than fact.

Furthermore, the "Mukaddime" outlines the difficult *political labour*[27] required to establish continuity across the "elusive point[s] of discontinuity" she identifies: the linguistic barriers, the divergent social positionings of *alafranga* versus traditionalist women, and the very seclusion that necessitates mediation. Fatma Aliye positions herself as the crucial mediator, the central actor undertaking the work of translation, enrolling potential allies (European women travelers), strategically displacing misconceptions, and attempting to transform ("no transportation without transformation,"[28]) the available narratives about Muslim women. Her project, as foreshadowed in the "Mukaddime", is thus fundamentally an exercise in Latourian translation: an attempt to build fragile networks of understanding by carefully navigating and reshaping the connections between different actors, discourses, and social worlds. This framework allows us to see *Nisvan-ı İslam* not just as an apologetic or descriptive text, but as an active intervention seeking to reconfigure relationships and redistribute intelligibility[29] through deliberate acts of mediation and transformation.

25 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 11-12.

26 Latour employs *hiatus* to designate the constitutive gap or discontinuity that interrupts a mode's trajectory, a moment demanding a "pass" through which heterogeneous actants are translated so the course of action can resume without erasing difference. Translation is thus the labor of leaping across this hiatus, forging only a provisional link that lasts while the network is performatively sustained. Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 210.

27 Naoki Sakai treats translation itself as a form of *political labour*: an active, historically situated practice that "creates continuity at the elusive point of discontinuity in the social," rather than merely conveying pre-given meanings. Because languages are never already unified wholes, translation precedes – and in fact posits – the very fiction of a homogeneous "source" and "target" tongue; it forges a provisional passage across asymmetries of power, producing new subject positions (translator/translatee) while simultaneously exposing the border that separates them. Muecke mobilises this insight to argue that every act of mediation in Latour's networks entails such labour: the costly, contingent work of holding heterogeneous actants together without collapsing their difference. Naoki Sakai, "How Do We Count a Language? Translation and Discontinuity", *Translation Studies* 2/1 (2009), 71–88, esp. 72–73.

28 Bruno Latour, *Aramis, or the Love of Technology*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 119.

29 Janicka, "Processes of Translation", 847.

2. The First Dialogue: Translating Slavery, Faith, and Difference

The conceptual groundwork laid in the "Mukaddime", outlining the necessity and challenges of intercultural understanding, finds its first practical instantiation in the "Birinci Muhavere" (First Dialogue) of *Nisvan-ı İslam*. This initial encounter, set during the religiously significant month of Ramazan, brings together Fatma Aliye, the European noblewoman Madam F, and a Catholic nun within the intimate space of Fatma Aliye's home. The ensuing conversation, primarily driven by Madam F's curiosity and critiques, revolves around two central themes: the institution of female slavery (*cariyelik*) within the Ottoman context and comparative discussions on Islamic and Christian beliefs and practices. More than a simple question-and-answer session, this dialogue unfolds as a complex and dynamic process of Latourian translation, orchestrated largely by Fatma Aliye herself. She acts as the central mediator, tasked with translating not only language but also intricate social structures, cultural norms, and religious tenets across significant cultural and experiential divides. The dialogue reveals the strategies, successes, and inherent limitations of such translational efforts, embodying the political labour involved in constructing understanding, or at least a particular version of it, across profound discontinuities.

The conversation ignites almost immediately around the figure of the *cariye*, specifically the *baş kalfa* (head female servant/slave). Madam F's confusion and implicit critique, stemming from the *kalfa*'s refusal to shake hands, her attire, and her standing apart, create the initial hiatus that necessitates Fatma Aliye's intervention as translator. Fatma Aliye immediately employs a key strategy: comparative translation. Instead of engaging with *cariyelik* on abstract, universal terms of freedom versus bondage, she reframes the discussion by contrasting the Ottoman institution with European domestic service (*hizmetçilik*). This move attempts to establish a relative equivalence in function (both involve service) but quickly pivots to assert the superiority of the Ottoman model in practice. Fatma Aliye meticulously translates the *cariyelik* system into a narrative of regulated rights, protections, and integration. She emphasizes that the *cariye*'s work is governed by custom (örf *ve* âdet), she possesses legal rights (cannot be sold against her will to an undesirable buyer, protected from abuse by şeriat- Islamic law), and benefits from a long-term, familial bond with the master's household.[30] This bond, Fatma Aliye argues, extends beyond the period of service, obligating the former master to provide support even after manumission (*azat*), a stark contrast, she implies, to the disposable nature of European servants.

In this detailed explanation, Fatma Aliye actively enrolls various actors and entities into her translation network: Islamic law (şeriat), Ottoman custom (örf *ve* âdet), the hierarchical structure of her own household, the material rewards given to *cariyeler* (jewelry, salary, dowry - çeyiz), and the very concept of *mürüvvet* (nobility, humaneness) expected of masters. She aims to displace Madam F's presumed understanding of slavery as sheer brutality with a complex picture of a paternalistic, albeit hierarchical, social arrangement where obligations are reciprocal. This translation effort seeks to transform the *cariye* from a mere object of ownership into a subject with specific rights and a defined social trajectory,

30 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 27.

culminating ideally in freedom and marriage. Here, Fatma Aliye subtly shifts the focus from the lack of absolute freedom to the presence of specific securities and protections within the system.

The translation becomes even more ambitious, and perhaps more problematic from a modern perspective, when addressing the origins of the *cariye*s, particularly those from Circassia. Confronted with the inherent violence of separating children from their families, Fatma Aliye constructs a counter-narrative that translates this act into one of opportunity and even desire. She paints a picture where Circassian girls actively aspire to be sent to Istanbul, viewing it as a path to significant social advancement.[31] The harsh realities of rural life are contrasted with the perceived comforts and potential rewards of service in an elite Ottoman household. Even the sale of very young children is translated into an act of parental love and foresight, aimed at securing a better education and future for the child that could be provided at home, or protecting them from potential stepmothers. This narrative effectively attempts to transform the actants involved: the selling parents become well-intentioned guardians, the purchased child becomes an aspirant to a better life, and the system itself becomes a vehicle for social mobility. It is a powerful act of narrative displacement, seeking to create equivalence between the Circassian family's aspirations and the opportunities offered by the Ottoman system, thereby neutralizing the critique of exploitation.

However, the limits of this carefully constructed translation soon become apparent. Madam F's ironic response, "But madam, you have described slavery in such a way that everyone will desire to be a slave"[32], signals a breakdown in the intended equivalence. It highlights the disbelief provoked by Fatma Aliye's overly idealized portrayal. This moment forces Fatma Aliye into a tactical retreat, a common feature in the negotiation inherent in translation. Subsequently, Fatma Aliye nuances her position. While initially offering a slight deflection (balancing slave and protector numbers), she then explicitly acknowledges the gap between the ideal and the real. She concedes that her defense was based on the "fundamental rules of sharia" and the practices of "families who are mindful of these and other requirements of humanity." She admits that "in the world, if a good side of everything is seen, a bad side is also seen," and that human nature is prone to misuse (*suiistimal*)[33] even the best principles. She acknowledges the existence of abusive fathers and exploitative masters but frames them as "rare" exceptions condemned by public opinion. This concession, while perhaps strategically necessary, reveals the inherent tension and potential "betrayal" within the act of translation,[34] namely the gap between the smooth, coherent narrative presented and the complex, often contradictory, reality it seeks to represent. Fatma Aliye manages the translation by presenting the idealized version first, only conceding imperfections when directly challenged.

The dialogue then shifts, significantly initiated by Fatma Aliye herself, towards the realm of religion, opening another complex field for translation. The seemingly innocuous comparison of the iftar spread to *hors d'oeuvres* is immediately elevated by Fatma Aliye into a religious

31 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 30.
32 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 36.
33 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 37.
34 Janicka, "Processes of Translation", 854.

parallel with the *Maide-i İsa* (Table of Jesus).[35] This move prompts the hitherto silent nun to engage, creating an opportunity for Fatma Aliye to translate Islamic perspectives on shared religious history. Her strategy here mirrors her approach to *cariyelik*: seeking common ground while subtly asserting an Islamic framework. She readily recounts the Quranic version of the miracle of the table (Sûrat al-Ma'ida), demonstrating Islamic familiarity with Christian narratives. When discussing fasting, she again employs comparative translation, suggesting Islamic fasting is no more difficult than Christian asceticism, seeking and receiving affirmation from the nun on the general principle of devotion. She further builds bridges by quoting the Quranic verse (al-Ma'ida 5/82) that praises the humility and knowledge of Christian priests and monks, explicitly enrolling the *Quran* itself in an act of interfaith acknowledgment.

The encounter deepens during the house tour when they find a woman reading *Quran*ic commentary (*Sûrat Al 'Imran*). This prompts a detailed discussion initiated by the nun about Mary (*Meryem*). Fatma Aliye translates the Islamic account of the Annunciation and the virgin birth, emphasizing the absolute necessity of this belief for Muslims.[36] Here, translation serves both to affirm shared belief in the miracle and to clearly define Islamic doctrine. This leads to the crux of the inter-religious translation effort: the discussion of the Gospels (*İncil*). Fatma Aliye affirms Muslim belief in the divine origin of the *İncil* but proceeds to translate it through an Islamic lens, arguing that it predicts the coming of Muhammad (Ahmed). Her use of the French Bible (Gospel of John) and the commentary of a French *Quran* translator (Kazimirski) to argue that *Paraclete*, understood as a corruption of *Periclytos* and denoting Ahmed/Muhammad, represents a fascinating attempt to enroll the Christian text itself as evidence for Islamic claims.[37]

This specific act of translation, however, meets explicit resistance. The nun firmly rejects Fatma Aliye's interpretation, stating it contradicts established Church doctrine.[38] This marks a clear failure of translation to achieve consensus or equivalence at the level of core theological interpretation. It highlights how translation breaks down when encountering deeply entrenched, alternative meaning systems. Fatma Aliye's attempt to transcode[39] the meaning of *Paraclete* from one religious semiotic system to another is rebuffed.

Despite this failure, Aliye continues to translate, now focusing on articulating difference. She clearly states the Islamic position on Jesus: a great prophet, miraculously born, but unequivocally human, not the "Son of God" (*İbnullah*).[40] She translates the term İbnullah itself, arguing it was metaphorical language used in earlier scriptures (citing the *Old Testament* and the Gospel of Luke) but prohibited in Islam due to its potential for literal misinterpretation – framing the difference as a clarification and refinement of understanding. Similarly, she affirms Jesus's ascension but translates the crucifixion narrative radically, denying the event as

35 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 47.

36 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 56.

37 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 58-60.

38 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 59.

39 In semiotic terms, to *transcode* is to transfer a sign or concept from one semiotic system into another, seeking functional or conceptual equivalence. As used by Greimas and discussed by Janicka, transcoding involves more than simple translation; it entails rearticulating a sign's meaning so that it resonates within a different cultural, ideological, or epistemological code. Such attempts often expose the limits of equivalence, particularly when the sign carries dense theological or historical connotations. Janicka, "Processes of Translation", 849.

40 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 65-66.

understood by Christians and claiming the Jews mistakenly crucified someone else while God raised Jesus. This challenges both Jewish and Christian accounts, asserting a distinct Islamic version of events. Here, translation is not about finding commonality but about precisely delineating Islamic exceptionalism, demonstrating that translation involves defining boundaries as much as building bridges, articulating difference alongside commonality.

Throughout the dialogue, Fatma Aliye skillfully manages the flow of information, acting as the primary interpreter and cultural guide. Her final remarks, echoing the "Mukaddime", attribute European misconceptions to faulty translations by unreliable intermediaries in Beyoğlu / Pera and inaccurate travelogues, thereby framing her own interaction as an authentic corrective. The dialogue concludes cordially, suggesting success on the level of social interaction and hospitality, a successful translation of politeness and respect, even though the translation of specific concepts like *cariyelik* and core theological points remained contested or incomplete. The First Dialogue thus serves as a rich case study of Latourian translation in action: a dynamic, strategic, labor-intensive process of mediation, enrollment, transformation, and boundary-setting, fraught with potential ambiguities and failures, yet essential for navigating the complex encounters between different worlds. It vividly illustrates Fatma Aliye's attempt to "redistribute intelligibility"[41] by weaving together diverse elements, including social practices, religious texts, personal experiences, and comparative frameworks, into a coherent, albeit contested, narrative.

2. The Second Dialogue: Translation, Affect, and the Philosophical Encounter

The second dialogue, featuring the intellectually formidable Madam R, significantly elevates the complexity of the encounters depicted in *Nisvan-ı İslam*. Initially introduced not through direct approach but via a letter from a mutual acquaintance (Madam C), Madam R arrives already partially translated, framed as a "philosopher" and a woman of significant learning and social standing. This pre-framing sets a different tone from the outset. While the first dialogue centered on correcting perceived European misconceptions through Fatma Aliye's dominant translational efforts, this second encounter unfolds as a more reciprocal, multifaceted exchange. It continues to showcase Latourian translation dynamics, such as the mediation of cultural practices, the enrollment of texts and actors, the negotiation of meaning across divides, but integrates these with palpable affective currents and the very eventfulness of the encounter itself. Drawing on Brian Massumi's work, particularly his critique of ideology and emphasis on affect and encounter, allows us to appreciate this dialogue not merely as an intellectual debate or defense of cultural norms, but as a dynamic "thinking-feeling"[42] process where knowledge, emotion, aesthetic sensibility, and social navigation intertwine, shaping both the participants and the potential for understanding.

The encounter begins with a heightened awareness of the sensory and the social. Madam R's physical presence is meticulously described, with attention to her fashionable yet tasteful attire, her striking features, her poised demeanor. This attention to the body and its presentation underscores the embodied nature of the encounter, moving beyond purely abstract dis-

41 Janicka, "Processes of Translation", 847.

42 Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, 94.

cussion (a point highlighted previously regarding the importance of sensory detail). Madam R is immediately positioned as an active participant, not just a passive observer; she is already learning Turkish, taking notes, demonstrating an intense curiosity that signals her capacity not just to be affected, but to affect the course of the interaction.[43] Fatma Aliye, in turn, adapts her role as hostess, offering her arm, a gesture of equal footing absent in the interaction with the *cariye* in the first dialogue, thereby initiating a different kind of relational dynamic from the start. This careful choreography sets the stage for an encounter characterized by what Massumi terms "differential attunement,"[44] with two individuals deeply engaged in the unfolding event, yet bringing their distinct perspectives and capacities into play.

The discussion quickly turns to polygamy (*taaddüd-i zevcat*). Madam R actively attempts her own translation based on observation, seeking to identify co-wives (*ortak*) by deciphering the gazes (*nazar*) exchanged between the women present, specifically looking for hostility.[45] Her failure to find such evidence, based on her assumption of its prevalence, represents an initial mis-translation rooted in received narratives. Fatma Aliye again steps in as the primary translator, confirming the practice's rarity and deploying a complex translation of Islamic law and social reality. She repeats her earlier points about polygamy being a strictly conditional permission (*ruhsat*) rather than a command, emphasizing the economic and social factors that limit its practice. Crucially, she again uses comparative translation, launching a counter-critique of European society. By contrasting the Islamic allowance for polygamy (framed as preventing greater social ills) with the European phenomenon of mistresses (*metreslik*) and the resultant suffering of illegitimate children,[46] she attempts to translate the perceived deficit of Islamic practice into a relative strength. She argues that Islamic law, by allowing regulated polygamy while forbidding adultery, ultimately offers greater protection to women and ensures the legitimacy and rights of all children, unlike the European system which, in her translation, produces social outcasts ("the 'bastard' stamp on their foreheads is indelible").[47] This is a powerful act of political labour, aiming to displace Western moral superiority by translating the issue onto the terrain of social consequences and affective outcomes, namely the lived suffering of illegitimate children versus the protected status, including the right to divorce, of Muslim women. The subsequent translation of historical and scriptural matters further complicates the exchange. When Madam R raises questions about Prophet Muhammad's multiple marriages, citing potentially negative hearsay, Fatma Aliye engages in an elaborate historical translation. She meticulously justifies each marriage, enrolling historical context, political necessity (alliances), social customs (*küfüv* – marital equality),[48] and compassion (support for widows) as explanatory actors. The potentially controversial marriage to Zaynab bint Jahsh is translated into a narrative primarily concerned with resolving the complex social issue of *küfüv* and establishing divine legal precedent regarding adoption. This demonstrates translation not just as explanation, but as active historical and theological justification, constructing a coherent narrative network from potentially disparate or problematic elements.

43 Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, 91.
44 Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, 94.
45 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 87.
46 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 98.
47 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 97.
48 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 104-105.

Similarly, the continued discussion on the textual integrity of the Bible and Torah, where Fatma Aliye points out inconsistencies to argue for their alteration (*tahrif*) in contrast to the *Quran*'s perceived purity, is an act of translation aimed at establishing the Islamic scripture's superior claim to authority by translating historical transmission into evidence of authenticity. Madam R's partial acceptance, acknowledging Islam's rationality and the problem of the Trinity, shows translation achieving a degree of intellectual alignment, yet hitting a barrier when she identifies veiling, not theology, as the main obstacle to potential Western conversion.

The discussion on veiling (*tesettür*) showcases Fatma Aliye's skill in nuanced translation. She carefully distinguishes between the core religious requirement (şeriat – covering hair, modest dress) and subsequent, culturally specific customs (*örf ve âdet* – face veils, etc.). By citing diverse practices (rural women, historical tribes, Prophet's era interactions) she translates *tesettür* not as a monolithic, oppressive mandate, but as a principle with varied historical and geographical expressions. She attributes the stricter contemporary norms of separation to a "corruption of the times",[49] effectively translating the current practice as a contingent custom rather than immutable religious law. This untangles the network, separating religion from custom, past from present, allowing for a more flexible understanding. Similarly, when defending arranged marriage against Madam R's preference for love matches, Fatma Aliye translates the debate away from individual romantic freedom versus constraint. She focuses instead on the affective outcomes and stability, contrasting the perceived high failure rate of European love matches (driven by fleeting infatuation - *heves*)[50] with the alleged stability of Ottoman arranged marriages guided by family wisdom and investigation. Fatma Aliye argues from the perspective of collective affective well-being and long-term relational stability, translating the Ottoman practice into a potentially more successful process for achieving marital harmony. Her framing of custom as powerful yet gradually changeable reflects a processual understanding of social transformation, rather than one marked by abrupt ruptures.

The latter part of the dialogue marks a distinct affective turn. As the conversation moves outdoors into the moonlit garden, the focus shifts from debate and justification towards shared experience and philosophical reflection. Madam R takes the lead, translating her vast knowledge of astronomy, geology, and botany into the shared space, not as dry facts but with palpable passion.[51] Fatma Aliye, in turn, translates her role from defender to appreciative listener, expressing admiration for R's intellect and finding aesthetic pleasure in her discourse. This shared engagement with science and nature, framed by the beauty of the Bosphorus night, creates a powerful affective field, a moment of connection transcending cultural difference. Madam R further translates her engagement with European high society (balls, fashion) through her unique philosophical lens, finding intellectual stimulation and observational richness where others might see only frivolity. Her ability to see the physics of sound in a silk dress or the sociology of glances across a ballroom demonstrates a capacity for translation across seemingly disparate domains, including science, aesthetics, social life.

This shared intellectual and aesthetic absorption culminates in a moment of profound, silent contemplation prompted by music and the atmosphere. This silence is not empty but

49 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 119.

50 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 123.

51 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 134.

pregnant with the "transindividual thinking-feeling" Massumi describes – an unspoken attunement between the two women. The interruption by the servant, and the subsequent reflection on being left alone, leads unexpectedly to a shared contemplation of mortality. This shared confrontation with an existential limit, triggered by the servant's simple gesture and R's observation, creates a powerful, serious emotional resonance, a "felt transition"[52] that momentarily overshadows their intellectual discussion. Madam R's subsequent self-reflection on her own physical flaws as a check against pride (*gurur*) further deepens this sense of shared humanity grounded in imperfection and mortality, moving the encounter far beyond a simple defense or critique of cultural practices.

The Second Dialogue represents a significant evolution from the first. While Fatma Aliye continues her skillful translational work, defending, explaining, comparing, justifying, the encounter is far more reciprocal, shaped significantly by Madam R's intellectual agency and affective presence. Madam R acts as both a recipient and a source of translation, bringing her own networks of knowledge (scientific, philosophical, social) into play and demonstrating a capacity for nuanced observation and reflection that transcends simple prejudice. The dialogue vividly illustrates the dynamics of Latourian translation in negotiating complex social issues like polygamy and veiling, and contested histories and scriptures. However, enriched by Massumi's perspective, the encounter is revealed as more than just a negotiation of meaning or ideology. It is a lived event, charged with affect, including curiosity, admiration, passion, shared aesthetic pleasure, existential vulnerability. The moments of connection forged through shared experience, scientific wonder, and philosophical reflection demonstrate the power of encounter to create understanding and relationship even where intellectual or theological agreement remains elusive. Madam R, poised to write her own "factual" travelogue, emerges as a figure who embodies the potential for a translation grounded in genuine encounter and intellectual honesty, offering a counterpoint to the misinformed translations Fatma Aliye critiques, suggesting that meaningful translation requires not just linguistic skill but also affective openness and a willingness to engage with the complexities of the other's world.

3. The Third Dialogue: Intra-Cultural Negotiations and the Affective Field of Encounter

The third and final dialogue presented in *Nisvan-ı İslam* offers perhaps the most intricate tapestry of interaction, weaving together internal Ottoman discussions, cross-cultural encounters, philosophical musings, and moments of shared aesthetic and affective experience. Opening not with the arrival of European guests, but within an intimate circle of Fatma Aliye and her Ottoman friends, S Hanım and N Hanım, the dialogue immediately establishes a different dynamic. It allows us insight into the negotiations of modernity, tradition, and personal preference occurring within the Ottoman sphere, before layering upon this the complexities of the encounter with European visitors. This structure provides a richer context for understanding the subsequent intercultural translations. Furthermore, the dialogue prominently features moments of shared sensory experience, aesthetic appreciation, and affective resonance.

52 Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, 93.

The scene opens with a lush, evocative description of a spring morning, appealing directly to the senses, with the "soul-enhancing fragrance"[53] born from the mingling scents of diverse flowers, the sound of the nightingale. This emphasis on the sensory creates an affective atmosphere, a specific field that conditions the interactions that follow. It is a reminder that encounters are embodied and situated, not merely abstract exchanges of ideas. Within this setting, the initial conversation revolves around the very modern anxieties of fashion, specifically S Hanım's dilemma over an out-of-style dress. The contrasting personalities of S Hanım (English-speaking, fashion-conscious, perhaps slightly frivolous) and N Hanım (prefers *alaturka*, pragmatic, critical of fashion's ephemerality) spark a debate that is itself an act of intra-cultural translation. They are translating competing values, such as adherence to European trends versus practicality and tradition, appearance versus substance, within their shared Ottoman context.

Fatma Aliye initially observes, then steps in to mediate. Her intervention is significant: she reframes the alaturka/alafranga dichotomy not as a mutually exclusive choice but as a spectrum of acceptable practices within Ottoman society. She declares them both "free in their actions", contrasting this flexibility with the perceived "compulsion"[54] of Parisian fashion. This act of translation validates both perspectives while positioning Ottoman modernity as uniquely adaptable. She further links the rapid changes in fashion to the broader condition of modernity, characterized by its speed and constant state of flux, suggesting fashion is merely one manifestation of a larger historical process. Fatma Aliye's own stated preference for situational flexibility, sometimes alafranga, sometimes alaturka – models this pragmatic, non-ideological navigation. The subsequent humorous debate about corsets, culminating in Fatma Aliye citing Ahmet Mithat Efendi to frame it as a choice between a life of dignity (*ömr-i aziz*) and a life of delight (*ömr-i leziz*),[55] further underscores this pragmatic, non-doctrinaire approach to mediating modern choices.

The intervention of an elderly woman adds another layer, translating the present debate into a longer historical perspective. Her nostalgic critique of the younger generation's dress and her description of past fashions[56] highlight the ever-shifting nature of custom and the generational gaps in perception. N Hanım's playful, parodic recreation of an old-fashioned headdress further underscores the performative, sometimes arbitrary, nature of fashion codes. This entire sequence demonstrates translation operating within the Ottoman group, negotiating modernity, tradition, individual preference, and generational perspectives through debate, mediation, historical reflection, and even parody.

The arrival of the European guests shifts the register of translation to the intercultural. The guests' prior request to see their hosts in alaturka attire immediately creates an affective tension – S Hanım's anxiety about appearing unfashionable or "ignorant." This highlights how encounters are pre-conditioned by expectations and the affective weight of potential judgment. Fatma Aliye manages this by prioritizing hospitality, translating the situation as an obligation to fulfill the guests' desire over personal preference. Their collective adoption of alaturka dress becomes a deliberate performance for the European gaze.

53 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 173.
54 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 183.
55 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 200.
56 Fatma Aliye, *Nisvan-ı İslam*, 207.

The central translation challenge emerges when the guests express disappointment, revealing that their image of alaturka is based on fantasy representations seen in Paris. Their desired costume, consisting of embroidered jacket, *şalvar*, does not match the contemporary alaturka worn by the hosts. This gap between the translated image (the European fantasy) and the lived reality becomes the focal point. Fatma Aliye undertakes a masterful act of deconstructive translation. By presenting a picture matching their description and meticulously analyzing its components, identifying the sitter as likely a Christian actress and the costume elements as a "composite" drawn from Arab, Albanian, Damascene, Indian, and European sources, she dismantles the guests' preconceived notion. She reveals their desired "authentic Turkish" image as a fabrication, a product of faulty translation and exoticizing representation. This reflects a methodological approach centered on tracing the networks in order to sreveal how objects (in this case, cultural images) are assembled and often misrepresented. It's a direct confrontation with the power of ideology to shape perception through simplified and inaccurate stereotypes, preventing genuine encounter with the complexity of the real.

The dialogue continues with further translations of cultural practices and social realities. The European aunt's deeply personal story about rejecting her lover, born out of wedlock, provides a powerful, affective translation of the consequences of European social norms regarding birth status. The narrative blends thought and emotion in a way that powerfully conveys the burden of social stigma, more effectively than any abstract reasoning could. This story serves as an embodied counterpoint to Fatma Aliye's earlier critique, adding depth and tragedy to the comparison between Islamic and European approaches to legitimacy and marriage. Fatma Aliye continues her corrective translations regarding Ottoman women's rights, refuting myths about subservience by translating specific legal points (financial independence, husband's obligation for support) and customary practices, contrasting them favorably with her translation of European legal constraints.

A significant aspect of this dialogue is the role of shared aesthetic and intellectual experience in fostering connection, moving beyond argumentation. The shared admiration for the European guests' musical virtuosity on the piano, followed by the hosts performing both Western and Ottoman music on traditional instruments, becomes a successful act of translation through a non-verbal, affective medium. Music acts as a bridge, creating a space of mutual appreciation and shared pleasure. Resistance, or connection, can emerge through shared practices and subtle emotional attunement, spreading more like a contagion than through force or direct persuasion. The musical exchange operates in this way, generating a fleeting sense of harmony. Similarly, the earlier shared appreciation of the moonlit Bosphorus and Madam R's passionate yet accessible discourse on astronomy and natural philosophy create moments of intellectual connection grounded in shared wonder and aesthetic sensibility. These moments exemplify how encounter is not just about conflict or negotiation but also about the co-creation of shared affective states and intensified experience.[57]

The Third Dialogue enriches the analysis by showcasing translation operating dynamically within the Ottoman group itself as they negotiate modernity, and by presenting a more reciprocal, affectively charged encounter with the European guests compared to the previous dialogues. Fatma Aliye continues her role as a masterful translator, deconstructing stereotypes,

57 Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, 101.

justifying practices through historical and comparative lenses, and navigating complex social and religious terrain. However, the dialogue also highlights the agency of others, including the contrasting views of S and N, the poignant narrative of the European aunt, the intellectual contributions and affective presence of Madam R's counterparts. This perspective allows us to understand these interactions not merely as strategic efforts to correct an ideology, but as lived encounters shaped by embodied experience, emotional resonance, and shared sensitivity. The successful deconstruction of the "authentic" Turkish costume stereotype, the powerful affective translation of the illegitimacy dilemma via personal story, and the moments of connection forged through music and shared appreciation of nature demonstrate how genuine encounter can disrupt preconceived notions and create openings for understanding, even if comprehensive agreement or translation remains elusive. The dialogue ultimately suggests that the most effective path towards cross-cultural understanding involves not only skillful intellectual translation but also a willingness to engage on an affective, experiential level, fostering moments of shared attunement within the complex, ongoing process of encounter.

CONCLUSION: MEDIATED WORLDS, AFFECTIVE TRANSLATIONS

Nisvan-ı İslam emerges, in light of the preceding analysis, as a profoundly layered textual site where translation is not merely a linguistic operation, nor encounter simply an exchange of views. Through the interwoven lenses of Latourian translation and Massumian affect, we have traced how Fatma Aliye choreographs complex processes of mediation across asymmetrical terrains of knowledge, representation, and emotion. Her dialogues do not aim to eliminate difference but rather to inhabit it, navigating the discontinuities, asymmetries, and tensions between Ottoman Muslim and European lifeworlds without reducing them to fixed oppositions or assimilable sameness.

The significance of Fatma Aliye's project lies in its refusal to rest on either defensive cultural apologetics or uncritical mimicry of the Western gaze. Instead, she performs a form of world-making translation, an ongoing, relational, and precarious endeavor of assembling intelligibility from within the tangled web of partial knowledges, entrenched imaginaries, and embodied perceptions. This translation is always situated, always contingent, and always charged with the possibility of failure. Yet, it is precisely through this friction, between sincerity and irony, hospitality and resistance, familiarity and estrangement, that the text generates its political and epistemic energy.

Nisvan-ı İslam also foregrounds the affective labor of encounter: the gestures, silences, hesitations, and atmospheric conditions that both exceed and shape what can be said. By attending to the material and sensory textures of the dialogues, including moonlit gardens, corset debates, musical exchanges, the aroma of spring flowers, Fatma Aliye draws attention to the relational infrastructures that undergird every act of communication. These aesthetic and affective registers do not supplement but constitute the encounter itself, making possible moments of resonance even amidst disagreement. Affective intensities can reconfigure perception and create new lines of potential where none previously existed. It is in this preconceptual domain that *Nisvan-ı İslam* most potently operates, not as a blueprint for consensus, but as a field for the emergence of new relational possibilities.

Moreover, the translingual and transregional afterlives of the text, including its multiple French and Arabic translations, each accompanied by different framing strategies and mediated by diverse actors, extend these dynamics beyond the original dialogues. The history of the book's reception and circulation becomes itself a site of performative translation: an unfolding network of alliances, displacements, and resignifications shaped by local epistemologies, political agendas, and affective investments. The translators and publishers (Lebedeff, Roukié, Fawwaz, Farisi) do not merely transmit the work; they reconstitute it within new assemblages of meaning, each generating new encounters and interpretive horizons. The text's portability thus testifies not to a universal transparency but to its capacity to remain productive under translation, to sustain multiplicity without collapsing into incoherence.

In theorizing *Nisvan-ı İslam* as a machinic site of translation and affective attunement, this article offers a reading that resists both instrumentalist accounts of intercultural communication and celebratory narratives of seamless understanding. It suggests instead that the politics of mediation reside in the capacity to hold open the interval between worlds, to dwell in the space where meanings are not yet fixed, and to forge connections that are both affectively resonant and epistemically reflexive. Fatma Aliye's dialogues model a mode of intercultural engagement that is neither naïvely universalist nor narrowly particularist, but one that acknowledges the fragility, asymmetry, and transformative potential of relational life under conditions of modernity.

Nisvan-ı İslam is not simply a record of what was said between women across a civilizational divide; it is a speculative blueprint for what might be possible when translation is conceived not as fidelity to origin, but as an act of situated co-composition, a process through which new ways of relating, sensing, and knowing can emerge, however momentarily, within the folds of a contested world.

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