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Halide Edip Adıvar and Her Perception of the 'New Woman' Identity

Halide Edip Adıvar'ın 'Yeni Kadın Kimliği' Anlayışı

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Abstract

The prolific Turkish writer, journalist, pioneer feminist, nationalist and educator, Halide Edip Adıvar, lived in the transition period (late 19th and early 20th century) of the Ottoman Empire from tradition into modernity, in which there were lots of struggles and deep-seated conflicts, especially concerning 'the new women identity'. Even in such a depressing period, Halide Edip Adıvar achieved lots of things in an eighty-year lifetime and was acknowledged widely both in Turkey and abroad. Besides struggling against the traditional dictations of her patriarchal society, she dedicated herself into the battle of her nation and female descendants for life and liberty. She was the 'Jeanne D'Arc of Turks', but never ceased to be aware of the moral and cultural facts of her time while realizing her aims. Considering these facts, this study focuses on

Öz

Üretken bir yazar, gazeteci, öncü feminist, milliyetçi ve eğitimci kimliklerini içinde barındıran Halide Edip Adıvar, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun, özellikle 'yeni kadın kimliği' ile ilgili birçok mücadelenin ve derin çatışmaların yaşandığı, geleneksel toplumdan modernliğe geçiş döneminde (19. yüzyılın sonu ve 20. yüzyılın başlarında) yaşamıştır. Böylesine zor ve çatışmalı bir dönemde bile, Halide Edip Adıvar, seksen yıllık yaşamı süresince sayısız başarılarla imza atarak hem yurtiçinde hem de yurtdışında kabul görmüştür. İçinde yaşadığı ataerkil toplumun geleneksel yaptırımlarına karşı savaşmanın yanı sıra, kendini milletin ve gelecek kadın nesillerin hayat ve özgürlük mücadelesine adanmıştır. Türklerin 'Jeanne D'Arc'ı olarak kabul edilmesine rağmen, hiçbir zaman toplumunun ahlaki ve kültürel

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the basis of Halide Edip Adıvar's perceptions on the female identity formation and the ways of constructing the 'new modern Turkish woman identity' throughout the conflicts and crises of her own society. Then, basing its arguments on the feminist approach and the mental attitudes appropriate to the historical contexts of the mentioned period, it is proved that the patriarchal system and its dictations based on religion and moral values play an important role in the 'new woman identity' formation process, and pose an obstacle against women in their search to accomplish their self-esteems and independent women identities.

gerçeklerinden vazgeçmemiştir. Bu gerçekler göz önünde bulundurularak, bu çalışma, Halide Edip Adıvar'ın kadın anlayışı ve 'yeni modern Türk kadın kimliği'ni, içinde bulunduğu toplumun çatışmaları ve krizleri boyunca, inşa etme yollarını temel almaktadır. Sonrasında, tartışmalarını feminist yaklaşım ve belirtilen dönemin tarihsel bağlamlarına uygun zihinsel tutumlara dayandırarak, ataerkil sistemin ve bu sistemin din ve ahlak değerlerinden kaynaklanan yaptırımlarının 'yeni kadın kimliği' oluşum sürecinde önemli bir rol oynadığı ve kadınların bağımsız kimliklerini gerçekleştirmelerinde engel teşkil ettiği kanıtlanmıştır.

Keywords: *Halide Edip Adıvar, New Woman Identity, Patriarchal Society, Identity Search, Independent Female Self*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Halide Edip Adıvar, Yeni Kadın Kimliği, Ataerkil Toplum, Kimlik Arayışı, Bağımsız Kadın Kimliği*

Introduction

Over the centuries, women have been confined by and excluded from HIStory, science, literature, art and civilization because of the long-lasting belief that women are 'imperfect men' and 'incidental being(s)'. Surrounded and defined by these phallogocentric discourses and ideologies, women have no choice but to consent being passive, innocent, soft, graceful, nurturing and accepting. As a result, they have been sentenced to confinement and dispossession.

Nevertheless, the late 19th and the early 20th centuries were times of challenge – triumph over fear and adversity – for women. Women stopped delimiting themselves in accordance with the male-defined roles and changed their submissive and secondary position. It was a kind of transition from the patriarchal society full of male-biased dictations into a liberation for women.

Transformations in Ottoman Women's Lives

Because of the restrictions and the strict values of a patriarchal Islamic society, Ottoman women were confined with private and patriarchal practices until the big transformation of the Ottoman state and society in the nineteenth century. With the influences of the transformation in Europe in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, the Ottoman Empire was confronted with the necessity to initiate social and legal reforms. Thus, the age of reformation, commonly named the

'Tanzimat' (1839-1876), emerged and a series of reforms – economic, social, political, judicial and ideological – were made during this progressive era. Ottoman women also benefited from egalitarian reforms and started to acquire better social and legal positions in society. The issues such as the prearranged marriages, the system of concubine and slavery, polygamy, and the women's imprisonment into a domestic life without any education took the attention of the reformers and modernization movements. As a result, the concubine was forbidden and the right of inheritance for women was provided.

The reforms, together with the construction of a modern state, necessitated the education of women and their visibility throughout the society. One of the most important results of these improvements was the creation of facilities for a better education for women. Before Tanzimat, women in Ottoman Empire were attending schools where the scholastic and religious education was provided. However, these schools were not compulsory for women and the curriculum was limited to certain subjects, which had been previously determined in accordance with the need of the patriarchal system. Nevertheless, with the introduction of the reforms and the increasing awareness throughout the society, women started to facilitate from the secondary education as well, in schools known as 'Rüşdiye', in addition to the compulsory primary education. Then, the high schools for arts and crafts special to females were established, and finally, Ottoman women got the chance of getting higher education in 1848 in the School of Medicine, where they could take midwifery courses. However, the most important attempt for females' education was realized in 1870 with the establishment of the 'Darü'l Muallimat' (Female Teacher Training College). This school had a great importance and meaning for the future women generation, because in Ottoman Empire, due to its patriarchal and Islamic structure, the female students' receiving education with their male peers in the same school was not approved. This misconception common throughout the society was giving rise to the Ottoman women's imprisonment into a silent and passivized life without any knowledge and education necessary for their own improvements. Thus, Darü'l Muallimat, with its graduate female teachers, took active roles in shaping the new and modern Ottoman women identity. The increasing number of the newly-established schools in Tanzimat gave rise to the publishing, especially to women magazines and newspapers after 1860. Women writers tried to create and disseminate the concept of 'new woman identity' through the Ottoman society with their articles, in which they mentioned about the desires of women to become visible in social life and getting the rights of education and independence like those in West.

The reforms established in Tanzimat turned out satisfactory in 1876 and 1908. These two dates, which are known as 'Meşrutiyet' (Constitutional Period), were the milestones for Ottoman women. During Meşrutiyet, Ottoman women's movement, called 'Hareket-i Nisvan', gained momentum thanks to the contributions of women having been trained in the modern institutions of Tanzimat. These new and self-confident Ottoman women, like Halide Edip, Fatma Aliye, Emine Semiye, and Nezihe Muhittin, became more active and visible in women charities, clubs and literary fields. They gave voice to the silenced and patriarchally constructed femininity and insisted on their demands about women's education, their active participation into the male-dominated fields with equal rights and the subversion of the long-lasting gender biases. One of these remarkable and

reformist women, Mrs. Arife, clearly explained the aims and priorities of the new women identity in 'Şükufezer', the first periodical published by Ottoman women. For Mrs. Arife,

[Women] are such a group of people that have been always neglected and exposed to the scorns of the males, as being concerned 'long-haired and scatter-brained. We are determined to challenge this misconception. We will resist, as much as possible, on the high way to success by not preferring masculinity to femininity, or femininity to masculinity.

Biz ki saçını uzun aklı kısa, diye erkeklerin hande-i istihzasına hedef olmuş bir taifeyiz. Bunun aksini ispat etmeye çalışacağız. Erkekliği kadınlığa, kadınlığa erkekliğe tercih etmeyerek, şahrah-i sa'y-u amelde (çalışmanın doğru yolunda) mümkün olduğu kadar payendaz-ı sebat (ayak direten) olacağız (*qtd. in Çakır, 1996, p. 26*).

To be able to realize all of these demands and enable the improvements of Ottoman women, the charities for women were established, some of which were 'Cemiyet-i Hayriyye-i Nisvan' that worked for the women's right of education, 'Kırmızı Beyaz Klubü' that provided women with chances of finding jobs in male-dominated fields, and 'Müdafaa-i Hukuk-i Nisvan' that defended the independence of women in all matters. All of these struggles came to fruition. For instance, the institutions providing high school-education for Ottoman women became widespread in 1911, and in 1914, 'İnas Darülfünun', the first university special to women, was founded. Then, the coeducation in universities was adapted in 1918.

Despite these promising reformations, Ottoman women were not able to regain their complete independence and reconstruct their female identities, like their peers in West, due to the patriarchal system and the canonical obligations of Ottoman Empire running for ages. The male-dominated Ottoman society was aware that women had to be provided with more facilities, responsibilities and visibility in society to be able to keep up with the West. Thus, Ottoman men ventured forth into establishing a 'new and modern Ottoman woman identity'. However, due to the fear of losing their power and control over women, they defined the limits and rules within the sphere of patriarchal gender stereotypes and roles. During this definition process of women, three ideologies had essential roles: 'Pan-Islamism, Westernism and Pan-Turkism'. For Pan-Islamists, these 'new women' with their European clothes, attitudes and increased visibility in society undermined Islamic codes and instructions. They asserted that women should receive education in accordance with the Islamic values and rules; that is, to be a good mother, wife and a Muslim. The Westernizers disagreed with the Pan-Islamists and emphasized the importance of modern education for Ottoman women, as they believed that women had to be saved from the claws of religion and traditional norms to enable the improvement of the society in every field. However, the Westernizers also did not mention about the complete independence for Ottoman women and confined them to a family life. For the Westernizers, Ottoman women were the "enlightened mothers" ("aydınlanmış anneler") (Durakbaşa, 2000, p. 104) for future generations. According to Pan-Turkists, the ideal resolution was to combine the reformist ideas of the Westernism and the traditional and religious norms of the Pan-Islamism with nationalistic sentiments. Nevertheless, women were again defined in accordance with the needs and desires of Pan-Turkists and became 'mother and sister' (ana ve bacı), accompanying males in the

liberation and the improvement of the country. In this way, Pan-Turkists created a secure place for themselves with the image of de-sexualized and patriotic women (Aytemiz, 2001). In fact, the control over female sexuality was one of the important factors that shaped and limited Ottoman women's roles. Even after the foundation of Turkish Republic, the virtue of the 'new woman' was considered a sign of female modesty, as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk put in one of his speeches:

The [New] Turkish woman should be the most enlightened, most virtuous, and most reserved woman of the world...The duty of the Turkish woman is to raise generations that are capable of preserving and protecting the Turk with his mentality, strength and determination. The woman who is the source and social foundation of the nation can fulfill her duty only if she is virtuous (Atatürk's Statements and Speeches, qtd. and trans. by Arat, 1989, p. 242).

As clearly seen, the transition of Ottoman women into modernity was not realized according to their needs and desires, but it was defined and constituted within the patriarchal boundaries and dictations, which were 'motherhood, wifeness and sisterhood'. Celal Nuri İleri, an important Turkish intellectual and journalist, explained these boundaries in his book, *Kadınlarımız*:

We should straighten out our women before anything else so that they can straighten out the children, who are going to take parts in the reformation of the state and nation when they grow up. The roof is not the first step in the construction of a building. Firstly, the foundation must be laid. The woman is the basic foundation of the mankind.

Her şeyden evvel kadınlarımızı ıslah etmeliyiz ki onlar da çocukları, çocuklar da büyüdüklerinde devleti ve milleti ıslah etsinler. Bir bina yapılacağı zaman çatıdan başlanmaz. Evvela temel kazılır. Kadın, insanlık binasının esas temelidir (qtd. in *Taşkıran*, 1973, p. 60).

Bearing all these facts concerning the 'new woman identity', Ottoman feminists who desired to benefit from the emancipatory reforms and the political atmosphere of the period had to maintain a more balanced and moderate way in their movements rather than follow the militarist actions of the Suffragettes and fellows in west. In many fields, they were struggling hard to achieve their equality and defend feminist ideals before the patriarchal Ottoman society. Nevertheless, most of the women involved in the Ottoman feminism were far from holding straightforward feminist inclinations due to the nationalism, traditional moral values, and most importantly, religiosity peculiar to patriarchal Ottoman society. That is why, as Ayşe Durakbaşa stated in her book, *Halide Edip Türk Modernleşmesi ve Feminizm* (Halide Edip Turkish Modernization and Feminism), "Ottoman men and women have tried to legitimate and rationalize these kinds of Islamic principles by using a sociological formula based on the necessity of a social order that is in accordance with the nature of a 'woman' and 'man' / "Osmanlı kadınları ve erkekleri, bu tür İslami ilkeleri, 'kadın' ve 'erkek doğası ile uyumlu toplumsal düzen ihtiyacına dayanan bir sosyolojik formülü kullanarak rasyonel gösterip meşrulaştırmaya çalışmışlardır" (2000, p. 105).

To sum up, breaking free from patriarchal and ethical norms of the Ottoman society and establishing 'a new woman identity' did not happen smoothly and steadily for Ottoman women. The idea of creating a modern and western type of woman left its place to the idealization of 'heroic

woman' during the Independence war. That is, Ottoman women were defined, shaped and positioned according to the stereotyped cognitions, cultural traditions and religious practices of their patriarchal society. Unfortunately, they could not get and enjoy their full and independent self-identities but remained as "enlightened [wives and mothers] in the private sphere" and as "asexual, masculinized social actors" in public (Kandiyoti, 1995, p. 25).

The 'Jeanne D'arc' of Turkish Literature: Halide Edip Adivar and Her Perception of The 'New Woman' Identity

The prolific Turkish writer, journalist, pioneer feminist, nationalist and educator, Halide Edip Adivar, was born in 1884 in Istanbul during a period when there were lots of struggles and deep-seated conflicts between Middle-East and Western culture. Even in such a depressing period, Halide Edip benefited a lot from being a daughter of a high-ranking Ottoman official. Her father, Edip Bey, adopting Western way of life, insisted that Halide Edip had to receive a Western education. Thus, he hired an English governess and private tutors in the field of social sciences, philosophy, mathematics, literature and psychology for Halide Edip, and then sent her to the American College for Girls in Istanbul, where she graduated from in 1901, as being the first Turkish and Muslim student. However, Halide Edip was also raised according to the rules of Ottoman traditional way of life and Islamic harem by her grandmother, Nakiye Hanım. Thus, getting stuck between the traditional and modern, Halide Edip " [...] grows up slowly, being nourished by both the eastern and western culture; she either listens to the prayers of her Sufi grandma or feels the influences of the English discipline that an occidental father admires" / "[...] doğu ve batı kültürlerinden beslenerek usul usul büyür; kah Mevlevi bir anneannenin yakarışlarını dinler, kah alafranga bir babanın hayran olduğu İngiliz terbiyesini varlığı üzerinde hisseder" (Adivar Edip, 2005, p. 300).

In fact, this divergence between her father and grandmother was the clear evidence of the Ottoman Empire's turbulent years and transformations from tradition to modernity. Throughout those years full of conflicts, Halide Edip devoted herself to intellectual studies and researches for the emancipation of women, their access to education and increased visibility within the society. Her articles propagating equal education and entry into the professional life for women were published in national and international periodicals as well. Besides her literary activities, Halide Edip established the woman's club in 1909, 'Teal-i Nisvan', (Organization for the Elevation of Women's Status), where women were provided with housekeeping, childcare and nursery classes. In 1912, she participated into the 'Turkish Hearth Association' under the influence of Ziya Gökalp, a Turkish sociologist and writer. During the years spent in this association, Halide Edip started to construct the basis of her 'new woman identity' by mostly borrowing from Ziya Gökalp's thesis, prioritizing the status of women in pre-Ottoman Turks where both genders shared equal rights and places. In fact, she depicted this new woman in her novel, Yeni Turan: "This work imagines the era in which women will have the right to vote, and their life and human relations will be fairly and equitably" / "Bu eser, kadınların oy sahibi olacağı, hayat ve insan münasebetleri makul ve muntazam olabileceği bir devri tahayyül ediyordu" (Adivar Edip, 2005, p. 187).

The booming war years and then the following Armistice period marked a new period for Halide Edip, who took active parts in the nationalist struggle and resistance. Not only did she help the wounded soldiers and serve as a nurse but she struggled a lot to announce the dreadful effects of the war to the whole world as well. She participated into a series of public meetings to honor war martyrs and protest the occupations, one of which was in 'Sultanahmet', where she made her famous patriotic speech. Being the first woman speaker addressing a mass crowd publicly, Halide Edip declared that all self-conscious Turkish women had to abandon their individual identities and become the part of a unique ideal for the sake and independence of their country; as she put it:

I believe that Halide in Sultanahmet was not the usual Halide. Sometimes, I think that the most modest and the little-known person would be able to represent the holy ideal of a great nation. ... I am the miserable daughter of Islam, but the mother of a heroic age as well, though unfortunate today. Bowing in front of the spirits of our ancestors, I address to them today on behalf of new Turkey; the heart of the today's unarmed nation is as invincible as theirs; we believe in God and our right. ... The sacred excitement in our hearts will last till the nations declare their rights.

İnanıyorum ki, Sultanahmet'teki Halide her günkü Halide değildi. Bazen en mütevazı ve tanınmamış bir insanın büyük bir milletin büyük bir idealini temsil edebileceğine inanıyordum. ... Ben İslamiyet'in bedbaht bir kızımı ve bugünün talihsiz, fakat aynı derecede kahraman devrinin anasıyım. Atalarımızın ruhları önünde eğiliyor, onlara bugünün yeni Türkiye'si adına sesleniyorum ki; silahsız olan bugünkü milletin kalbi de onlarınki gibi yenilmez kudrettedir; Allah'a ve haklarımıza iman ediyoruz. ... Yüreğimizdeki kutsal heyecan milletlerin hakları ilan edilinceye kadar sürecektir (*Paralı, 2001, pp. 102-103*).

To be able to increase women's active participation in the nationalist struggle and their contribution to the foundation of an independent country, Halide Edip served on the front line with the rank of a corporal. With these ceaseless efforts, she was acknowledged throughout the world, and then defined as "the Turkish Jeanne D'Arc" in a front-page editorial published in The New York Times magazine (qtd. in Koloğlu, 1998, p. 57). During the years she spent on the front line, Halide Edip Adivar had the chance of meeting and comparing Anatolian women, who were mostly illiterate and reserved, with the women of occupied capital city Istanbul, who had better education and life standards relatively. The syntheses that she obtained from the comparison of women in Anatolia and Istanbul helped Halide Edip Adivar to construct her perception of 'new woman' identity. In fact, beside the women in Anatolia and Istanbul, there were lots of other role models facilitating this identity construction process: her grandmother representing the Ottoman traditional life, the women from different countries and classes she met during the school years, the other pioneering women like Nezihe Muhiddin, Nakiye Elgün and Fatma Aliyye enabled Halide Edip Adivar to evaluate the status of various women and establish a specific viewpoint on independent and strong female identities.

Considering these facts in her mind, Halide Edip Adivar blended, dissolved and merged all of these different women identities into each other and created an 'alternative woman identity' that

weaved traditional expectations with modern life in a transitioning Ottoman society, where tradition and modernity alternately clashed and converged to each other. For Halide Edip Adivar, the role of education in the modernization process of the society, and women as well, had of great importance. She struggled hard to subvert the stereotyped image of a woman: 'an object for male gaze and pleasure' and 'weak and illiterate creatures imprisoned at home with the male-defined roles'. Breaking from the chains of patriarchy and establishing a new and independent female self was merely attainable through women's education. Hence, she emphasized the importance of education on all occasions.

However, Halide Edip Adivar's insistence on women's education did not completely overlap with the arguments of the Western feminist scholars, who advocated the self-realization and individuality over male superiority. Standing aloof from the "feminist breakouts" / "feminist patlamalar" (Durakbaşı, 2000, p.197) of the Suffragettes, Halide Edip Adivar prioritized women's education to create enlightened, patriotic wives and mothers for future generations that would empower the national improvement. These educated and "enlightened mother[s]" / "aydınlanmış, anne[ler]" (Durakbaşı, 2000, p. 200) had utmost importance as they merged the disciplines of nationalist thought and modern life; as she emphasized in her article published in *Mehasin*:

Women need to learn as much as men do, need to learn everything. In this case, the key concern of women cannot be different from that of men... Yet, these new needs should not let women avoid fulfilling their principal responsibilities, even cooking. No matter how high the knowledge that women possess, it must be in a perfect harmony with their womanly responsibilities, discretion and the role of governess [...] A woman, first, is an Ottoman, a patriot. ... The rights of a country are a thousand times more important and honorable than those of women. Thus, while yelling out for their rights, women must remember that these rights are for breeding a child for the homeland.

Kadınlar, erkekler kadar öğrenmeye, her şeyi öğrenmeye muhtaçlar. Bu hususta kadınların mevzuu erkeklerinkinden başka olamaz... Fakat bunları vezaif-i hakikiyelerinden, hatta yemek pişirmekten bile çekindirecek tarzda temessül etmemeli. Bildikleri şey ne kadar yüksek olursa olsun vezaif-i nisviyelerine, muhakemelerine, mürebbiyelik rollerine ahenktar bir mükemmeliyet vermelidir [...] Bir kadın evvela Osmanlı, bir vatanperverdir... vatanın hukuku kadınlık hukukundan bin kat mühim ve muhteremdir. Onun için kadınlar bugün hukukumuz diye haykırırken bunu kendileri için değil, vatana yetiştirecekleri evlada lazım olan terbiyeyi verebilmek için olduğunu der-hatır etmelidir (*qtd. in Demirdirek, 1993, pp. 38–40*).

Thus, despite advocating the equality between the sexes, Halide Edip Adivar also warned women not to ignore their 'womanly responsibilities' and national duties for the betterment of the Turkish nation. In this sense, it could be argued that Halide Edip Adivar could not manage to unbind herself completely from the dictations of the patriarchal Ottoman society and reproduced certain phallogocentric discourses for women with a refined focus that synthesized "the two prevailing ideologies of the time, Turkish nationalism and the Westernization ideal" (Jayawardena, 1986, p. 40). That is, Halide Edip Adivar established an alternative woman identity, 'a conservative modernist

woman', defined as "educated [...] dressed in the new styles and attuned to Western ways - [...] yet whose role was primarily in the home [...] [T]hey still had to act as the guardians of national culture, indigenous religion and family traditions..." (Jayawardena, 1986, pp. 12-14).

Conclusion

As a conclusion remark, Halide Edip Adivar, with her 'new woman identity', aimed to establish 'modern but modest' figures who melted the modernists, nationalists and religious considerations in the same pot. Believing that the concerns and benefits of society preceded the needs and the rights of any individual, Halide Edip Adivar continued to emphasize the significance of women's domestic responsibilities in marriage and motherhood to be able to establish a sophisticated and modern Turkish nation. Thus, she maintained the patriarchal ideologies and discourses of morality molding and limiting women as breeders and educators of future generations and reproduced the male/female relations, rather than promoting women's individual liberation. Briefly, Halide Edip Adivar's woman was "emancipated but unliberated" (Durakbaşa, 1998, pp. 140-41).

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