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Barbara Dell'Abate Çelebi

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Fatma Aliye: At the Intersection of Secular and Islamic Feminism

Barbara Dell'Abate Çelebi

Istanbul University, Istanbul

In October 2008, Turkey's Central Bank chose Fatma Aliye to adorn, on the reverse of the picture of Kemal Atatürk, the country's new 50 TL banknote in the transition to the new Turkish Lira. This decision generated a plethora of critical messages from the Turkish public and from mainstream newspapers (Tait). The main criticism perched on the fact that Fatma Aliye could not be considered the true representative of Republican Turkish women as she was an Ottoman lady and her image was associated with the Hamidian Era (1878–1908) and the reign of the last powerful sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Abdülhamid II, deposed in 1908 by the Young Turks and stigmatized until the last decade of the twentieth century as an autocrat and tyrant. She was labeled by a secularist Republican People's Party MP a "dubious personality" and a survey showed that 90% of the people in the street did not know who she was (Tait para 6). Many of the critics demanded that her place on the banknotes be taken by Halide Edip Adivar, only one generation younger than Fatma Aliye but considered a feminist and Republican icon. Criticisms were coming mostly from the more secular side of Turkish society, the *Atatürkçu* or Kemalists, the strongest supporters of Kemal Atatürk's political project of nation-building and secularization who were accusing the choice as bowing to pressure from the ruling Islamist-leaning Justice and Development Party (AKP). This reaction exposed the danger of political instrumentalization of less-known literary figures within strongly polarized political arenas and demonstrated or, better, confirmed the lack of knowledge and almost invisibility of Ottoman women in modern Turkish society due, among other causes, to shifts in ideology and in the official narration of national history.

As well summarized by Senem Timuroğlu, "while Fatma Aliye is ingrained into an Islamic identity opposed to the Republic, Halide Edip is ingrained into the social memory as a representative of the national Republican identity" (Timuroğlu 433). The picture however, as many intellectuals and academicians have highlighted in the last years, is not so clear-cut. Even Halide Edip does not fully fit the mythical, one-sided, republican symbol. Ayşe Durakbaşa in her *Halide Edip, Türk Modernleşmesi ve Feminizm* (2009)

CONTACT Barbara Dell'Abate Çelebi barbara.celebi@istanbul.edu.tr Department of Western Literature, Istanbul University, Room 410, Ordu Cad. 6, Laleli/İstanbul 34459, Turkey

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[Halide Edip, Turkish Modernization and Feminism] affirms that also this great figure has her dark side in public opinion as she is seen as both "an exemplary Turkish woman, a pioneer in the women's independence, and a demonic character with ambitions of power, who betrayed Ataturk reforms" (152).

It is not surprising that the dispute on the person representing the nation concerned two women since women are usually the symbolic carriers of national collectivity and embodiment of the nation (Chatterjee; McClintock; Najmabadi; Yuval-Davis). Moreover, if we accept Anderson's definition of the nation as "an imagined political community" (6) and a "deep, horizontal comradeship" (7) it is then quite self-evident that the symbol of this comradeship needs to be like a mirror in which each one of the members of the nation can look and see their own reflected image. However, Anderson reminds us that nationality, nation-ness, or nationalism, as one wishes to call them, are cultural artifacts of a particular kind and he adds that "to understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy" (4).

It is within this cultural artifact or national construct that Fatma Aliye needs to be studied. She is not simply a writer but a synecdochical representation of the Secularist/Islamist binarism that polarizes Turkish politics and public opinion, and which keeps Fatma Aliye on one side of the dichotomy. This first binarism can be further expanded to Republican/Ottoman, Modern/Conservative, and Feminist/Traditionalist. This dichotomic approach prevents a broad national identification and keeps her outside the margins of modern Turkish identity. She is frozen within an Ottoman, Islamist, conservative, traditionalist image that envelops and suffocates any alternative reading of her works. Only by digging down to the foundations it is possible to rebuild on new grounds. Only by contextualizing her works and ideas, keeping firmly in mind the deep and multiple transformations lived by Turkish society, and looking at her with fresh, unpolarized eyes, it is possible to try to enable a shift in public perception and possibly move her from outside the fixed margins where she is now engraved.

Scope and bibliographical background

This article does not aim to draw an integral and univocal portrait of Fatma Aliye nor will it provide a comprehensive philological analysis of her works that can be found in multiple and more detailed studies (see Akşit; Barbarosoğlu; Canbaz; Findley; Gezer; Karaca; Polat and Derer; Timuroğlu). This study focuses on an interview that Fatma Aliye has given in 1913 to the journal *Vakit* in which she freely discusses her ideas on

women, men, and religion, an interview that is rarely cited and that does not have, to date, an English translation. The decision to choose to analyze this interview is to offer a new perspective on her thought through her direct voice without literary filters. Also, Aliye at the time of the interview, having reached her fifties and having gained fame with her novels, is a mature and respected writer who has the confidence to speak in a frank and quite bold manner. She was not only a novel writer but also wrote widely in journals about current issues and was knowledgeable about philosophy and history; she is in fact considered the first woman intellectual in Turkish literature.

This research, grounded within a post-colonialist and feminist standpoint epistemology and informed by postcolonial and feminist critical thought, aims to try to disentangle the complex series of elements that have made of Fatma Aliye a controversial figure in Republican Turkey and put her to oblivion and at the same time to show how she can be considered the *trait d'union* between Ottoman, secular, and Islamic feminisms. This offers an alternative reading of her work and especially of her feminism, putting her at the center of a gendered discursive production of national identity, demonstrating that by giving voice to the muted ones we come to discover that the *dichotomy* secular vs. Islamic can be substituted by the *commixture* of the two terms that are both malleable and heterogeneous.

Fatma Aliye (1862–1936) is not only a literary figure, so the revision of her work cannot naively be seen as solely a literary task. The historical, ideological, religious, and linguistic contexts of her life have been almost erased by Republican Turkey and her proto-feminism has been seen as suspect if not completely denied (Barbarosoğlu; Canbaz). However, within the frame of a feminist re-reading of literature, a critical revision of Fatma Aliye's work is a necessary task as it is deeply connected to our present. In a time like ours when liberal discourses of gender equality serve the promotion of anti-Muslim rhetoric and propose a monolithic and orientalist image of the subjugated "Middle Eastern woman" in need of being saved by the West, a figure like Fatma Aliye can offer alternatives and open new breaches. To those who find it convenient to dismiss feminism outside the West as a foreign ideology, the rediscovery of a Muslim proto-feminist intellectual such as Fatma Aliye can help historicize, provide a place for specific references, and show that feminism(s) in the Middle East are not "borrowed, derivative or secondhand" but "are born on and grow in home soil" (Badran, *Feminism in Islam* 307). Moreover, to recover her approach to Islam and feminism is an occasion to shed light on the articulation of a model of egalitarian Islam buried in the past and re-actualized in the last decades within the framework of Islamic feminism. This is a growing domain within feminist studies, and consists of Islamist and Islamic feminist works by scholars such as Miriam Cooke and Margot Badran who foster the idea of an Islamic feminism that is not derivative of Western ideology but originated

in the Middle East and in Miriam Cooke's terms "is an attitude, a frame of mind that highlights the role of gender in understanding the organization of society" and permits women "to remain positively focused on constructing new systems without ever having said no to the old system" (ix). One of the strategies followed by Muslim feminism(s) is revisiting the holy sources from a gender-conscious perspective, a strategy that is followed nowadays within Islamic Women Liberation Theology (Barlas; Syed; Wadud) but has its roots in late nineteenth century, as explained by Margot Badran: "Re-reading Islam from the late nineteenth century to this day is what women as secular and Islamic feminists in the Middle East have tried to do" (*Feminism in Islam* 310). Drawing from these approaches that refuse a monolithic, universalistic, white, Western-rooted conceptualization of feminism but envision multiple identities and "speaking positions" (Cooke 310), it is possible to reinterpret with new eyes Fatma Aliye's position at the interception of Islamism and feminism. Scholars as Fatma Mernissi (*Beyond the Veil, The Veil and the Male Elite*; *Women and Islam*), Amina Wadud (*Qu'ran and Woman; Inside the Gender Jihad*), Asma Barlas, and Mohammad Ali Syed, among others, have been re-reading the Quran and the Hadiths (sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad) from "a woman perspective" (Wadud, *Qu'ran and Woman*) sharing with Fatma Aliye's work the objective of drawing a clear distinction between Islam and patriarchy.

In Turkey with the resurgence of Islamic feminism in the 1980s and the appearance of political Islamic feminism in the '90s with the Refah Party, the issue of feminism, secular and Islamic, has become a debated and controversial one as issues of modernism and Westernism are increasingly debated. However, the lack of a confrontation until the 1980s between liberal and Islamic feminisms has consolidated the idea of the impossibility of a coexistence between secularism and Islam in a liberal democracy as "Islam versus liberal democracy, and secularism versus Islam have long been linked as antithetical" (Arat, *Rethinking Islam* 1). This strong polarization between "secular/Kemalist" and "Islamist" feminisms has been exacerbated by the rise of political Islam in the 1990s and has once again, after more than a hundred years, shed light on the "woman question" as a basic indicator of modernity and "civilization." According to Nilüfer Göle, "Recalling the Tanzimat Period, in which women were the object of political struggle, they began to be *the subjects of politics*" (82). It is important to remember that these same issues originated and became topics of novels and articles during Fatma Aliye's lifetime. Writing her novels and articles between 1892 and 1910, she witnessed a time of major political, social, economic, and ideological transformations, and drew the image of an Ottoman empire menaced by many forces that under the label of modernism were undermining its essence. In her works, she chose to deal with women's lives and difficulties, articulating her feminism within the religious

framework of her time. To go back to the past and to intellectuals, such as Fatma Aliye, is thus pivotal in understanding not only the past but also the present of Turkish feminism(s) and is central in giving back to women their voices as "subjects of politics." The advent in the '80s of a new Islamic figure of woman and feminist sharing the same class, religion, education, and profession with the secularist woman but asserting an Islamic feminist identity has been a source of uneasiness and has divided Turkish women in two separated and opposed factions. The rediscovery of intellectual women figures like Fatma Aliye can provide new grounds for dialogue. The daughters of Turkish secular modernism and children of Ataturk's secular republic seem to have forgotten to be also the granddaughters of women like Fatma Aliye, an Islamic, modern, and enlightened proto-feminist. A woman who was able to be modern without being Westernist, and Islamic without being reactionary. Her blended identity can be considered as a bridge between two seemingly antithetical and irreconcilable positions and show that secular and Islamic feminisms in Turkey are not two hermetic entities, as they are considered today, but sliding intersections of an indigenous women's feminist consciousness whose emergence can be traced back to the end of the nineteenth century.

Fatma Aliye, Islamism, and feminism

Divided between tradition and modernization, Fatma Aliye seems to embody all the contradictions of the late-nineteeneth-century Ottoman Empire and of the nascent "Ottoman feminism"[1] whose "fathers" were a group of enlightened, well-educated intellectuals, such as Ibrahim Şinasi, Ziya Pasha, Namik Kemal, Ali Suavi and Ahmed Mithat Efendi, known as the Young Ottomans. These reformist intellectuals were at the same time the main actors and the more vociferous critics of the "authoritarian modernization" (Avci Avci1) that was informing the Ottoman Empire in what is known as *Tanzimat* (Reorganization) (1839–1876).

Fatma Aliye is part and parcel of this fast-changing world and only by understanding and keeping in mind the historical context in which she lived and the quite "contradictory"[2] attitude of the intellectuals of her time, and specifically that of the Young Ottomans, toward the West it is possible to interpret her oxymoronic traditional-modernity and religious-feminist standing. Moreover, as one of the first woman writers of her time, she had to

[1]For an introduction to Ottoman Feminism see Toprak (1986), Toprak 1988), Demirdirek (1993), Demirdirek (1999), and Çakır (1994).

[2]Şerif Mardin in his study on The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought(2000) affirms that the Young Ottomans tried to make a synthesis between Western ideas of modernity and Islam, but the inadequacies of their political theory gave rise to "a contradictory stand as they were on one hand praising abstract 'progress' and the material advances of Europe and on the other hand looking back wistfully on the harmoniousness of an imaginary, ideal Islamic state" (402).

challenge the authority and tutelage of male figures, such as her father, brother, husband, and most of all her literary father, Ahmet Mithat Efendi. She certainly was able, in her maturity, to exercise her agency and chart a unique space for herself, but this was not an easy task. As the daughter of an important member of Sultan Abdülhamid II's entourage, Cevdet Pasha (1822–1895), Fatma Aliye enjoyed all the privileges of an aristocratic lady, including a private education, but as a woman she was not supposed to enter the territory of letters if not under the guidance, patronage, and supervision of them.

She was only thirty-years old when her first signed book was published and, using Kandiyoti's expression, she had to learn quite early on to "bargain with patriarchy" (*Gender and Society* 274) to affirm her ideas and personality. An important element that allowed Fatma Aliye to negotiate and at the end impose her views was her knowledge of philosophy and Islamic law. Her cultural capital, in Bourdieusian terms, allowed her to bargain within a men's world and affirm herself as an intellectual woman writer. Ahmet Mithat's initial criticism of a woman writing about philosophy voiced in the correspondence of the late 1890s turned in fact into praise once he read her works. In the same way, she participated fervently in the defense of Islam and criticism of Western feminism and by using Islamic precepts, she argued for women's equality by giving examples from the history of Islam. Her book, *Nisvân-i İslâm* (transliterated in Turkish as *Islam Kadınları)* [Muslim Women, reprinted in 2009], as well as her consequent one on great Muslim women, *Nâmdârân-ı Zenân-i İslâmiyân* (transliterated in Turkish as *Ünlu Müslüman Kadınlar*) [Famous Muslim Women, reprinted in 2011] published originally in *Malumat Gazetesi* in 1899), is deeply rooted in an Islamic identity that permeates and frames her embryonic Turkish nationalism. In the preface to *Ünlu Müslüman Kadınlar* she is careful to highlight that the state of ignorance that has followed the great women of Islam cannot be attributed to Islam or being Turkish (9) but to the misogynistic and patriarchally biased interpretation of Islam that has followed the early, "golden age" of Islam (*Asr-I Saadet*).

Also, the protagonists of her novels are not oppressed specifically by their religion or by their veiling, but it is at the intersections of various oppressions that their individual situation needs to be evaluated. This position is quite modern and anticipates feminist studies within the domain of intersectionality[3] that have shown that each woman is embedded in a matrix of domination made of laws and institutions (structural domain), bureaucracy (disciplinary domain), culture and ideology (hegemonic domain), and everyday interactions (interpersonal domain). The single

[3]For an introduction to the domain of intersectionality within feminism see Bilge (2010), Collins (2000), Collins and Bilge (2016), Crenshaw (1989), Hancock (2016), McCall (2005), May (2015), Shields (2008), and Lykke(2011).

woman's capacity to resist, accommodate, act independently, or become an accomplice depends on the factors characterizing her singular being: her gender, class, race, religion, marital status, age, nationality, et cetera. (Dell'Abate Çelebi 193).

The influence of religion, and in particular the use of the adjective "Islamist" to connotate her, needs in our days to be further analyzed and contextualized. Ismail Kara, in his paper on Islamism in Turkey (2013), dates back the word *Islamcılık* (Islamism) to 1913, while its Ottoman equivalent *Ittidah-I Islam* was already used in relation to a "renewal" of Islam (in the areas of faith, worship, morality, philosophy, politics, law, and education) that aimed to counterbalance the dominion of Western influence (17). He cites Namık Kemal, Ahmet Mithat, and Ziya Pasha as pioneers and ambassadors not only of Islamism but also nationalism and Westernism (23) and adds that with the 2nd Constitutional period (1908–1918) the three elements were always present to the point that *Sırat-ı Müstakim*, the magazine of Islamic circles directed by Mehmet Akif, was the magazine representing the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) and advocating an Islam-centered nationalism (25). Islamism is intended by Kara as an umbrella term within which are present at various degrees nationalism and Westernism with the prevalence of the Islamist element until 1924 (23). So in Fatma Aliye the religious element, or Islamism as will be called later, is deeply intermingled with being Turkish, with the nascent nationalism and *Turkism* that will develop 20 years later. As confirmed by Elif Ekin Akşit (2010) and Senem Timuroğlu (2014), Fatma Aliye can be considered an emblematic figure of transition from an Ottoman to a Turkish understanding of "nation." Her ideology is framed within and influenced by her father's, Ahmet Cevdet Pasha who "despite representing the traditionalist wing in Tanzimat, … paved the way for nationalist ideologist ideas in his work … and attributed the fortitude of Ottoman Islam to its Turkish roots (Timuroğlu 442). Turkism as a political strategy would develop under the *Yeni Türks* (Young Turks) but only later "the term Turk evolved into a word, denoting race" (442).

It is clear that though she is part of a multi-cultural and multi-religious empire, she has a conscious understanding of her identity as Muslim and consequently as Turkish. She is an Ottoman woman, but she speaks in the name of only a segment of women within the empire – Muslim women. The borders of these two identity traits, "Muslim" and "Turkish," however, were quite blurred in the time she writes. This is a very important point to highlight as these two terms did not imply the polarization of our days but were used by Fatma Aliye to reinforce a nationalist Turkish identity in opposition to the dangers of a blind Westernization of Turkey. Her position in relation to women and Islam is very clearly expressed in a precious document, an interview that she gave to Fatih Kerimi in 1913, transliterated

and published in Turkish only in 2001, an interview that is rarely cited in its integrity but shows lesser-known aspects of Fatma Aliye's position in relation to women and Islam and provides clear evidence on Fatma Aliye's harsh criticism of patriarchy from a proto-feminist intellectual standing. This interview reveals with no ambiguity her thought on the woman question in Turkey and the role played by Turkish men in hindering their enhancement.

An interview with Fatma Aliye

In the preface of *Ünlu Müslüman Kadınlar* Fatma Aliye recognizes that the improvement in women's conditions is the result of our forward-looking and civilized men (9). Addressing her book to Madam Poter Palmer, she attributes to men, and in particular to fathers, "babalarimiz," the credit for the education of girls as she affirms that the presence of women in science and arts is not a new phenomenon but the renewal of an old one (9). She is well aware of the fact that these enlightened men, such as her father and mentor, have allowed her to be educated and to become a writer. Yet, there is a more pessimistic side to this vision that glimpses out from her novels and that she openly reveals 13 years later, when, having reached the age of 50, she has become a mature and well-known author. She is, possibly, also aware that to be considered already part of a bygone generation and having reached the highest point of her career she probably has little to lose in exposing the truth. Or, more simply, speaking to a "foreign" journalist, who had been, moreover, a friend of the late Ahmet Mithat (deceased only two months earlier, on December 28, 1912), she feels at ease with someone with whom she can share, without judgments, her concerns. It is certainly surprising to read such sharp and bitter comments in defense of women and against patriarchy voiced by someone whose proto-feminist stand has been often denied on the basis of her being too much imbued in a conservative Muslim perspective (Canbaz 107).

On February 9, 1913, Fatih Kerimî, a Turkish-Tatar correspondent of the journal *Vakit* on a four-month mission to Istanbul following the Balkan War, together with Yusuf Akçura,[4] meets Fatma Aliye for an interview in her house in Şisli. The article recalling the interview offers quite a fresh look on Fatma Aliye because Kerimi, a Russian born Tatar-Turk, looks at Fatma from the ambivalent position of a foreigner. He describes Fatma Aliye as a fifty-five-year-old lady, very energetic, fast, and outspoken (262–263). He adds that she is slim, quite short, and that her dress is completely European. She wears a long black skirt with a black jacket and a white foulard covers her

[4]Yusuf Akçura was an intellectual of Tatar descent who immigrated to the Ottoman Empire from Russia and played an important role in the formation of Turkish nationalism, drawing on an idea of Pan-Turkism. He is the author of *Uç Tarz-I Siyaset* (Three Ways of Policies, 1994), where he describes the nation as based on a common race (*ırk*) which referred, for the first time, to an ethnic identity.

head and her hair (262). At the beginning of the interview Fatma Aliye reveals that she would have never accepted to meet a male journalist but that she had made an exception because of his friendship with Ahmet Mithat, so she considers the interviewer as a spiritual brother (262). During the interview Kerimi inquires about any new book she is writing. She reveals to have been working for a long time on an essay on women and law[5] that she is not planning to publish in Turkish but in French. She goes on revealing that it is a study on men and women's equality from the origins of time. She had identified in her study the precise moment in which men and women's roles started to differ and which coincided, according to her research, with men going fishing and women remaining at home looking after the children. Her book, she adds, would then analyze how Greeks and Romans dealt with these issues and review the condition of women in Buddhism, Brahmanism, Judaism, and Christianity. Kerimi explains that she referred in her speech to Islamic sources using Turkish, Arabic, and English vocabulary and spoke as if she were teaching him a lesson, using many French phrases and expressions (264). Moreover, he adds, she reminded him of Ahmet Mithat's lively and entertaining style of talking.

After offering tea, "alafranga," as she served it personally to her guests, Fatma Aliye reveals to have also been researching for her book on women's veiling. She explains that there is a big difference between *hijabs* and *tesettür* (two types of veiling) as *hijab* was used by the women belonging to the family of the Prophet, while the *tesettür* was used by other Muslim women. She shows as an ideal example her dress and head cover that, she explains, in its simplicity is fully complying with Islamic law "tam şer'î mânâsiyla tesettürdür" (265). At this point, the interviewer compliments her for her forthcoming book and wonders about the reasons behind her decision not to publish it in Turkish. Fatma Aliye's answer is quite stunning. She reveals in a frank and direct way that everyone would read it, competent and incompetent people, and she would have big troubles, "başıma kiyametler koparirlar" (265). She goes on saying that the intellectual level of Turkish men is very low, and even discloses to the interviewer to have been receiving in the past, for other articles, threatening and anonymous letters. She explains that Turkish men can study in Europe, become professors, read philosophers as Kant and Comte but on two topics cannot change their minds and will always remain the same. These issues are veiling, *tesettüur*, and polygamy, *taaddud-i zevcat*. For as civilized they can become, she says, they will never change the idea of having more than one wife. Men cannot control themselves in the presence of women; she wonders how many would attend

[5]Senem Timuroğlu in her article refers to this essay as being *Ünlü Islam Kadınları* (Famous Muslim Women). However, *Ünlu Islam Kadınlari* (*"Nâmdârân-ı Zenân-ı İslâmiyân"*) was published in 1899 and was not dealing with law. Also, it is not clear why Fatma Aliye should refer to it in 1913 as a current work. I could not find any work published after 1912 on women and law by Fatma Aliye. I hope future research will clarify the matter.

meetings where women are present. Very few, she adds. She goes on saying that by leaving idle half of the nation and giving all the burden of a family to men, Muslims are doing damage to their economy. If women will not be allowed to be part of the labor force, Muslim societies are destined to weaken until extinction (265).

When asked by the interviewer if there are any actions she could undertake as an intellectual to lead women toward progress, Fatma Aliye is very categorical and sharp. The government controls such activities while men do not care much about women's advancement. She brings up the example of the *Şeyhülislam effendi*, the chief authority in religious affairs in the Ottoman State, who has imposed rules on how women should dress and has delivered fatwas for the ones who would not follow his rules. These acts do not fall under his jurisdiction, she affirms, but should be the duty of the police. The interviewer rebuts her and wonders why women do not directly challenge men on these issues. Her answer is lapidary. This is not possible, she says, as this is the task of the State and not of women as there should be laws defending women by which police should abide. However, she adds, men, the state, and the police are all against women. We can only try as intellectuals, she concludes, through schools and conferences to educate the population (266).

Fatma Aliye's proto-feminism

This interview illustrates quite clearly Fatma Aliye's standing on women, men, and Islam. She does not consider Islam a barrier to women's progress, but she blames men for the relegation of women to a passive domestic role and their nonparticipation in the labor force. She does not justify this relegation by using Islamic precepts but in her "anthropological" reading, she traces back the present state of things to an initial unfair division of roles that not only harms women but that will lead to the ruin, to the extinction of Muslim societies. For a writer considered traditionalist and conservative in her approach to men–women relations, abiding by patriarchal norms, Fatma Aliye's extremely negative perception of men as unable to control themselves in the presence of women and with no real intention to improve women's standing in society is quite surprising. And even more surprising is the inclusion, within this group, of the "civilized" men, the ones who have studied abroad, who read philosophy, and have become professors, as they still expect to set the rules on veiling and polygamy. Fatma Aliye seems to share with the radical Westernists, and in particular with Abdullah Cevdet (186?-1932), the idea that "Islamic traditions served as the most salient barrier in the path towards civilization" (Göle 37) but while for Cevdet, Western civilization is "a totality which must be accepted with its roses and thorns" (37) for Fatma Aliye the "degenerated traditions" are not rooted in

Islam but in men, both Muslim and *Farisi*, or Pharisee (Akşit, *Doğudan* 65) who, due to their ignorance of Islam and their dominating nature, have coopted women and arbitrarily read the sacred texts. This approach seems to anticipate the late twentieth century re-visioning of Islam through *ijtihad* (independent investigation of Islamic sacred texts) in which feminist and Islamist women are engaged today (Badran, *Feminism in Islam* 219).

Moreover, her stress on the importance of women's participation in the job market is fully coherent with her vision of women in Islam as equal to men. Both her *Ünlu Müslüman Kadınlar* and her article *Meşahir-I Nisvan Islamiyyede Biri: Fatma Bint-I Abbas* [One of the famous women in Islam: Fatma Bint-I Abbas] (1895) aim to draw an Islamic tradition of strong women able as much as men to be leaders. In her *Ünlu Müslüman Kadınlar* she relates the existence in the thirteenth century of about 100 women professors giving lesson to men, and she adds that women could even become "tekke şeyhi," religious leaders, while women who had problems with their husbands could take shelter in these "tekkeler" lodges (Gezer 606). Her going back to the historical origins of Islam is generally tied to the Islamism of the Young Ottomans and to their approach to Islam, known as *Asr-ı Saadet* [The Golden Age] (Akşit, *Doğudan* 85; Timuroğlu 438), and in particular to Namik Kemal and, in the new century, Ziya Gökalp. The central role that Fatma Aliye's articles had played in the transitory phase elapsing between the two thinkers is often undermined, in a period when the Young Ottomans had been pushed underground and the new group of Young Turks was forming (Aksit 64). This unrecognized transitory role as *trait d'union* between the Young Ottomans and the Young Turks needs to be acknowledged and has been read merely as a form of proto-nationalism (68) in the same way that her feminism has been considered a simple extension of the Ottoman feminism of enlightened male intellectuals of her time (Findley; Polat and Derer).

This reading, though viable, limits considerably the originality and unicity of Fatma Aliye's thought and denies her a proper recognition as pioneer of a new form of autochthonous proto-feminism, modeled neither on the Western nor on the Ottoman male one, a new combination of modernist Islam and gender equality drawn from a woman's perspective. The Ottoman feminism laid down the precepts for the emancipation of women within the set roles of spouse and mother, according to a male perspective (Kandiyoti, *End of Empire* 267). On the other hand, Fatma Aliye's feminism shifts the perspective and draws the image of an Ottoman woman who aims to modernize simultaneously the state and society (the public sphere) and the family (the private sphere). In so doing, she presents elements of both secular and Islamic feminisms (Badran, *Feminism in Islam* 226), condemning a masculinist interpretation of religion and hegemony in both the family and society at large. As highlighted by Badran referring to Egyptian proto-

feminists, in the late nineteenth century pioneering women have constructed new feminisms "appropriating the discourse of Islamic modernism" (216) and opening up spaces for "multiple identities" (217). Moreover, she adds, the feminisms of most Muslim women have historically been more Islamic than commonly alleged, with first wave Turkish feminism (referring to Republican feminism) being the major exception to this tendency (218).[6] This is certainly true also for Turkey if we include Fatma Aliye as a pioneer within the first wave of feminism. Living and writing before Republican Turkey she preserved an Islamic identity that would be wiped out one generation later and built her feminism within its boundaries. However, as a scholar and daughter of a statesman, she did not accept passively the patriarchal version of Islamic discourse but tried to re-negotiate through her knowledge its boundaries.

It should also come as no surprise that she opposed Western feminism or better, its more radical faction. In her frequently cited article (see Karaca 96; Polat and Derer 192; Canbaz 19–20) "Ilm ve Cehl" [Knowledge and Ignorance] published in September 1909 in the magazine *Inkilab*, Fatma Aliye in expressing her aversion for the most radical fringe of Western feminists, the "ifrat-perveran" [extremists], comes back to her main argument: laws, and in the specific, Islamic laws, are the best defense for women. She affirms that Islam has already given rights to women and made them equal to men, but these rights have been taken away from them by customs and tradition. The real issue for Fatma Aliye is not a battle of women against men as this would be negative for women and their prospects of marriage as, she adds, many women are starting to refuse marriage, "artık teehhüle rağbet etmeyen nisvân çoğalma[ya] başladı." The real issue, as stated in her title, is the battle of knowledge against ignorance. The greatest weapon women have, she says, is *şeriattır*, the law of sharia (2). Her point is clearly coherent with the *Asr-I Saadet* approach to Islam and her conviction that the lack of knowledge relative to the high-standing position of women in this "golden age" of Islam is the culprit for women's inferior status in Ottoman society.

Moreover, she does not look up at Western feminism. In a series of articles published in 1895/1896, she had retraced a long tradition of strong Muslim women. In one of these articles, "Meşâhîr-i Nisvân-ı İslâmiyyeden Biri: Fatma Bint-i Abbas," recalling the life of the female religious leader Fatma Bint-i Abbas, she affirms that there are no women like her in Europe: "Avupada bu türlü kadınlar gelmemiştir" (Aliye 3; qtd. in Canbaz 23). In fact, in a further article titled "Bablulardan İbret Alalım" [Let's take warning from the bluestockings!] (1895) she recalls how intellectual women in Europe

[6]Badran never mentions Fatma Aliye even though she should be aware of her existence as she cites Nilufer Göle's *The Forbidden Modern* (1996) (Badran, *Feminism in Islam* 218). This may be due to the fact that Göle in her book refers to Fatma Aliye very briefly, in relation to her dispute on polygamy with Mahmud Esad, and includes her within the Westernists opposed to Islamists without any reference to her proto-feminism (Göle 33).

were mocked and derided and called "bas-bleus" by men.[7] We should not copy them, she states, as we are the successors of the Prophet and pilgrims who came from Islam: "Biz Bablulara halef olmamalıyız. Biz eslâf-ı İslâmdan gelmiş olan meşâhîr ve nâmdârân-ı zenâna halef olmalıyız" (Aliye 3; qtd in Canbaz 23).

The women she represents in her novels and writings are strong, determined, and rational. Though religious, they do not accept self-sacrifice for the sake of their husbands or in the name of family unity. Even when there are children within the marriage, as in *Levayih-i Hayat*, the only hesitation before divorce regards economic issues with the poorer woman paying the higher price. The celebrated "iyi eş, iyi anne" ("good wife, good mother"), the slogan of the time, taken up by *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* (Çakir 28) does not seem to be the main prerogative of Fatma Aliye's female characters who, though being pious and devoted Muslims, fight for their rights and push further the boundaries set for them by men, through education and self-improvement, within both the public and private domains.

Conclusion

This article sheds new light on Fatma Aliye's work, especially in relation to her proto-feminism, resting on the assumption that the rediscovery of the forgotten foremothers is essential in building a comprehensive tradition of national literatures that, englobing within their ranks both women and men and bringing out the heterogeneity within each of these gendered groups, could help us understand more critically both our past and our present. This direction of studies is even more important in countries like Turkey where the resurgence of Islamist movements in the 1980s has seen "the advent of this new Islamic figure of women sharing the same classes, educations and professions [of secular women] but asserting at the same time their aspirations for an Islamic ideal and identity" (Göle 2). While the outcome of the Islamic movement has on one side brought back to center stage the issues related to gender relations, as has been also witnessed during the Tanzimat Era and Kemalist Republic, on the other hand, the strongly polarized dichotomy of secular-opposed-to-Islamic interpretations has complicated the study on women's identity and produced quite antithetical and sometimes contradictory narrations of pre-Republican women often simplistically associated with one or the other ideological side.

Within this complex context, the rediscovery and critical analysis of an apparently divisive character, such as Fatma Aliye, could help dispel clichés that still dominate the reading and analysis of Ottoman women writers and intellectuals. As a matter of fact, her identity as an Islamic writer and her

[7]She uses the French term transliterated in Ottoman Turkish.

veiling have been interpreted by the public at large in accordance with highly polarized political standards which forget that in her time, all women were "Islamic" and had to wear a veil. It has been seemingly disregarded that today's Muslim women are free to decide to wear it or not while for Fatma Aliye, the veil was not only a sign of religious piety but also, as she clearly affirms, predominantly a defense against the lust and potential aggressions of men. Moreover, in her time Islam in Turkey was not only the official religion, as it is nowadays, but implied the *Shari'ah*, the canonical law, so it could not be contested. The civil code, inspired by the Swiss code, was introduced only in 1926 by Kemal Atatürk. So, for example, when she affirms that women's best defense is *Shari'ah*, we should question if she is making a clear choice between secularism and religion or if she is asserting the centrality and importance of laws in creating and maintaining an egalitarian society.

In conclusion, we may still wonder if we could define her as a feminist or even as an Islamic feminist, as many scholars do. Yet, as this article has tried to show, these close-ended labels can only fence her within modern pre-set schemas while her approach to the "woman question" needs to be contextualized within her historical context. For instance, if we consider that the term "feminism" was coined in France in the late 1880s by Hubertine Auclert, made its appearance in English in Britain in the first decade of the twentieth century and then by 1910s in the United States (Badran, *Feminism in Islam* 242–243), it is clear that its connotation in Fatma Aliye's time was quite different from today's. Moreover, the French, American, and English feminists before WWI were a frequent target for critics and humorists in the popular press of the late nineteenth century. The "new woman" was depicted by many commentators as masculine and threatening to the reassuring image of the "womanly woman," the traditional figure of wife and mother (Marks 1). This could also help explain Fatma Aliye's adversity to Western feminism.

If, on the other hand, we consider the term "Islamic feminism" in its current understanding, the term has been coined very recently to describe a movement that originated in the late twentieth century with a specific focus on an "*ijtihadic* project of articulating a coherent model of an egalitarian Islam" (Badran, *Feminism in Islam* 5). If we consider, instead, the Muslim feminism(s) that emerged between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these were mostly defined as "secular" with the meaning of "national" even if, except in Republican Turkey, they all kept their Islamist modernist nature. Only in the 1970s the word "secular" was given a new meaning by proponents of political Islam, who used it to signify un-Islamic, anti-Islamic, and non-Islamic. So, "by evacuating religion from the notion of secular, the two identities became strongly polarized and in opposition" (Badran, *Feminism in Islam* 305).

This polarization, as shown in this article, was absent in Fatma Aliye's time and her two identities, secular and Islamic, were clearly interconnected and blended. We could say that Fatma Aliye shares elements with both feminisms though belonging integrally to neither of them. With Islamic feminists she partakes in the desire to purge Islam of its misogynistic elements, though she did not proceed to a reexamination of the sacred texts but worked toward recreating a tradition of strong Muslim women which is also the first step taken by Islamic feminists, such as Mernissi and Barlas. In line with secular, egalitarian feminists she endorses a discourse of gender equality based on women's rights founded on laws, stresses the importance of education and of economic independence through paid jobs, and portrays the image of a strong, rational, and independent woman. If we reconsider, at this point, the dichotomy mentioned in the introduction, made of distinct and oppositional elements confronting each other almost ontologically, we can clearly state that this net binarism is unable to express Fatma Aliye's multiple standings. She does not belong solely to one side of the dichotomy, but she shares elements of both. In doing this, she destabilizes many certainties and opens new avenues to the inclusion of feminism, secularism, and Islamism as non-divisive elements of national identity.

By way of conclusion, we can affirm that recovering the originality and unicity of Fatma Aliye's proto-feminist thought, moving her from the margins to the center of Turkish identity, is a necessary task not only to reconnect the ties with Ottoman women intellectuals severed by Kemalism but also to reclaim for Turkey an indigenous feminist awakening that was not the product of Western imperialism but, reclaiming gender-oriented reforms within Islam, the State, and the family, planted the seeds of equality at the intersection of secular and Islamic feminism.

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ORCID

Barbara Dell'Abate Çelebi http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2222-2099

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