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Women's Rights In History and Today

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ABSTRACT

The "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," declared by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948, is one of the most significant achievements of humanity's historical journey, only a fraction of which is known today. In the early 1800s, according to the general perspective of liberal feminist theory, women were in a secondary position worldwide; this secondary position could only be eliminated by women having the same rights as men. Thus, the first visible representative of the women's rights movement, Olympe de Gouges, took action for the first time with the aim of countering this general secondary position of women in the world. By declaring to the world on September 6, 1791, in France, with the "Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen," that women are also human and should benefit from all the rights enjoyed by men, Olympe de Gouges led women to begin to fight for equal rights with men in the world they lived in. Although this struggle was initially initiated by liberal feminists, cultural feminists, as well as Marxist and socialist feminists, later joined this struggle. The aim is to ensure that women have the same rights as men by moving away from the secondary position of women. For this purpose, as a second initiative, Elizabeth Cady Stanton published the Declaration of Sentiments in New York on July 19-20, 1848. This second declaration was signed by one hundred women and men. Initially, the most important demand of women was to open the doors of universities to them and to grant them the right to vote. Liberal feminism aimed at political and legal equality and achieved it. However, Marxist feminism later insisted that domestic labor should also be remunerated. However, Marxist feminism has not yet been able to achieve its goal in this regard. Later, this demand for rights advanced to the point where radical feminists began to claim that women have the right not to marry and not to have children, and to this day, the biggest problem remains domestic violence. Domestic violence is a subject that post-modern feminists insist on. And the most important problem that still cannot be solved today is that marital sexual harassment is still not considered a crime in many societies. Parallel to the history of the women's rights movement, significant progress has been made in Turkey, a country where the majority of the population is Muslim. With the recognition of the right to vote and stand for election in 1934, there is still a significant distance to be covered because women in Turkey still do not have sufficient awareness of their rights, and there is also a serious gap between the number of women's shelters needed to combat domestic violence and the number of shelters available in Turkey. While there should be 3000 women's shelters in Turkey, the current number is only 16. Moreover, marital sexual harassment is still not considered a crime. In summary, there is a need to cover a much greater distance. And achieving these distances also requires a process of raising societal awareness. At this point, every Turkish citizen has important responsibilities. Based on the example of Turkey, it can be easily said that the situation of Islamic countries is not at all satisfactory.

Key Words: *Feminism, Women's Rights Movement, Women's Rights, Liberal Feminism, Socialist Feminism, Radical Feminism, Post-Feminism*

-I-

INTRODUCTION

As we mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, perhaps the most significant question to be asked is where we stand today in terms of human rights. Or, after 60 years, to what extent are we able to uphold human rights in our country?

However, during our presentation, we will slightly modify this question and ask as follows: Where do we stand today, both globally and nationally, in the problematic realm of human rights, particularly focusing on women's rights – an issue that remains significant and unresolved to this day? Are we still far from the point we aim to reach, or is there still a considerable distance to be covered?

Answering this question is not merely about examining the current sociological context. Like any issue, this question has a significant historical background. Understanding this historical context will provide us with crucial insights into finding the answer to this question.

The emergence of women's rights in the West led Western women's rights advocates, especially liberal feminists, to claim that women were always secondary and marginalized in non-Western societies. However, a brief overview of the history of women's rights in the West will reveal that this claim reflects an incomplete perspective. Indeed, the position of women in Western history does not paint a rosy picture.

In ancient Greece, women were questioned for their moral virtues.¹ In the Roman Empire, women were under the guardianship of their fathers until marriage, then under their husbands, and later under their sons² guardianship after their husbands' death. During the Middle Ages, women were accused of witchcraft³ and burned at the stake. They were also subjected to agreements between knights and royal families, where attacking noblewomen was prohibited while attacking commoners was allowed.⁴ In medieval Europe, women were prohibited from touching the Bible, deprived of many rights such as inheritance and divorce, until finally, towards the end of the 18th century, women began to rebel with a reactionary response to centuries of exclusion. Under the leadership of Olympe de Gouges, who proclaimed to the world with the "Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen" on September 6, 1791, women started to fight for equal rights with men in the world they lived in.⁵ Although this struggle was initially initiated by liberal feminists, later cultural feminists, as well as Marxist and socialist feminists, also joined the movement. The aim was to ensure that women have the same rights as men, thereby moving away from their secondary status. In pursuit of this goal, Elizabeth Cady Stanton published the Declaration of Sentiments in New York on July 19-20, 1848, as the second initiative. This second declaration was signed by one hundred women and men. Initially, the most significant demand of women was the opening of university doors to them and the granting of voting rights.⁶ Liberal feminism aimed at political and legal equality and achieved it.

However, Marxist feminism later insisted on the remuneration of domestic labor. However, Marxist feminism has not yet been able to achieve its goal in this regard. Later, this demand for rights advanced to the point where radical feminists began to claim that women have the right not to marry and not to have children, and to this day, the biggest problem remains domestic violence. Domestic violence is a subject that post-modern feminists insist on. And the most significant problem that still cannot be resolved today is that marital sexual harassment is still not considered a crime in many societies. However, to discuss in detail the process of women gaining their rights, it would be appropriate to first look at the brief history of feminism. Rather than narrating this brief history as a historical process, seeing it in a schematic table form will provide us with a more organized and detailed knowledge base about the women's rights movement.

When discussing feminism, it's important to acknowledge that there isn't a static and singular feminism. Therefore, it would be more accurate to talk about feminisms instead of feminism. Feminism can be broadly divided into two main branches: Modern and Postmodern Feminisms. Modern feminisms, in turn, can be further categorized into four subgroups: Liberal, Marxist, Socialist, and Cultural/Radical Feminisms. Postmodern Feminisms, on the other hand, can be categorized into three branches: existentialist, Freudian, linguistic, and post-feminisms. This categorization can be represented in the following table:

¹Bendason, Ney, "Women's Rights from the Beginning to the Present," translated by Şirin Tekeli, published by Yeni Yüzyıl Kitaplığı, p. 23-24.

²Bendason, Ney, *ibid.*, s. 25

³Scott, George Ryley, *History of Torture*, Ankara, February/2001, p. 111.

⁴Tabakoğlu, Ahmet, "Family and Women in the West", *Women in Social Life*, İSAV, Istanbul, 1996, pp. 164-165.

⁵Bendason, *ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

⁶Brown, Stuart Gerry, "Women Suffrage", *Encyclopedia International*, New York/USA, 1968, vol. XIX, p. 442.

Types of Feminism				
Modern Feminisms (1789-1960)			Postmodern Feminisms (1960-)	
Liberal Feminism Pioneers: Mary Wollstonecraft, Frances Wright, Sarah Grimke, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Harriet Taylor	Main Advocacies: Equality issues in fundamental rights such as inheritance, divorce, and voting rights	Marxist and Socialist Feminism Pioneers: Lisa Vogel, Margaret Benston, Angela Davis, and Zaretsky	Existentialist Feminism Pioneer: Simone de Beauvoir	Freudian Feminism Pioneers: Karen Horney, Nancy Chodorow
		Main Advocacies: Equal pay for equal work, remuneration of domestic labor	Main Advocacies: Confronting the social oppression faced by women and being able to be oneself	
Cultural Feminisms: Pioneers: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Margaret Fuller	Main Advocacy: Matriarchal Theory		Poststructuralist Feminism: Pioneers: Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Helen Cixous	
Radical Feminism: Pioneers: Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millet		Main Advocacy: The eradication of a society built on gender discrimination;	Main Advocacy: The notion that language is at the root of existing social biases against women, and these biases can only be eliminated through the transformation of language.	

The table above provides clues about the historical process of feminism. Thus, it is understood that the Liberal Feminist movement was the first to bring women's rights to the agenda. As mentioned earlier, liberal feminism seems to have achieved its goals in many parts of the world today.

However, the claim of Liberal Feminism that women are oppressed worldwide seems to have lost its validity today. Postmodern feminisms have refuted this theory in favor of the local context. It cannot be said that women have undergone the same historical process everywhere in the world. In the historical process of Islamic society, the movement for women's rights has occurred differently from that in the West. Therefore, it would be misleading to speak of a single socio-historical perspective of women covering the entire world. The socio-historicity of women in the Islamic world is quite different from that in the West, and the approach of Muslim scholars to women is not the same as that of Western and liberal authors.

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We believe that it is necessary to address the approach towards women in the Quran. However, before discussing the Quran's approach to women, it is beneficial to touch upon the approach towards women in the Torah and the Bible. In the Torah and the Bible, Eve is depicted as the culprit for the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise. This actually corresponds to the concept of original sin in Christianity. The Lord God said to Adam, 'Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you,' 'You must not eat from it,' cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since

from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.⁷ So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden.⁸ However, the Quran states that when narrating the story, the expulsion from paradise was a sin committed jointly by Adam and Eve. 'We said: 'O Adam! Dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden; and eat of the bountiful things therein as (where and when) ye will; but approach not this tree, or ye run into harm and transgression.' Then did Satan make them slip from the (garden), and get them out of the state (of felicity) in which they had been.' So the Quran presents the disobedience and straying from the path of Adam.⁹ According to the Quran, Eve alone is not solely responsible for the expulsion of humanity from paradise. This perspective aligns with the Quran's overall approach towards women. As seen in these verses, the Quran approaches the issue entirely from the perspective of individual responsibilities of humans. Eating the forbidden fruit was the individual sin of both Adam and Eve, and each person, whether male or female, is responsible for their own sin. Eve is not the scapegoat for all of humanity's sins.

According to the Quran, superiority lies not in being a woman or a man but in piety. Therefore, the Quran, beyond its view that does not discriminate between men and women, mentions many women as examples or admonitions for believing women. However, it only names one of these women: Hz. Maryam (Virgin Mary). Regarding some of these women, the Quran warns believing women not to be like them, while for others, it advises them to be like them. "Allah presents an example to those who disbelieve: the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were under two of Our righteous servants but betrayed them, so those prophets (i.e., their husbands) did not avail them from Allah at all, and it was said, 'Enter the Fire with those who enter.' And Allah presents an example of those who believed: the wife of Pharaoh, when she said, 'My Lord, build for me near You a house in Paradise and save me from Pharaoh and his deeds and save me from the wrongdoing people.' And (the example of) Mary, the daughter of 'Imran, who guarded her chastity, so We blew into (her garment) through Our angel (Gabriel), and she believed in the words of her Lord and His scriptures and was of the devoutly obedient."¹⁰ Additionally, in the Quran, working women are mentioned. For example, although her name is not given, the Queen of Sheba, Belkis, is mentioned along with her reign. Her ruling over a country, governing it, is not subject to criticism; only her and her people's worship of the sun is criticized. "Indeed, I found (there) a woman ruling them, and she has been given of all things, and she has a great throne."¹¹ Furthermore, when the story of Hz. Moses (Musa) is narrated, two women whom he encountered are mentioned; these women were the daughters of Hz. Shuayb (Jethro), who were tending their father's flock because they did not have a male shepherd in their household. Later, Hz. Moses would become their shepherd, and they would likely abandon their previous occupation. "And when he came to the watering place of Madyan, he found there a crowd of people watering (their flocks), and he found aside from them two women driving back (their flocks). He said, "What is your circumstance?" They said, "We do not water until the shepherds dispatch (their flocks); and our father is an old man."¹²

The Quran also criticized the practice of burying infant daughters alive during the pre-Islamic era of ignorance (Jahiliyyah) and the Prophet made efforts to eradicate such barbaric customs. The Quran criticizes the polytheists for devaluing female children and simultaneously referring to angels as Allah's daughters. For a polytheistic Arab, having a daughter was considered a disgrace, a shameful act, and a cause for embarrassment. Yet paradoxically, these same daughters were considered as Allah's daughters. The Quran explains this dilemma as follows: "When one of them is given the good news of the birth of a female child, his face darkens, and he is filled with suppressed anger: He hides from people because of the bad news he has been given. Should he keep the child despite his disgrace, or bury it in the ground? How ill-judged is their judgment! They attribute daughters to the All-Merciful, but they have no knowledge about them: they utter mere lies. Should God have daughters while you have sons? Do you ask for a reward for this except from yourselves? How foolish is your judgment."¹³

As seen, the Quran did not exhibit a different approach towards women compared to men. However, it assigned responsibilities to men regarding the sustenance of the family, as well as the obligation to provide dowry (mehr) and financial support (nafaka), which led to men receiving a 2/3 share in inheritance. One of the most criticized aspects of the Quran's approach to women revolves around inheritance and the issue of polygamy.

Regarding the issue of polygamy, the insights of Fatma Aliye shed significant light on our perspective. Her statement that "Muhammad (peace be upon him) did not want his daughter Fatima to be subjected to polygamy, nor did he desire it for the daughters of his community," provides important insight into the matter of polygamy.

The Quran elevated the status of women from being considered merely property to being inheritors and subjects of sales contracts, a position previously reserved for men during the pre-Islamic era of ignorance (Jahiliyyah). This general

⁷Genesis, Old Testament, 3:23

⁸Genesis, Old Testament, 3:23

⁹Surah Taha (Chapter 20), Verses 116-121

¹⁰Surah An-Naml (Chapter 27), Verse 23.

¹¹Surah Al-Qasas (Chapter 28), Verse 23

¹²Surah Al-Qasas (Chapter 28), Verse 23

¹³Surah Az-Zukhruf (Chapter 43), Verses 17-20

approach of the Quran has been reflected in the overall portrait of Islamic society, and numerous Muslim women scholars have emerged throughout the Islamic world. One of the pioneering figures in this regard is Hz. Aisha, who had many female and male students. Some of her female students include Amre Binti Abdurrahman, Amre's sisters, Hafsa binti

Abdurrahman, Esmā binti Abdurrahman, Aisha binti Talha, and Fatma binti Muhammed. Among her male students were Urwa bin Zubair, his brother Muhammad bin Abu Bakr's sons al-Qasim and Muhammad, Abdurrahman bin Al-Aswad, Abu Lubanah, Suleiman bin Umeyya Al-Sakafi, Abu Salama bin Abdurrahman, and Abdulaziz bin Rafi.¹⁴ Some of these eminent women scholars and the fields of knowledge they engaged in are listed below.¹⁵¹⁴

However, we believe that these women, although not constituting the majority, emerged from a wealthy but intellectually curious segment of society eager to learn about their religion. They generally belonged to the intelligentsia of their time, and while some ordinary women from the lower classes may have joined this group, historically, the number of such scholars among them may not have been as high as desired. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy and pride-inducing that in Islamic societies, especially in the field of religious sciences, women have produced such eminent scholars, unlike in the West where touching the Bible was considered a sin for women. However, over time, there has been a decline in the number of these women scholars, as evident from their birth and death dates. Whether women remained uneducated or why educated women belonged to the wealthy and intelligentsia is entirely a sociological phenomenon attributed to the social class system of that era and the socio-cultural environment reliant on oral tradition. It is not solely a discriminatory attitude towards women in society, in my opinion.

The significant point to mention about the involvement of women in the scientific world during that era is perhaps, in accordance with the prevailing scientific understanding of the time, that these women worked only in the field of religious sciences. Just like in the past in the West, Muslim women generally found expression in society in a manner that detached them from their sexual identity, only within the religious sphere, especially as exemplified by Rabiātū'l Adeviyye in the realm of Sufism. Women like Sharane and Rabiātū'l Adeviyye, who understood that in the eyes of Allah,

¹⁴War, Woman in the Era of the Caliphs of Consent; Ravza Pub., Istanbul - April 1996.

¹⁵**1-Exegesis (Tafsir):** Yasemine bint Sa'd ibn Muhammad as-Siravendiyya (1108); Fatma bint Katbay al-Umeri (1487); Esmā bint Musa al-Dicai (1498).; **2-Jurisprudence (Fiqh):** Zeliha bint Ismail Yusuf, who was involved in Shafi'i jurisprudence, Emet'ul Wahid bint'l Hussein al-Mehamili (377-987), Hatice bint Muhammad bin Ahmed al-Juzjani (372-982), Sittu'l Wuzera bint Muhammad (736-1333), who herself is a Hanafi jurist. It is also narrated that Zeyneb (1220-1805), one of the Mecca jurists who is said to have produced a detailed work on the rituals of Hajj according to the four schools of thought, and Bint Ali al-Minshar al-Amili (1031-1622) from the Shia women, Fatima bint Muhammad al-Amili al-Juzini (786-1384), in addition to Fatma bint Ahmed ibn Yahya (849-1436), who her husband also consulted on legal matters; **3-Sermon-Guidance-Sufism (Vaaz-İrşad-Tasavvuf):** Hamde bint Vasik (466-1073), Hatice bint Muhammad ash-Shahjaniyya (460-1068), Hatice bint Musa (437-1045), Zeynep bint Abi'l-Berekat, Sittu'l Ulema (712-1321), Aisha bint Muhammad Ibn Ali (641-1243), Fatima bint Abbas al-Baghdadiyya (714-1314), and there are also numerous ascetics. Hicab bint Abdullah (725-1325), Habiba al-Adeviyya from Basra, Hasna bint Ruhidam from Yemen, Ummu Osman ibni Sevde, Ummu Mevşiliyya, Rabia al-Kaysiyya from Basra, Zeynep bint Ahmed al-Rifai (630-1233), Shavane, Fatma al-Naysaburiyya, Fatma bintu'l Musenna, Shams Ummu'l Fukara, Rabia bint Ismail al-Adeviyya (135-752), Nafisa bintu'l Hasan (762-823), who is the granddaughter of Hz. Ali. **4-Science of Recitation (İlmü'l Kiraat):** "According to the travelogue of the famous Turkish traveler Evliya Çelebi, one-third of the nine thousand hafizes in Istanbul were women. That means there were three thousand female hafizes in Istanbul alone." ¹⁴ Beyrem bint Ahmed and Fatima bint Muhammad, the mother and daughter from Beirut, Celile bint Ali al-Shajari from Shistan (485-1092), Bünane bint Abi Yazid al-Azdi (68-687), Hakime bint Mahmud ibn Muhammad (698-1299), Hatice bintu'l Hassan al-Qurayshiyya al-Dimashqiyya (641-1243), Hatice bint'ul Kayyim al-Baghdadiyya (699-1300), Ummu'l Hayr bint Ahmed, Hatice bint Harun from Maghreb (695-1296), Sayyida bint Abd al-Ghani al-Ahbari (647-1249), Sharafu'l Ashraf bint Ali al-Tawusiyya, (VII / XIII). There are three Andalusian women who lived in the century, namely Ummu'l-Izz bint Ahmed (636-1238), Ummu'l-Izz bint Muhammad al-Abderi al-Dani (610-1213), Fatima bint Abd al-Rahman from Cordoba (613-1216), and also recently lived Hatice bint Ahmed from Morocco (1323-1905; **5-Hadith (Traditions):** From the Tabiun: Cesre bint Decace al-Amiriyya al-Kufiyya, Kerime bint Sirin, Kerime bint Hüman, Hayre bint Muhammad, Habibe bint Meysere, Fatima bintu'l Hussein, Ummulhiyar al-Rubey bintu'n-Nasr al-Ansariyya, Abide al-Medeniyya, Kerime bint Ahmed al-Merveziyya al-Kuşmeyheniyya, Kerime bint Abdi'l-Wahhab al-Kurayshiyya, Fatima bint Ali al-Kebundjeki (380), Fatima bintu'l-Hasen ibn Ali al-Dakkak (480), Setite al-Bajali (447), Bintu'l-Sharif al-Murtada, Huçeste bint Abi'l-Wafa (571), Habibe bint al-Makdisi (656-713), Zeyneb bint Ahmed, also Aisha bint Sayf al-Din (793-1390), who taught hadith lessons at Madrasat al-Hatuniyya; Kahhale, Omar Rıza, A' lamu' - Nisa, fi alameyi' l - Arabi, ve'l Islam, Damascus - 1378 - 1959, Vol. V, p. 295; Vol. IV, p.90-91; Vol. II, p. 65; Vol. I, p. 89; Vol. I, p.341; Vol. II, p.174; Vol. II, p.45; Vol. III, p.332-338; Vol. IV, p.139; Vol. IV, p.31-32; Vol. I, p.294-343-344; Vol. II, p.57-160; Vol. III, p.168; Vol. IV, p.66-67; Vol. I, p.248-242-263-359-433-438-494; Vol. II, p.46-299-300; Vol. IV, p.147-148-93; Vol. II, p.304; Vol. I, p.430-432; Vol. V, p.187-190; Vol. I, p.161; Vol. IV, p.141; Vol. I, p.201; Vol. I, p.148; Vol. I, p.287-325-339-326-338-389-345; Vol. II, p.275-292; Vol. III, p.268-269-269; Vol. IV, p.72-73; Vol. I, p.322.

they were equal to men in society and were seen only as humans in the sight of Allah, served as spiritual leaders in women's convents and monasteries. They lived their faith and also taught it to other women, believing that they would gain reward for consciously living their faith. Many of them, like Rabia, chose not to marry and dedicated themselves to God. However, unlike nuns in Christianity, they did not abstain from marriage out of obligation but rather chose it willingly, dedicating their entire lives to God.

When looking at the socio-historical processes of Western and Eastern women, it is evident that they unfolded quite differently. While European women were not even allowed to touch the Bible, Muslim female scholars emerged in the Islamic world. This indicates that the socio-historical trajectory of women worldwide is not uniform. Muslim women have always been one step ahead of their counterparts in medieval and early modern societies in Europe. However, this does not imply that the problem of women's rights was fully solved in the Islamic world.

In the Islamic world, the emergence of women advocating for women's rights came much later, around the 19th century, corresponding to the Ottoman era. However, before the Ottoman period, we believe that the perspective of Rumi (Mevlana) was quite significant in reflecting the view of women in the Islamic world. Rumi's thoughts are clear enough to not require elaboration. Let us now listen to Rumi.

“Even if a person surpasses Zaloga Rüstem with bravery, or even exceeds Hamza, he is still a captive to his wife in the matter of ruling.”¹⁵

Adam, whose words intoxicated the universe, would still say to Muhammad, “Speak, oh Humaira.”¹⁶
Indeed, outwardly water is superior to fire; however, when placed in a vessel, fire boils it vigorously.¹⁷¹⁷

When there is a pot or a jug between the two, fire turns the water into vapor and destroys it.¹⁸¹⁸

The Prophet said, “Women prevail greatly over intelligent and eloquent individuals.”¹⁹¹⁹

However, fools dominate women because they treat them harshly and rudely.²⁰²⁰

They lack pity, compassion, and love. This is because their nature and creation are more inclined towards beastliness.²¹²¹

Love and compassion are qualities of humanity; while anger and lust are qualities of animals.²²²²

As seen, while contemporary Europeans prohibited women from touching the Bible, Mevlana compares women to fire, speaking of their superiority over men.²³

-III-

As mentioned earlier, the quest for women's rights in the Muslim world was first observed in the 19th century Ottoman Empire. There are two main reasons that led to the emergence of the issue of women's rights in Ottoman society. One of them is the Reform movements in the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, progressive sultans like Selim III and Mahmud II were not only aware that the Ottoman society lagged behind the world militarily, but also recognized that there were new developments, especially in social life, globally, and that Ottoman society was significantly behind in these developments as well. In this regard, Ottoman scholars belonging to various nationalities within the Ottoman subjects who had the opportunity to be sent to the West for education were aware of the fact that the Ottoman society lagged far behind the civilized world. One of the areas where the Ottomans lagged behind and could not keep up was the social, legal, economic, and political conditions of women in a country, which is an important criterion for being a civilized society. Ottoman intellectuals were well aware of this. Therefore, many reforms were made within the Ottoman State on this issue in the 1800s. What is important for us here is how feminism was reflected in the women's rights movement of the Ottoman and Republic periods.

During the Ottoman period, while military and political reforms were being made in Muslim societies, Ottoman intellectuals were also thinking about the social backwardness not only of Ottoman society but also of the Islamic world to a large extent. The issue of women was seen as one of the problems leading to the social backwardness of the Islamic world. And there were many literary activities on this issue. Among those who wrote and advocated feminist literature, and perhaps those who initiated feminist literature, especially names such as Kasım Emin, Fatma Aliye, and Emine Semiye can be mentioned. While in Europe, the process of rereading and interpreting passages in the Holy Book concerning women, initiated by reformist-feminists, was paralleled in Ottoman society by the re-reading and interpretation of passages concerning women in the Quran, not by feminists, but only by devout reformists. We called

¹⁶From the Masnavi, vol. I, verse 2427.

¹⁷Ibid, vol. I, verse 2428.

¹⁸Ibid, vol. I, verse 2429.

¹⁹Ibid, vol. I, verse 2430.

²⁰Ibid, vol. I, verse 2433.

²¹Ibid, vol. I, verse 2434.

²²Ibid, vol. I, verse 2435.

²³Ibid, vol. I, verse 2436.

these individuals reformists compared to their contemporaries in Europe, but they are actually known as Islamic Modernists. Among these modernists, one of the most important and earliest figures to make observations about women was Kasım Emin, an author from Egypt who caused a great sensation with his book during the Ottoman period. Kasım Emin's work, originally titled "Tahrirü'l Mer'e" in Arabic and translated into Ottoman Turkish as "Hürriyet-i Nisvan" (Freedom of Women)^{24,23} by Zakir Kadiri Ugan, is a work that boldly and wisely says what some intellectuals still cannot say today and almost completely challenges the patriarchal-Hebrew culture. This work, which later sparked controversy and was opposed by Ferit Vecdi, who later wrote a work called "Muslim Woman," was banned in 1918.²⁵

Ferit Vecdi vehemently opposes Kasım Emin's views, drawing inspiration from European liberal male theorists in his opposition. As we mentioned in our discussion of the emergence of liberal feminism and feminism, one of the greatest influences in the emergence of feminism is attributed to liberal male theorists. Notably, Ferit Vecdi's citations from Auguste Comte are noteworthy: "It is possible to impose natural rules against these delusions (such as women's work) that destroy the civilization building and cause chaos.... (One of these rules is:) It is necessary for the man to support the woman; this principle is a natural law for humanity." Accordingly, Ferit Vecdi perceives women working outside the home as an obscure flaw, a corruption.^{26,25} As evident, Ferit Vecdi opposes women's work by taking cues from liberal male theorists, while K. Emin defends women's work solely based on Quranic principles, without referencing 19th-century feminists. K. Emin's efforts have not been in vain, as women have begun to regain many of their rights. The Tanzimat period is also the era when the doors of educational institutions were opened to women.

"Women were first provided nursing education within the Faculty of Medicine in 1842. This education became even more widespread with the establishment of Girls' Elementary Schools in 1838. Additionally, women began receiving education in industrial schools starting from 1869. The purpose of this was to meet the labor demand of the industrial initiative. As will be seen in later years, graduates from these industrial schools were employed in various industrial sectors, thus entering the public sphere. Furthermore, in 1870, the establishment of Darül Muallimat (Girls' Teacher Schools) aimed to create an army of educated women. Graduates from these schools were sent to different parts of the country to lead the education of women. Women's education was also given a legal status through official regulations. For instance, the 1868 Maarif-i Umumiye Regulation (Public Education Law) mandated primary education for all girls aged 6-11. Additionally, the first constitution, the 1876 Kanun-i Esasi, made primary education compulsory for all Ottoman population, regardless of gender. The Ottoman government allocated significant resources to women's education and turned this issue into a nationwide campaign. Educational institutions proliferated, and many women had access to education. By the year 1905, the number of official primary schools for girls reached 304, while the number of coeducational primary schools reached 3621. Additionally, a total of 84 girls' secondary schools were opened, with 69 in the provinces and 15 in Istanbul. By the year 1909, the number of women accessing education had reached tens of thousands just in secondary schools alone. Women's education also brought about the development of publications in the realm of women's literacy. All of these are considered as initial and significant steps taken in the context of 'women's rights' narrative, emphasizing the long journey that women needed to undertake and highlighting them as rights to be attained.^{27,26}

The initiation of Turkish women into feminist literature and their acquaintance with feminism coincided with their exposure to formal educational institutions.^{28,27}

During the Servet-i Fünun period, there were many notable female authors who stood out in feminist literature. However, we will briefly discuss the life of Fatma Aliye, as she is a lady who competed with the Shaykh al-Islams (Chief Islamic Scholars) and deserves immense respect. Fatma Aliye, along with many other authors of the period like Mustafa Sabri Efendi, wrote on the topic of women. Among these authors, we see that Abdullah Cevdet, Şemseddin Sami, Namık Kemal, Tevfik Fikret, Ahmed Rıza, Münif Pasha, Celal Nuri, and many others also wrote on the subject. While it is possible to learn about the conflicting perspectives of these authors on the topic of women through their articles, we find this overview sufficient.²⁸ In the 7th issue of the Women's World Magazine in 1913, an article titled "Are Men Truly Advocates of Freedom?" written by Naciye Hanım and published in the magazine, states: "...Yes, although men appear to be advocates of freedom outwardly, in reality, they are nothing more than petty tyrants. Even when they drown vast continents in blood with the slogans of freedom, their eyes do not see the feminine realm, which is greater and more

²⁴Kasım Emin, "Freedom of Women", translated by Zakir Kadiri Ugan, Örnek Publishing House, Kazan-1909, pp. 43-55.

²⁵Kurnaz, Şefika, Turkish Women Before the Republic, Ankara-1991, p.70.

²⁶Ferit Vecdi, Muslim Woman, trans. Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Sırat-ı Müstakim, vol.1, issue.8., p.24.

²⁷Çaha, Ömer, Civil Woman, trans. Ertan Özensel, VadiYay., Ankara, April/1996, p. 88.

²⁸Aydın, Mehmet, What Are These Women Writing, Ilke Pub., Ankara/1995, p. 33-45.

important than themselves. They hesitated to grant us not just political rights but even the rights of humanity. They began to insult and ridicule even those among them who desired to defend our rights, labeling them as feminists.”²⁹

Osmanlı women, *besides formal education*, had taken their place in many fields of social life if their financial means allowed. However, especially from the 17th to the 19th centuries, with the influence of the West, feminist discourses began to emerge in Ottoman society as well. A wide range of writers and intellectuals, including women writers who are still remembered with the same fame and reputation years later, were discussed in the Ottoman Empire. *Aynur Demirdirek* expresses this as follows: “Until the Republic, regardless of their qualifications, we know of more than 40 publications targeting women, starting with the supplement of the Terakki newspaper in 1868, "Muhadarat: Şukufezar, Family, Mirror, Women's Specific Newspaper, Collection, Beauties, Woman (Thessaloniki), Woman (Istanbul), Illustrated Woman, Piece of Parcel, Womanhood, Woman's Feeling, Ladies' World, Women's World...”³⁰

One of the famous Westernizers of this period, Abdullah Cevdet, expressed his own dreams in an article titled “A Very Alert Sleep” published in his own magazine, *İjtihad (İctihat)*, where he also shared his visions regarding the issue of women. According to him, the days when polygamy would be abolished, lodges and retreats would be closed, women would uncover their exaggerated veils, participate in social life, and all women would live free from oppression are very close.³¹ Indeed, Abdullah Cevdet's dream came true, and these changes were experienced in Republican Turkey. Bernard Lewis mentions Cevdet's article in his work “The Emergence of Modern Turkey” as the only document that foresaw the future of Turkey in the Ottoman era. However, when this article was published, his contemporaries laughed at Cevdet. This article also clearly demonstrates the views of Westernizers on women. Here, there is an important sociological reality that is often overlooked both when discussing these reforms and when implementing these issues directly in subsequent periods. No social reform or innovation happens suddenly. For these innovations to take place, suitable time and ground must first be established. And for the solution of a problem, it is necessary for it to be accepted to the same extent by the entire society. Regarding the issue of women, it can be said that the majority of Ottoman women did not have such a problem, at least not for that period. The main point underlying the problem is that the environments where the issue of women was discussed at that time were generally affluent circles. Whether such a problem exists or not for the public is a debatable issue. As previously mentioned, the center of feminist debates in the Republican era includes the rights given to Turkish women or the reforms made in Turkish social life, which were also Abdullah Cevdet's aspirations. In 1926, the adoption of the Swiss Civil Code and on April 3, 1930, the acceptance of the Municipal Law granting women the right to vote and stand for election, followed by the opportunity for women to be elected to the Parliament in 1934, and then on March 1, 1935, women entered the parliament with 18 deputies. The Turkish women, who endured many hardships alongside men during the War of Independence, perhaps for the first time, were reaping the fruits of their labor and actively participating in governance through a right granted directly to them in history. The issue of women in the Republic era, a state established following the Ottoman Empire, was not disconnected from the issue of women in the Ottoman State. And perhaps the type of woman conceived by some Ottoman intellectuals like Abdullah Cevdet emerged with the Republic. As in all revolutions, women were at the forefront of the Turkish Revolution. However, unlike revolutions in other societies, this time women truly began to slowly earn the place they deserved in society. The Turkish women who played primary roles on the frontlines during the War of Independence would, after the war, legally obtain many rights, perhaps through many reforms to be implemented. However, unlike in the Ottoman period, where these rights were won through the struggle of women's associations established by women, these rights in the post-war period were not the result of a struggle, but rather were rights granted in accordance with the desires and views of the young Republic of Turkey, especially those of Atatürk, within the framework of a great social change carried out, in line with the fundamental principles of the Turkish Revolution. Just as women took their place alongside men on the frontlines during the war and sacrificed their lives for their country, they were expected to take their place in this period of reform and social change after the war, as a reflection of the belief that women should also take their place in accordance with the fundamental principles of the Turkish Revolution. In other words, the Republic's women did not engage in a separate struggle for these rights. However, as the Ottoman Empire, which had completed its mission, had already taken its place on the most distinguished pages of history, the Ottoman women, especially urban Ottoman women, fought a great struggle for the acquisition of these rights granted during the Republican era. And indeed, they are gradually gaining these rights.”³²

²⁹For the mentioned articles, see *Socio-Cultural Change Process in Turkish Family*, Prime Ministry Family Research Institute, Ankara/1992, vol. III, p. 1015-1179.

³⁰Naciye Hanım, "Are Men Truly Advocates of Freedom, What Do Women Want?", *Women's World*, 1913, issue. 7, p. 2-3.

³¹Demirdirek, Aynur, *A Story of Ottoman Women's Quest for the Right to Life*, Ankara, January/1993, p.8. Lewis, Bernard, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, translated by Metin Kıratlı, T.T.K. Publications, Ankara-1984, p.236.

³²Çaha, page 88.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the subjects of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic are the same; that is, the nation. The struggles undertaken during the previous period in these two states would yield results in the subsequent period. The struggles for women's rights during the Ottoman Empire period would bear fruit in the Republican period, and Turkish girls would begin to become even members of parliament. However, the reforms regarding women's rights in the Republican era accelerated the process that could be called the acquisition process, which began in the Ottoman period, and enabled Turkish women to gain these rights earlier.

This rights for the Republic women have not required much struggle, as the Turkish Nation had just emerged from the war, and everyone was aware that there was no time to waste, urgent social problems existed, and there was not a moment to lose. The necessity to add the reforms regarding women's rights to the extensive package of social reforms that were urgently implemented was evident. However, the problem was not here; the problem was the difficulty in immediately perceiving and subsequently implementing the rapid process of these reforms by society, both in individuals' personal lives and later in societal life. Considering that even individuals belonging to the same educational level, social environment, and generation can have different reactions to the same social events and changes, the acceptance of these reforms by various segments and classes of society is a matter of time. Especially in a Muslim-Turkish society, which is the heir to an androcentric culture deeply intertwined with Hebrew traditions and where the positive and moderate approach brought by Islam in the early days, during the Prophet's era, gradually deteriorated within half a century after the Prophet's death due to the heavily androcentric culture intertwined with Hebrew traditions, it will undoubtedly take time for these reforms to be embraced and implemented in social life.

In other words, the Republican ideology started with the understanding that a significant change in mentality and perspective regarding women's rights was necessary. And aware that this change in mentality would primarily occur through education, the young Republic, led by Atatürk and all reformers, primarily reorganized textbooks to reflect the intended new reforms and the newly established gender roles within the framework of these reforms. An investigation conducted in Turkey sheds light on the gender roles imposed on children through books and the social gender roles formed through this method, in the article titled "Gender Roles in Republican Textbooks" by Firdevs Gümüšoğlu. Although Firdevs Gümüšoğlu's comments carry ideological traces, it cannot be denied that this type of education plays a role in shaping the female or male identity. The main evidence for us here is that the textbooks of the early Republic period were filled with elements prepared to change women's social identity. However, after 1945, the textbooks began to emphasize women's roles in the androcentric tradition again. The portrayal of women in textbooks before 1945 was a typology of a "Republic Woman" who had achieved individual freedom, worked, earned, escaped idleness, contributed to social production, but at the same time, prioritized homeland law over gender law, as described by Halide Edip.

During the Republican era, the new laws implemented to confer a prestigious status on Turkish women in social life brought many advancements that could be considered ahead of their time compared to laws in other countries of the same period. However, they also harbored certain problems. Nevertheless, different segments of society perceived the shortcomings in these laws differently. Thus, various social groups identified different deficiencies in these reforms. Alongside all these reforms, Turkish women began to assert themselves in various fields of social life, ranging from union activities to librarianship, from academia to law.³³

Especially during the establishment years of the Republic, Turkish women prioritized the law of the nation over the law of femininity, and the social and political context of the time did not permit dealing with issues such as women's rights as a problem. Subsequent legal advancements, such as the adoption of the civil code or the granting of suffrage rights, were not rights granted solely through the demands and struggles of Turkish women as a whole. Perhaps, owing to the circumstances of the time, these rights were more akin to a grant from the state, perhaps as a reciprocal gesture for the benefits Turkish women provided during the national struggle. However, these rights would gain significance as women became more aware of their rights and duties. In fact, from the very beginning, the Turkish or Ottoman women's movement failed to encompass the entirety of Turkish womanhood or develop a discourse that would encompass all. Except for the years of the national struggle, the Turkish women's movement has never been able to be a comprehensive movement. Because fundamentally, the Turkish women's movement emerged from the upper and upper-middle classes of society, evolving as an initiative primarily of intellectual women. Its resurgence as a social movement occurs much later, in the 1980s. Even during this period, Turkish feminism, which continues to be predominantly associated with a bourgeois class, only managed to capture its true grassroots base in the 1990s when almost everyone began to understand and acknowledge their rights and duties. In this process of awareness, the formation of what is referred to as the Islamic women's movement, or more precisely, conservative women's movements more intertwined with the grassroots, also played a significant role.

³³Turkey's Republic: For public life, see the first ladies to learn... See Topçuoğlu, *ibid.*, pp. 130-131.

Nilüfer Göle describes women's movements as the visibility of Muslim women in society, particularly emphasizing spiritual values and conservative social positions alongside the emphasis on women's identity. However, since our focus here is not solely on discussing these conservative female identities in detail, we do not feel the need to delve into this further.³⁴

The issue of women's rights advocacy has advanced to such an extent in recent years that radical feminists have begun to claim that women have the right not to marry and not to have children. Yet, the biggest problem still remains as domestic violence within the family. Domestic violence is a subject that postmodern feminists insistently highlight. And today, the most significant unresolved issue is that marital sexual harassment is still not considered a crime in many societies.

In Turkey, a country where the majority of the population is Muslim, significant progress seems to have been made in parallel with the history of the women's rights movement. Despite the recognition of suffrage rights in 1934, there is still a long way to go, as women in Turkey still lack sufficient awareness of their rights. Furthermore, there is a significant gap between the necessary number of women's shelters, a crucial step in combating domestic violence, and the actual number of such shelters in Turkey. While Turkey should have around 3000 women's shelters, there are currently only 16. Additionally, marital sexual harassment is still not considered a crime.

In summary, there is a much greater distance to be covered, and achieving these milestones requires a process of societal awareness. At this point, every Turkish citizen has important responsibilities. Based on the example of Turkey, it can be easily said that the situation in Islamic countries is far from promising.

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³⁴For further information on the subject, see: Göle, Nilüfer. *Modern Intimacy*. Istanbul: Metis Publications, 1991. Göle, Nilüfer. *The New Public Faces of Islam*. Istanbul: Metis Publications, 2000.