



Women's Economic Status in the Ottoman Turkish Novel and the Pioneering Portrayal of Women's Work in Fatma Aliye's Novels, *Refet* and *Uđı*

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Abstract

In this article, Ottoman women's economic status, work experiences in the public sector, and their assets were discussed and examined Fatma Aliye's (1862-1936) novels *Refet* (1896) and *Uđı* (1898). These two novels are the first Ottoman-Turkish novels that problematize these matters. *Refet* relates the adventures of a young woman who graduates from one of the Female Teachers Training Colleges (*Darulmuallimat*), the first of which was opened in 1870, and who goes on to become a teacher. As such, it constitutes a valuable portrayal of how the teaching colleges were established and what they meant for the Ottoman women. These essential and permanent historical developments laid the foundation for legal rights to be gained after the establishment of the Republic, and *Refet* is the first Turkish novel to deal with this subject matter. Additionally, *Refet* (1896), appears as the first Turkish novelistic portrayal of teaching as a profession 'suitable' for women. Between *Refet* and *Uđı*, there is intertextuality. *Bedia*, the protagonist of *Uđı*, is inspired by *Refet* and requests Fatma Aliye to write about her life; hence, the author develops *Uđı* as an early work of metafiction. *Bedia* makes a livelihood in *Uđı* by teaching oud lessons. It's no accident that both women in these novels work as teachers. Teaching is regarded as one of the most female-friendly professions.

Keywords: Fatma Aliye, *Refet*, *Uđı*, *Darulmuallimat*, Female Teachers Training College, Ottoman women, women literature.

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Osmanlı Türk Romanında Kadının Ekonomik Durumu ve Fatma Aliye'nin Romanlarında Kadın Emeginin Öncü Tasviri, *Refet* ve *Uđı*

Öz

Bu makalede, Fatma Aliye'nin (1862-1936) *Refet* (1896) ve *Uđı* (1898) romanları üzerinden Osmanlı kadınının ekonomik durumu, kamu sektöründeki iş deneyimleri ve varlıkları incelenmiş ve tartışılmıştır. Her iki romanda da öğretmenliğin kadın için 'uygun' bir meslek olduğu vurgulanmaktadır. Kadın öğretmenin Türk romanında ilk örneği Çalığışu (1922) olarak bilirse de ondan yirmi altı yıl önce yayımlanan *Refet* içerik olarak Cumhuriyete aktarılamamış kültürel bir miras olarak durmaktadır. Bu roman bir genç kızın, ilki 1870'te açılan Kız Öğretmen Okulu'nu bitirerek öğretmen olma serüvenini aktarmakta Osmanlı'da kadınlar için öğretmenlik kurumunun başlangıçta ne ifade ettiğini ve nasıl inşa edildiğini yansıtmaktadır. *Refet*, Osmanlıda kadınlar için açılan eğitim kurumlarının, özellikle de Kız Öğretmen Okulları'nın yetiştirdiği ilk örneklerden birine dikkat çekmesi bakımından son derece önemlidir. İki yıl ara ile yayımlanan *Refet* ile *Uđı* romanları arasında metinlerarası ilişkiler vardır. *Uđı*'nin baş kahramanı *Bedia*, *Refet*'ten ilham alır ve Fatma Aliye'den hayatını anlatmasını ister. Yani yazar *Uđı*'yi erken dönem bir üstkurmaca eseri olarak kurgular. *Bedia*, *Uđı*'de ud dersleri vererek geçimini sağlar. Bu romanlardaki her iki kadının da öğretmen olması tesadüf değildir. Öğretmenlik Fatma Aliye tarafından da kadın için uygun görülen bir meslek olarak tanımlanmaktadır; ancak Fatma Aliye'nin, kadınların hangi şartlarda çalıştığı ve çalışma koşulları ile ilgili de farklı yorumları söz konusudur. *Refet* ve *Uđı*'nin, içerikleri dolayısıyla edebiyat, sosyoloji ve kadın çalışmaları alanları ile ilgilenen araştırmacılar için son derece ilginç metinler olduğunu söylemek gerekir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Fatma Aliye, *Refet*, *Uđı*, *Darulmuallimat*, öğretmen, kadın edebiyatı, Osmanlıda kadın.

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Introduction

In this article, I discuss Ottoman women's economic status, work experiences in the public sector, assets, and examine Fatma Aliye's novels *Refet* (1896), and *Udî* (1898). These two novels the first Ottoman-Turkish novels, truly problematize these matters. While non-Muslim women's work outside the home had long been part of Turkish novels, Muslim Turkish women who worked in the public sector only began to appear in the novels of the late Tanzimat era. Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar asserts that 'the working woman' was first seen in Ahmet Mithat Efendi's *Felsefe-i Zenan* (1870), in the character Zekiye (Tanpınar, 1997:465); however, this Muslim character's 'career' is cut short by her marriage and premature death. While Reşat Nuri Güntekin's *Çalılıkıuşu* (1922) is often cited as the first Turkish novel to depict teaching as an 'appropriate' occupation for women, the similar contents of Fatma Aliye's *Refet*, published twenty-six years earlier, remain a cultural legacy not well transposed to the Republic. *Refet* relates the adventures of a young woman who graduates from one of the Women Teachers' Training Colleges (*Darülmuallimat*), the first of which was opened in 1870, and goes on to become a teacher. As such, it constitutes a valuable portrayal of how the teaching colleges were established and what they meant for Ottoman women. *Refet*, the primary text to be examined in this chapter, was only published in the modern Turkish alphabet in 2007. There is an intertextual relationship between *Refet* and *Udî*. Bedia, the main character of *Udî*, is inspired by *Refet* and asks Fatma Aliye to write a novel about her life. The author creates *Udî* as an early work of metafiction in the process. Bedia earns a living in *Udî* by providing oud lessons to students. It is no coincidence that both female protagonists in these novels are teachers. Teaching is often considered to be one of the most female-friendly professions available.

Fatma Aliye (1862-1936) was born in Istanbul. She published her first novel, *Muhâzarât*, under her own name in 1892. In a conference talk delivered in 1924, the Lebanese writer May Ziyade (1886-1941) mentions Fatma Aliye among the women influential in the East's awakening. She asserts that Fatma Aliye, despite having written in Turkish, influenced the Arab women who followed her (Ziyade, 1990:240). But it would be erroneous to maintain that Fatma Aliye has been held in the same high esteem in Turkish literary history, and especially by female writers of the Early Republican period. To lend our textual analysis of *Refet* and *Udî* the necessary socio-historical context, this chapter examines Ottoman women's economic position and work life generally before analyzing the specific women's issues portrayed in the novel.

Women's Economic Position and Work Life

The 17th and 18th centuries constituted a transition period from a feudal economy to an industry-based economy, which sped up the emergence of feminism. Almost all feminists associate women's emancipation with their economic independence from men. As is mentioned in Josephine Donovan's *Feminist Theory*, the assumption that women belonged in the home as mother and wife was almost universal. However, starting in the mid-18th century and

especially at the beginning of the 19th century, the industrial revolution restricted women to the private realm and separated the workplace from the home (Donovan, 2001:19). Thus, Donovan relates, the public world of work and the private realm of the home were separated from each other in a manner never seen before (Taşçıoğlu 1958:19). In the late Ottoman Empire, however, women began to work increasingly more, due to a series of wars. Muhaddere Taşçıoğlu emphasizes that Turkish women began to get more involved in public social life after the Balkan Wars of 1912-13 (43). The Balkan Wars and World War I affected women's civil service entry. During World War I, female officers progressively replaced departing public employees left by male workers (Tümer-Erdem & Yiğit 2010:113). After the war, educated or upper-class women had social work knowledge. Several women were drawn into professional life while starting an organization (Tümer-Erdem & Yiğit 2010:122).

Serpil Çakır relates that in the Ottoman Empire, which was an agrarian society, the weight of the agricultural economy fell upon the shoulders of Anatolian women and men, and especially upon the shoulders of women who, even as they worked all day in the fields, were responsible for meeting their families' needs at home and for raising their children. Even so, the entrenched perception that being productive or participating in the work force meant working in the city, and especially in Istanbul's government offices, led to the misimpression that women did not work or contribute to the economy. According to Çakır, this erroneous perception of Ottoman women's role in economic life stems from a lack of sufficient statistical information:

Because the 1882-1884 Population Census was aimed at recruiting soldiers for the army, women were not included in the census until the beginning of the 19th century. The inclusion of women in industrial statistics only occurred in 1913. Furthermore, imperial edicts, *qadi* registers and various consular reports that should provide important information about women have not yet been sufficiently analyzed. If these documents from various periods were examined, the existence of female merchants and women who owned businesses in the cities, as well as that of female miners, would come to light (Çakır, 1996:261).

Çakır also asserts that middle-class urban women, whose lives have been examined more closely than those of rural Anatolian women, began to enter the workforce in the 1900's, and that women, accepted for the first time as civil servants and labor inspectors at the Telephone Company in 1913, began to work in almost every field after World War I (264). Dersaadet Telefon Anonim Şirketi Osmaniyesi (Istanbul Telephone Company) was founded in 1911, and a 30-year telephone operating privilege was given to a consortium of American, British, and French companies (Karakışla, 2014:20-25). Istanbul Telephone Company was one of the first workplaces where Ottoman women worked. When discussing female heads of households and women who earned money, Suraiya Faroqhi points out that especially in Rumelian provinces, women who continued to harvest their fields after the death of their husbands comprised a distinct group according to Ottoman tax law. Meanwhile, in the Central Anatolian trading city of Tokat, a good number of households run by women existed, according to tax records from

the 1640's, which indicates that these women were regarded as heads of their household (Faroqi, 2002:126). In her mention of Ottoman women's involvement in business (126-127), Faroqi states that there was a market in Bursa at which women sold their own handicrafts, that similar markets were to be found in Istanbul from time to time, and that visits to such local markets provided women with opportunities to contribute to city life (167).

Ayşegül Yaraman reports that in the late Ottoman Empire, wars not only led to the recruitment of men to the army, but also provided women with employment opportunities, and that women workers were productive in areas like weaving, carpet making, the production of tobacco, canned goods and various paper products, printing and soap making (Yaraman, 2001:100). New horizons opened by the reevaluation of women's duties, states Yaraman, meant that Turkish women not only worked in small studios, but also entered new and varied fields, from trade to cleaning, from teaching to nursing, from road construction to barbering (101-102). As measures were taken to draw women into the workforce in order to lessen the shocks to economic life caused by the wars, which came one after the other in the late Ottoman period, Ismail Hakkı Bey founded the Islamic Society for the Employment of Women (*Kadınları Çalıştırma Cemiyet-i İslâmiyesi*) in Istanbul in 1916, under the patronage of Abdülmecid's granddaughter and Enver Pasha's wife, Naciye Sultan (Yaraman, 2001:106). Yaraman reports that those involved in the *Kadınları Çalıştırma Cemiyet-i İslâmiyesi* witnessed the female population enter the workforce in a profoundly striking fashion. These important and permanent transformations in Turkish women's history heralded the legal rights to be earned later on (190). The most outstanding example of Ottoman women's entrepreneurship should be addressed here. "Hanımlara Mahsus Eşya Pazar Osmanlı Anonim Ticaret Şirketi" (Ladies' Goods Market, Ottoman Joint Stock Trade Company) was founded in 1917 to produce and sell items that women needed, such as sewing materials. The company was founded by three women (Fatma Hasene Hanım, Fatma Zehra Hanım, and Ayşe İzzet Hanım). Even though it was created during the war, the firm, which prospered in the early years, was severely harmed by the economic crisis resulting from the protracted conflicts (Tümer-Erdem & Yiğit 2010:150).

Ömer Çaha's assertion that women involved in the rural Ottoman economy continued to enjoy traditional equal status and took part in the same sort of decision making as men (Çaha, 1999:80) draws attention to the fact that Ottoman women were not comprised only of Istanbul women (82). Çaha confirms the existence of women who traded and who opened their own stores (83). Likewise, Tiğınçe Oktar states that Muslim women were involved in commerce during every period of the Ottoman Empire (Oktar, 1998:24). According to Kadriye Yılmaz Koca, studies on Ottoman women generally ignore Anatolian women and instead focus on wealthy women of the palace or from families with military rank, trying to prove that these women were "domestic slaves". Yet, women's activities in Ottoman society are in need of scholarly evaluation, not speculative interpretations (Koca, 1998:11). Koca argues that the restrictions placed on women in the public sphere in medieval Islamic society, as well as the distance from economic life imposed upon them, was not

limited to early Ottoman society, but rather, emerged in the years in which broader social deterioration began. She maintains that the economic rights Islam granted to women and the honor-giving structure which Turkish traditions provided made it easier for them to quickly gain economic independence in society (46). The right to engage freely in commerce, preserve one's goods and property as one desires, receive inheritance and *mahr*, a specified amount of money or goods from the groom upon marriage, comprised the foundation of women's economic activities (Koca, 1998:46). Women's entry into the public realm of work is closely connected to their access to education. The first indications of women's participation in public educational institutions are the first women's appointment to teaching in 1873, the first woman's public speech in a school ceremony in 1881, and finally, the first women's appointment to school administrative positions in 1883 (Çaha, 1999: 90). Another important point mentioned by Ayşegül Yaman is that many educated Turkish women approached teaching "as if it were military service" (Yaman, 2001:102).

Educational Institutions and the Course of Women's Education

In the late Ottoman Empire, the sharpest criticisms women leveled at bureaucrats were related to matters of education. Women first began to be given nursing education at the College of Education in 1842; and this education spread in 1858 via secondary schools for girls (*Kız Rüştüyeleri*). Starting in 1869, women also began to access education in industrial schools. This training was designed to meet the labor needs of the industrial initiatives started. As would be seen in later years, female students who graduated from these industrial schools were employed in various industrial fields and hence entered the public sphere. Due to a lack of female teachers, families were unwilling to send their daughters to school (Tümer-Erdem & Yiğit 2010:91).

With the first Female Teachers Training College (*Darül Muallimat*) founded in 1870, efforts to build an educational army of women began. The graduates of these colleges were sent to various parts of the Empire and served as leaders in women's education (Çaha, 1999: 89). According to Çaha, the first constitution, *Kanun-i Esasi* (1876), made primary education mandatory for the entire Ottoman populace, male and female (89). After the secondary schools for girls, girls' preparatory schools (*Kız İdadileri*) were opened in 1911. When these preparatory schools were turned into high schools in 1913, woman took a further step into the realm of education. Higher education for women was made possible in 1914, with the opening of a women's university, *İnas Darül Fünunu* (Çaha, 1999:102-103). Şükûfe Nihal (1896-1973) was one of the first women who graduated from *İnas Darül Fünunu* (1919). She was a Turkish educator, poet, and activist. She spent many years teaching in various high schools. She was involved in several women's organizations and published articles on women's rights in journals and newspapers (Argunşah, 2020).

Women's education brought about the development of publications that appealed to female readership. *Terakki*, the first Ottoman newspaper published in 1868, addressed women's issues extensively; and the first women's supplement, titled *Muhaderat*, began to be published in 1888. A sizable number

of new newspapers and periodicals followed; Şefika Kurnaz identified among these 13 different journals aimed at women that were published between 1868 and 1900 (Çaha, 1999:89). These periodicals, published regularly for women, were also used to educate young women in schools. Serpil Çakır argues that the periodical *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* did not try solely to convince its readers to play the role of ‘good mother, good wife’, but rather, that the women writers articulated their problems and questioned their status, even as they refrained from rejecting those identities (Çakır, 1996:28). These journals and periodicals debated gender equality, women’s rights, and education. However, except *Kadınlar Dünyası* (The World of Women), most of these periodicals only survived a year or two (Tümer-Erdem & Yiğit, 2010:119-120). In *Kadınlar Dünyası* (1913-1921), women’s concerns were addressed, an Ottoman illustrated periodical published from 1913-1921. Women-owned and ran the publication. It was published by the Osmanlı Müdafaa-ı Hukuk-ı Nisvan Cemiyeti (Ottoman Women’s Association for the Defense of Women’s Rights). Nuriye Ulviye Mevlan founded both organizations (Çakır, 1996). *Kadınlar Dünyası*, in addition to advocating for women’s rights, also encouraged women to enter the workforce. In 1913, Istanbul Telephone Company advertised for female switchboard operators in newspapers. In its articles, Women’s World encouraged women to apply for this position, and as a result of all of these calls, Muslim Ottoman women, Bedra Osman and six of her friends applied. When the company refused to accept these applications because they required knowledge of a foreign language, the matter was brought up at the Osmanlı Müdafaa-ı Hukuk-ı Nisvan Cemiyeti and its publishing organization, *Kadınlar Dünyası*, and became a public issue. The hiring policies of the telephone company had been criticized. All seven of these Muslim Ottoman women were hired at Istanbul Telephone Company around a year later after all of these efforts (Karakışla, 2014:20-25; Tümer-Erdem & Yiğit, 2010:113-115; Baysal, 2017:345).

During a debate about how Ottoman women should be raised, Fatma Aliye Hanım cautions young girls who knew all about famous European women but little about the famous women of Islam in their own history in her article, “Ta’lîm-i Terbiye-i Benât-ı Osmâniyye”. She writes that these girls and women, who were unconsciously trying to learn languages and were yet unable to stand their ground in the face of foreign cultures, felt foreign and unable to warm up to their own society, in which they lived but from which they remained estranged (1).

Darül Muallimât as an Educational Institution and Female Teachers

When İlber Ortaylı mentions ‘the female teacher’ as the 19th century’s most intriguing figure, he notes that there were female teachers who began to educate common people not only among the Turks, but also among the Bulgarians, Greeks and Serbians (Ortaylı, 2004:118). The view that every mother is simultaneously an educator was common. In her articles, Fatma Aliye Hanım wrote frequently about mothers’ impact on their children. In her article, “İlk Mektep”, she emphasized the need for mothers to be educated. She often expressed in her writings that a mother is her child’s “first school”. And in an

article titled "Vâlîde", she advises women to read what has been written about childcare before becoming a mother (1).

The teacher is a frequently encountered character in Turkish literature. The teacher protagonist, a symbol for the new Republic and enlightenment, is imagined to have first appeared in *Çalığışu* (1922). In Halide Edip Adıvar's *Vurun Kahpeye* (1926) and Reşat Nuri Güntekin's *Yeşil Gece* (1928), the teacher protagonists are also depicted as models for societal enlightenment. Meanwhile, the female teacher protagonists idealized in novels also became a model for the Republican woman. Also in Emine Semiye's novel *Muallime*, Bihbude manages to live as a teacher. Emine Semiye (1864-1944), the second daughter of Ahmed Cevdet Pasha and Fatma Aliye's sister, was a significant figure in the Ottoman women's movement, well-known for the multiple positions she successfully assumed as a politician, journalist, teacher, and nurse. She was one of the first Muslim women from the Ottoman Empire to get an education in Europe. According to Şahika Karaca, Emine Semiye thinks that women deserve equality and that attaining equality requires a solid education. Karaca notes that *Muallime* (1901) emphasizes women's education, as implied by the novel's title (Karaca, 2011). Emine Semiye featured women working also in *Sefalet* and *Gayya Kuyusu*. Şahika Karaca examined the similarities and differences between the terminology in the changing period of the woman's identity to the teacher's identity in the Turkish novel in her other paper. She discusses the novels *Refet* and *Udî* by Fatma Aliye, *Muallime* by Emine Semiye, *Tatarcık* by Halide Edip Adıvar, and *Acımak* and *Çalığışu* by Reşat Nuri Güntekin in her paper (Karaca, 2012). Halide Edip Adıvar's *Tatarcık* (1939) is also a novel that highlights the ideal young teacher girl type. It is about the life of Lale, who, after her father's death, gave private lessons in English and later studied and became an English teacher.

Refet and *Udî* are novels by Fatma Aliye Hanım in which women's work is the central theme. *Refet* is the first example of the 'teacher protagonist' that would appear with increased frequency in the early Republican period. She completes the Female Teachers Training College despite very difficult conditions and becomes a teacher. When *Refet* is asked during an exam to share her thoughts about school and education, she writes in her composition that school cannot be taken away from her and the other female students, and that it has adorned them with knowledge, capital which cannot be lost (Fatma Aliye 2007, 78). Dwelling upon how important a profession teaching is for women, *Refet* calls the Female Teachers Training College a "dârü'l-malûmât", a house of knowledge, and exclaims that hundreds of knowledgeable Ottoman girls are raised well, thanks to these schools (79). In the novel, the secondary schools' teachers are also women and graduates of the Women's Teacher Training Colleges; and the embroidery teachers are the graduates of the Industrial School (44).

Shaken by her mother's death at the end of the novel, *Refet* reflects once again on the importance of her profession when warned by a friend and realizes that she must teach in order to pay the empire back for all the time and energy invested in her (195). But there is another reality, which must be recognized: *Refet*'s greatest ideal is not to teach. Teaching, to her, seems to be the quickest solution to her economic woes. When *Refet*'s mother surmises that *Refet* will not

be able to be a teacher for the poor, like themselves; Refet replies, to the contrary, that she can only be a teacher for the poor, like themselves, because the rich girls come to school not to become teachers, but to acquire knowledge (25). In short, Refet pursues teaching in order to earn sufficient money to support herself and her mother. In fact, at various points, she considers doing ‘any kind of work’ that will earn her the money she needs in short time. For example, when she learns of the high price at which famous painters’ paintings are sold, and realizes how little pay quilt and pillow embroidery yields, despite the difficulty of the work, she thinks to herself, “If only I were a painter; with just a few paintings I’d earn enough money and secure my future” (152). When asked why she desires wealth so much, Refet answers:

Isn’t it better for those who are obliged to work to earn their money at once? When one becomes wealthy, one can work as much as the body allows. That is to say, one works no longer out of necessity, but for the sake of art, or for fame. Those who work to make ends meet, however, are obliged to work every day, every hour. Even when sick, they’re obliged. Even if they have no strength left! Those type of people, what if they become so ill they can’t work?! What if they lose their health?! That’s why, of course, it’s better to work only as much as is necessary and to secure one’s future when one is healthy! My aim is not wealth; it’s earning a living!(155).

The author, who writes that Refet’s dreams do not resemble the dreams of other girls her age, attributes this to Refet’s hopelessness regarding marriage (59). Because Refet is not a beautiful girl, she believes that no one would choose to marry her. If she had pinned her hopes on marriage, perhaps she would not have taken work so seriously (29). This hopelessness regarding her future is expressed in Refet’s words when her mother passes away: “What work, what duty is left for me in this world? Shall I live only to drag around this lazy, ugly body?” (115). As with Bihbude, the teacher in Emine Semiye’s novel *Muallime*, Fatma Aliye describes Refet as an ugly girl. Both the characters in these novels seem beautiful due to their intelligence and abilities. Fortunately, Refet decides to re-channel her love toward the children she will teach. “I will love the children. I wonder if there will be some among them who love me? Oh! I just can’t do without the pleasure of being loved!” (118). Actually, *Çalığışu*, often presented as the Turkish novel’s first ideal teacher protagonist, is similar in this vein. Reşat Nuri notes that the teachers in his novels don’t immediately think of becoming teachers, but only decide to teach after they experience negative life events:

I don’t see much difference between the girl in love in *Çalığışu*, who like Âşık Garip and all fairy-tale lovers, gets carried away and sets out for mountain meadows, and the bearded village teacher in *Yeşil Gece*. They are two quixotic wretches, one who has lost the man she loves, and the other, the greatest beloved of all, God. They wander around the Anatolian countryside like meadow snakes, trying to fill what is missing in their lives (Referenced in Kavcar, 1972: 169).

Fethi Naci deems Feride “an overly exaggerated character” (Naci, 1995: 76). Likewise, N. Ahmet Özalp argues that changes made in the later editions of the novel rendered Kamran’s personality indistinct and turned Feride into an

exaggerated character. Özalp also reports that other changes were made in the text in order to idealize Feride (Özalp, 1999: 13) and that the words uttered by Kamran, words that were removed from later editions, thoroughly injured Feride's pride, which is why she set out to teach in Anatolia. In a chapter titled "Women as Teachers" in his book on female identity in Turkish novels, Ramazan Gülendam notes that the women who teach in Erhan Bener's *Yalnızlar* do not teach because of a specific ideal, but rather, they teach in order to "pass the time". He also remarks that Nevin in Rakım Çalapala's *Köye Giden Gelin* hates all men because of what she has experienced, and for this reason, plans never to marry, but rather, to go to Anatolia and teach in a small town (Gülendam, 2006: 351). Gülendam argues that Nevin resembles Reşat Nuri's protagonist Feride because of these qualities (351). He also notes that in Halide Edip Adivar'ın *Sonsuz Panayır*, Ayşe gives private lessons solely to earn money and access a certain social milieu (351).

Similarly, in Fatma Aliye's novels, we see women who have no hope of marriage or who are unhappy in their marriage direct their interests and love to another area of life. In *Udî*, Bedia decides to work and directs her emotional energy to her oud because she 'is obliged to' and because she must earn money (Fatma Aliye, 1898:171). When Bedia settles in Istanbul and begins to earn a living with her oud, she takes it into her lap and pours out her heart to it: "You are my lover, my beloved, my man" (227-228). When doctors advise her to stop playing her oud due to illness, she replies: "If it weren't for this oud, what would become of me? [...] How could I lighten this poor afflicted heart's need to love?!" (233-234). Similarly, in Fatma Aliye's last published novel, *Enîn*, Sabahat and Fehame, unable to find the happiness they were expecting in marriage, dedicate themselves to scholarship. Exploring the depths of material, they had read earlier in their lessons, they escape into philosophy (139).

As seen in these works, a variety of difficult situations and broken dreams led Ottoman women to work. Many strived to direct the love and interest that they could not expend in marriage to other outlets. In other words, a woman's employment was not something seen when 'all was well'. Even so, we should not conclude that Ottoman women's work was belittled. In Fatma Aliye's novels, if a woman is working honorably in a 'suitable' profession and is accomplishing an art, her effort is commended. That is to say, a woman's work is seldom portrayed as negating her femininity. Furthermore, the emphasis on artistic women's work in Fatma Aliye's novels is noteworthy. Fatma Aliye sought the solution for women's financial problems in education and the possession of a viable profession or in the sale of the artistic products they created. Even though *Refet* details the extent to which an uneducated woman wears herself out performing the types of physical labor necessary to make ends meet, Fatma Aliye's novels are generally focused on the familial and personal problems of upper-class women. These women only experience economic problems due to changes in their family life. Erol Köroğlu states that *Udî* emphasizes the importance of education for women's subsistence without a man. Therefore, Köroğlu notes that "education for women was a class issue and it was possible only for the upper-class women. Fatma Aliye's *Udî* conceals

this fact with her conformist closure but it reveals the patriarchal exploitation of Ottoman women through the symptomatic development of its plot” (Köroğlu, 2018:294). An upper-class woman herself, Fatma Aliye did not prioritize the problems of working women or even the subject of women’s work. Nevertheless, *Refet* and *Udî*, as texts that deal directly with these topics, are incredibly important.

Women’s Reasons for Working and Work Conditions

Fatma Aliye also discussed the topic of women’s work in some of her articles. With her article, “Terbiye-i İctimâiyye”, which was published in *İnkılab* in 1909 and became the object of much scrutiny, she became the first Ottoman woman to mention women’s work productivity in workplaces where they could use their hands more capably than men; and she described how a work environment in which women could work without compromising their honor could be established. But, according to Fatma Aliye, the real purpose of establishing a proper work environment for women was to provide a space for them to benefit from good social upbringing, in order to prevent the inertia caused by idleness and unemployment from leading them to engage in forms of “immorality”, such as gossip and competition (114). Accordingly, in *Muhâzarât*, the protagonist Fazıla’s inability to get along with her mother-in-law and sister-in-law while married to Remzi is due to these women’s habit of constantly gossiping and sitting around, twiddling their thumbs (182).

In an untitled article published in 1898 in the 184th issue of *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, Fatma Aliye comments on the reasons why women in the United States and Europe work. Fatma Aliye questions whether American and European women work for the sake of civilization, for their own pleasure, or out of real financial necessity. The author suggests that she believes these women are not working for their own pleasure; for according to her, a woman who has no need to work does not think of doing so. In Europe, she says, women who are unable to meet their own needs, which is a condition for marriage, are unable to marry; and because they are unable to marry, they are obliged to work even harder. Fatma Aliye admits that these matters are ones that “should be further researched and pondered” (1). It should be remembered that World War I impacted women’s public service admissions across Europe. Males abandoned their jobs to serve in the military. This situation forced women into the workforce throughout Europe. As part of the war effort, new employment was established. Around this time, governments began coordinating women’s employment via campaigns and recruitment drives.

Fatma Aliye’s protagonists do not think of working when they are not obliged to. Working to earn money is a path that comes to mind only when the need for money is felt. The author writes in *Nisvân-ı İslâm*: “In our culture, managing the household is the wives’ duty, providing for it is the men’s duty” (140). Clearly, Fatma Aliye regards “bringing home the bacon” as the male’s responsibility. Out during the afternoon preceding an Islamic holy night, Refet experiences great joy when she is able to buy the children the savory ring-shaped biscuits and candy being sold for the night; she walks “with a feeling of

valor and satisfaction" (58). Her mother greets her, saying "My daughter, my child, the man of my house!" (58). Even though Refet carries packages in another neighborhood, she does not want to frequent the market or bazaar in her own neighborhood (55), because she is "of the opinion that a young woman should preserve her dignity in her neighborhood" (55). According to the author, Refet's behavior stems not from pride, but from her sense of dignity. Yet, Refet excuses two girls who are obliged to do the shopping, one due to her parents' illness and the other, to her father's death: "The poor girl was both the daughter and the man of the house. She was obliged both to earn money, like a man, and to see to the housework, like a woman" (94). Here again, the author displays a sensitivity particular to her milieu by mentioning the girl's social position as the reason for her behavior.

As she expresses in her article *Terbiye-i İctimâiyye*, Fatma Aliye believed that women given free rein of idle pursuits were in need of reform (111). Yet, she made a distinction between this sort of women and herself and other "upper-class women". For instance, in *Udî*, when Bedia is forced to work, she asks the author to help her find a few students to whom she can give out lessons. Fatma Aliye tells Bedia that she will find many people who want to be her student, but that she should not go anyone's house without first being sure that it is an "appropriate" place (Fatma Aliye, 1898:218-19). Thus, the necessity of protecting "a woman's honor" is once again introduced hand in hand with the proposition of work.

Even as Bedia gives lessons, she continues composing songs and taking lessons from musical masters herself (223). What she actually wants, after finding a means of earning the money she needs, is to play out only for herself. In fact, her biggest complaint is not having enough time for herself. Bedia regrets that "all of her hours are sold" (224-25). After earning enough money to live on and establish a small shop, she wishes to rest and play out only for her own pleasure (227-28). Evidently, she wishes to rescue her dear out from being a mere tool of trade (228). Likewise, after Refet is forced to quit the private lessons she has been taking outside of school in order to offset the wages formerly earned by her mother, she, too, realizes that she needs money in order to set aside time for herself. If it were up to Refet, she would choose the pursuit of knowledge over money a thousand times, but she is obliged to work. At that point in the novel, Refet envies the wealthy once again, for it is difficult for her to give up her new appetite for scholarly education (162). When Virginia Woolf commented that if her contemporaries' mothers and grandmothers had left them enough money, "this evening, we [women] would be able to sit comfortably here and talk about archeology, botany, anthropology, physics, the structure of atoms, mathematics, astronomy, relativity or geography" (Woolf, 2002: 25), she was voicing the same complaint about women being unable to find time for themselves due to material impossibilities.

After reading *Refet*, Bedia is quite moved and asks Fatma Aliye to write about her life, too; so, the author constructs *Udî* as an early piece of metafiction. Bedia knows that jobs like washing laundry and cleaning quickly ruin a woman's health, because she saw this in *Refet*. As a result, she considers

alternative forms of work. Refet says that her mother lost her health a little more each day doing physical labor, and that she wants to become a teacher to rescue them both from such troubles (49). Refet is convinced that women who earn a living by washing laundry, polishing floorboards or sewing lose their health early on (26). Josephine Donovan also reports that 19th century women complained about being kept away from lucrative forms of work and about not being paid the same wages as men (Donovan, 2001: 26). Although Woolf might have enjoyed slightly better working conditions, she complained of the same problems: “Earlier, in order to make ends meet, I begged the newspapers for temporary work by informing them about a wedding here or a show there. I earned a few pounds by writing addresses on envelopes, reading books to old ladies, making paper flowers, and teaching the alphabet to small children in a nursery. Before 1918, these were the main jobs open to women” (Woolf, 2002: 42). Woolf foresaw that, in the future, women would wear themselves out faster than men when they entered every field that had been denied them, that is, when they stopped being the protected sex and started toting coal, driving locomotives, and became soldiers, sailors or laborers (45-46). Refet believes, for the reasons mentioned, that if she were to work physical jobs like her mother, that she would not be able to withstand it as long. She exclaims to her mother, “Don’t think that I’m afraid of dying. I’m just afraid of us reaching the point where we can no longer work” (Fatma Aliye, 2007: 52).

This examination of how the subject of women’s work is handled in Fatma Aliye’s novels and articles has revealed several themes, which the author herself emphasized. She begins by discussing the problems that oblige women to work; and once women’s work is in question, she emphasizes the necessity of working in an “honorable” environment, in a profession that matches one’s talents and skills, rather than merely performing physical tasks that quickly wear out the body. While Fatma Aliye indicates that women only work outside the home when they are obliged to, i.e. in certain situations, she also mentions that working keeps women away from bad habits that arise from lack of meaningful activity.

Women’s Assets and Inheritance Rights

The inclusion of women among the foundation’s founders, both from the palace and the general public, is significant in showing that Ottoman women could have a role in property and economic matters. Also, there were always issues. Women had some difficulties when establishing ‘Hanımlara Mahsus Eşya Pazarı Osmanlı Anonim Ticaret Şirketi’ (Ladies’ Goods Market, Ottoman Joint Stock Trade Company) in 1917 (Tümer-Erdem & Yiğit 2010:150-151). “The fact that the founders and shareholders were women caused the biggest controversy during the establishment of the company. It was certain that at least some of the stocks to be offered to the public would be bought by men. When this situation happened, it would be necessary to have women and men together in the company’s board of directors and general assembly formed by the shareholders. That was a very important problem for the period. Because there was a definite separation of men’s and women’s spheres in every aspect of life. Women should not have been

in the same room with men who were not her relatives. The issue was once discussed in the General Assembly of the Şurayı Devlet. In the end, The General Assembly approved the firm by stating that the establishment of a joint-stock company or the purchase of shares by women did not mean that they were involved together being in the same place, side by side with men" (Çetin, 2021).

Suraiya Faroqhi writes: "Unlike European women, Ottoman women were able to maintain control over their capital even after marrying - at least at the legal level - until the 19th and 20th centuries. Once they came of age, they gained legal identity, which meant that they could seek justice in the courts if wronged and, of course, others could lodge complaints against them, too" (Faroqhi, 2002:115). Kadriye Yılmaz Koca also confirms that inheritance claims, and lawsuits are found frequently in Ottoman court records, as inheritance rights constituted the foundation of women's property rights during that time period (25). As Koca reports, inheritance from one's father and the *mahr* acquired from one's husband, both of which could be utilized and increased, served as preliminary capital that provided women with a sort of social security they could 'control'. Local judges tried to prevent all kinds of interference in women's *mahr* rights, and in most cases, rulings were made in favor of the women to receive *mahr* (32). With the Property Law of 1858, the former practice of denying or only giving a small amount to women, should a male heir exist, was abandoned and women also became the recipients of inheritance (Çaha, 1999:88).

Mohja Kahf relates that when Lady Mary Wortley Montagu came to the Ottoman Empire in 1717, she made special effort to refute westerners' claim that Muslim women were oppressed, and her letters circulated among the elites of London and the entire European continent until 1763 (Kahf, 2006:145). Montagu wrote, for instance, in a letter to her sister that wealthy Turkish women do not fear their husbands because their incomes are in their own hands. Kahf argues that Montagu's own economic dependence on her husband must have bothered her when she wrote, "When they divorce, they are able to take their own assets; and they can claim the alimony their husbands are obliged to give them" (150). In her book, *Osmanlı'da Kadın ve İktisat*, which examines the Shari'a and local *qadi* registers as well as the inheritance registers, Kadriye Yılmaz Koca states that Islamic law granted women economic rights and responsibilities like owning property, receiving inheritance, passing on assets to heirs via a will, borrowing and lending, trading, and entering into contracts. Koca, who indicates that women possessed the right to acquire assets and to use or save them as they desired, says that in practice, "the protection of women" guided implementation.

In *Refet*, a woman's right to inheritance appears as a problem. Namely, Refet's family pockets her share of inheritance out of spite. Even though the share due Refet is not much, it is enough to keep her and her mother Binnaz from financial dependency on others. But, because Binnaz is an uneducated woman, she does not know how inheritance works or how assets are divvied up; she cannot guess how much her husband's property and assets are worth or how much should be left to her and her daughter (Fatma Aliye, 2007:19). Refet's half-brothers do not send her inheritance share from her father (114). Refet's mother Binnaz summarizes the events as follows: "They sent news with

someone coming from there that they will not give even a cent of it, and that if we want it, we'll have to file a lawsuit to take it. Where should people who have trouble even putting food on the table get the money to file a lawsuit?" (164). At the end of the novel, we learn that Refet is going to fight to claim her inheritance from her father. Recounting how her mother had requested her inheritance share from the family members every few years, and how the court had then ruled that 100 kurush be given each month, but that her siblings still had not sent the money, Refet concludes: "I want to show the people who tried to destroy me by not giving me my own assets, including cash, how I rose up out of poverty and, thanks to the support and stewardship of the state and school, today earn a good living" (216-17).

A positive example of a woman who manages her own land is also presented in the novel, namely the Kastamonu woman from whom Refet and Şule take private lessons. This woman has her own plot of land in her hometown and settles her accounts herself (98): "She doesn't live permanently in Istanbul, but rather, comes here to spend some winters as a guest in her maternal uncle's home. This time, even though she came early, she's going to spend the winter. She has a farm and all in her hometown, and she herself is the owner and overseer of it all! She settles her own accounts and looks after the seasonal farm work herself" (161). Contact with such an educated individual, and being educated herself, makes Refet aware not only of her right to inheritance, but also of all her rights as a woman. Mucib, who seeks Refet's hand in marriage, learns from the ulema that he cannot take her to his home by force. These Muslim scholars inform him of what Refet already knows: that he has no such right or authority over her (210). That education increases women's awareness of their rights is emphasized at every opportunity in the novel.

Conclusion

In this article, I discussed late Ottoman women's economic status in general, examining their financial assets and work experiences in the public sphere. I observed that these important and permanent historical developments laid the foundation for legal rights to be gained after the establishment of the Republic; and I examined *Refet* and *Udî* as the first Turkish novels to deal with this subject matter. Additionally, I pointed out that *Refet* (1896), which constituted the first Ottoman-Turkish novelistic portrayal of teaching as a profession "suitable" for women, was not passed on as part of cultural heritage during the Republican period, despite the fact that it was published 26 years before the novel *Çalılıkusu* (1922), which has generally been accepted as featuring the first female teacher-protagonist meant to be a model for young Turkish women. While positive male character types are rarely found in male authors' novels of the Tanzimat period, Fatma Aliye depicted women's problems and ideal female character types in numerous novels she published one after the other. Even though her works were some of the first to be translated to French, Arabic and English in the 1890's, Fatma Aliye was excluded from the Republic's literary cannon. Yet, *Refet's* portrayal of the educational institutes opened for women in the late Ottoman

Empire, especially its characterization of one of the first teachers produced by the Women's Teacher Training Colleges, is tremendously important.

Refet and *Udî* emphasize the importance of the teaching profession for women; yet the approach taken by upper-class Fatma Aliye to the subject of women's work is another noteworthy side topic for discussion. According to Fatma Aliye, it is unnecessary for women to work unless they fall upon hard times. Despite the problematic nature of this view, the same idea that women become teachers not because of certain ideals, but rather, "in order to pass the time" is implied in *Çalikuşu*, which is posited as the first textual example of a female teacher-protagonist, and in other novels. Nor does *Refet* introduce a character, who, from the beginning, dreams of becoming a teacher. Rather, women work in Fatma Aliye's novels because of various difficulties they have experienced in life or because of major disappointments. They attempt to channel the love and interest they are unable to expend in marriage in alternate directions. Women's economic position and their right to inheritance are also thematized in Fatma Aliye's novels. Thanks to education, women learn about the rights they possess and how to defend them.

In conclusion, I contend that *Refet* and *Udî* are fascinating texts for researchers working in literary scholarship, sociology, and women's studies because of their unique content. Hence, we see that accumulative experience in the Ottoman Empire was the forerunner of the legal rights women gained with the founding of the Republic and that some texts that are clear indicators of this experience, like *Refet* and *Udî*, were forgotten. In the context of our discussion of this text's interdisciplinary significance, it is possible to conclude that scholars and the public still have not fully benefited from the cultural heritage of the Ottoman period.

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